



Perceived Heads of Departments' Infusion of Ubuntu Values in Curriculum and Knowledge Sharing Leadership in Under-Resourced Public Schools

Bongani Innocent Nkambule*

* Institute for Open and Distance Learning, College of Education, University of South Africa, Pretoria: South Africa.


Email: nkambbi@unisa.ac.za

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ABSTRACT

The article reports on the findings of a qualitative inquiry involving a sample of nine (9) teachers (three participants per school) drawn from three schools within the locality of three education circuits of Emalahleni in Mpumalanga Province (South Africa). The primary objective of the article was informed by the paucity of literature that establishes an intersection between Indigenous epistemologies of Ubuntu philosophy, instructional leadership and the sharing process of knowledge management within the domain of primary and secondary education. By eliciting teachers' views about heads of departments' (HODs') curriculum leadership practices, the article attempts to narrow down the knowledge gap on the topic of instructional (herein referred to as curriculum) leadership— a domain whose preoccupation often slants towards the principal's role at the exclusion of other key stakeholders within the school ecology. In terms of the findings, democratic (participative), autocratic, transactional, transformational and managerial leadership styles were found to have been used by individual HODs alongside instructional leadership style to strengthen their curriculum leadership role. It however, became apparent that both participative and transformational leadership styles sufficiently promoted the ethos of Ubuntu in HODs' curriculum leadership role and thus enhanced curriculum delivery processes and knowledge sharing behavior among teachers as well as between HODs and teachers. The findings of the article demonstrate how a non-adversarial intersection between indigenous and mainstream leadership practices, might add an impetus to HODs' curriculum delivery and knowledge sharing leadership role in under-resourced schooling contexts.

KEYWORDS

Ubuntu; curriculum delivery; teacher collaboration; leadership; schooling system; learner performance.

INTRODUCTION

All schooling systems across the globe consider learner performance as a pivotal factor. The need for improved learner performance has, as pointed out by Hallinger (2005), led to greater emphasis being put on the provision of continuous teacher curriculum support and ongoing interactive teacher learning forums, both of which translate into effective curriculum delivery and reciprocal knowledge sharing behavior. Accordingly, Mora-Ruano et al (2021, p. 1), ascribe school “effectiveness” to operational processes that adequately promote high curriculum delivery standards and knowledge sharing behavior among stakeholders. This implies that effective curriculum delivery and knowledge sharing behavior cannot be achieved in the absence of a deeply entrenched atmosphere of trust, interdependence, mutual respect and reciprocal undertakings between teachers and their leaders. In an African organisational context, this speaks to the need for upholding Ubuntu values. Mpofu (2002) defines Ubuntu as an ancient way of life which aims to unleash the greater good in every person by orienting them towards an ethical approach to engaging one another. Maphalala (2017, p. 10239) adds that Ubuntu espouses “intrapersonal, interpersonal and environmental” values that ameliorate the effectiveness of a school. In this article, Ubuntu is studied in relation to curriculum leadership, which lies within the purview of heads of departments (HODs) (cf. Arends, 2021; Bambi, 2012; Bipath & Nkabinde, 2018; Bush et al., 2010; Department of Education [DoE], 2002; Kruger, 2003; Mampane, 2018; Mashiane-Nkabinde, 2020; Mbhele, 2015; Mpisane, 2015; Mulaudzi, 2019; Mvimbe, 2019; Ndashe, 2016; Nkabinde, 2012; Nkambule, 2020, 2022, 2023; Nkambule, 2018; Rajoo, 2012; Seobi & Woods, 2016; Romm & Nkambule, 2022; Tapala et al., 2020; Wilmot, 2017). In terms of their role, HODs wear two hats, that is, they teach learners and supervise teachers. Alongside these core duties, they are also expected to play an intercessory role of supporting the maintenance of cordial relationships between teachers and learners (Nkambule & Amsterdam, 2018). In addition, Steyn (2013) locates the coordination of knowledge sharing meetings and committees among groups of teachers within the ambit of HODs. Broadly speaking, HODs should (i) support teachers with formulating and fulfilling their professional self-developmental curriculum efficacy goals, and continuously monitor the attainment of these goals; (ii) conduct formal and informal classroom observations at regular intervals; (iii) conduct direct and indirect coaching clinics and discursive forums in a bid to improve instructional matters; and (iv) give constructive performance analysis, alongside recommendations for future developmental growth of individual teachers (McEwan, 2003). Carrying out these duties calls for HODs to introspect on the extent to which their leadership practices accentuate cordiality, considerateness, reciprocity and respect (DoE, 2001, p.16), all of which are traits grounded on Ubuntu.

While there has been a voluminous flow of literature pertinent to curriculum leadership in South Africa (Bipath & Nkabinde, 2018; Bush, 2003; Nkabinde, 2012; Mashiane-Nkabinde, 2020), several studies have documented that this scholarship often slants towards the principal's role at the exclusion of HODs (Mestry & Pillay, 2013; Naicker et al., 2013; Rajoo, 2012;

Tapala et al., 2020) and other stakeholders within the school ecology. Consequently, there is a knowledge gap pertinent to the effect of HODs' leadership role on teacher curriculum delivery and knowledge-sharing practices in a South African public schooling context. The norm that [HODs in their capacity as] curriculum leaders adopt a parallel leadership style (Bush, 2003; Kwan, 2020) to mitigate the instructional leadership style's inability to sufficiently support their role's infusion of a comprehensive dialogue and distributed sense of responsibility (Loock, 2003; Hallinger, 2005), exposed a gap around the understandings of the leadership styles that HODs applied alongside instructional leadership style to enhance their curriculum leadership role at selected schools. Also, in keeping with the postulation that in Africa, Western leadership models inherently espouse indigenous ethics in them (Bush, 2007; Msila, 2008), the article sought to investigate how the Western-oriented norm of applying parallel leadership styles might not only enhance individual HODs' curriculum leadership role, but also add an ethical grounding upon which Ubuntu values can be seen to be equal to the task of insulating the wellbeing and sustenance of teacher curriculum delivery and knowledge sharing behavior, learner performance, and in the bigger scheme of things, school effectiveness. The following questions led to the achievement of the study's objectives:

- a) Which other leadership styles are perceived to be adopted by individual HODs parallel to instructional leadership style as a measure to enhance the effectiveness of their curriculum leadership role?
- b) What are the experiences of teachers about individual HODs' practice of Ubuntu values in their curriculum leadership role?
- c) How do teachers characterise the level at which HODs apply Ubuntu values towards managing both the internally and externally directed teachers' knowledge sharing behavior?
- d) From these leadership styles, which ones do teachers perceive to incorporate Ubuntu values more than others?

Driven by the above research questions, the article highlighted how in the studied schooling contexts, Indigenous epistemologies of Ubuntu philosophy intersect with instructional leadership and the sharing process of knowledge management. In terms of the outlook of the article, the subsequent sections tabulate empirical, theoretical and methodological discussions, as well as the presentation of the findings, conclusions and some recommendations that are pertinent to the findings.

Leadership Styles

This article discusses the perceived effectiveness of HODs' infusion of *Ubuntu* values in curriculum delivery and knowledge sharing leadership. In non-profit schooling environments, leadership is regarded as a human engineered endeavor to direct employees to perform duties assigned to them in line with policies and best practices (Nkambule, 2022). To be able to lead their followers, education leaders [such as HODs] apply different leadership styles. Hickman (2017, p. 9) defines a leadership style as "the manner and approach of supplying direction,

implementing plans, and inspiring people". Machumu and Kaitila (2014) argue that leadership styles determine the level of teachers' job satisfaction. This section of the article concisely discusses some leadership styles that are a prominent feature in school management literature.

Instructional Leadership Style

Bambi (2012) posits that while curriculum leadership forms part of the principal's job description, HODs' insightfulness on curriculum delivery makes them its mainstay. Essentially, the nature of their occupation requires them to develop a sense among their followers to adhere to the targeted "goals and expectations, planning, coordinating" of "teaching and learning" (Robinson et al., 2008, p. 640) through the application of *direct and indirect mentoring and coaching instructional leadership methods*. Due to its heavy reliance on compliance and rigid line function, enhancing its dynamism often demands that a parallel leadership style is adopted (Bush, 2003; Hallinger, 2005; Kwan, 2020; Loock, 2003).

Participative Leadership Style

Bush (2007) points out that participative leaders ascribe to the belief that accessibility, collective effort and equitable sharing of tasks have a positive effect on workforce dynamics and organisational productivity. To eradicate factionalism, participative leaders closely monitor the harmony that exists among their followers (Leithwood et al., 1999; Maile, 2004; McLennan & Thurlow, 2003). Buthelezi and Ajani (2022) liken the participative leadership style to using a "*lekgotla*" (i.e., a Sotho word for a forum where various participants in diverse indigenous settings, including schools, converge to engage in extensive and participative discussions to generate context-specific solutions) as the basis upon which to mobilise support, resolve issues and seek the followers' consensus.

Managerial Leadership Style

Even though managerial leadership style is widely applied in South Africa's schooling system (Bush, 2007) it is seldomly discussed in empirical research. Because managerial leaders embrace the role of trade unions, operational bargaining power and worker consultative forums, Sebakwane (1997) contends that the managerial leadership style is a breakaway from autocratic leadership. A managerial leader tends to be task-oriented and prefers to use the old, tried and tested methods of achieving results and enforcing compliance rather than exploring new trends and methods of doing things.

Transactional Leadership Style

Transactional leadership style is grounded on a give and take basis, whereby rewards are given for a job well done and punishment is administered for failure to perform adequately (Hickman, 2017). Oftentimes, sour employee relations do not take center stage in this leader's agenda provided they impede on organisational productivity. Depending on the character of a leader, they may either take a passive or active approach—commonly known as management by exception—in terms of which an active leader monitors followers' performance at regular intervals whereas passive a one tends to monitor followers' performance after completion of a task (Stajkovic & Sergent, 2019).

Transformational Leadership Style

Transformational leaders encourage collaborative partnerships to achieve better results. Although transformational leaders have a lot in common with participative leaders, their approach to leading followers is not so much on genuinely generating followers' inputs but more on having their buy in by conditioning their mindset towards adopting a particular manifesto (Lawrence, 2022). According to Bush (2007), transformational leadership augers well for schooling contexts plagued by the absence of effective leadership, low staff morale and dismal learner performance.

Some Perceived Barriers to HODs' Curriculum Leadership Role

Reversing the ripple effects of the apartheid regime on South Africa's socio-economic outlook is an ongoing challenge that has left the country in socio-economic tatters. Although the government has done considerably well in reversing some of the many inequalities, factors such as corruption, poor management of state resources, misappropriation of service delivery funds and hostile economic climate, have significantly retarded the pace of such interventions. Naturally, what happens in the political sphere draws a host of challenges in schools, moreover the rural and township-based ones. At the heart of these challenges, as pointed out by Coleman et al. (2003, p. 65), lies: a) differences in socio-economical dynamics among the majority of the people within the vicinity of the school (e.g., urban, township, rural, suburban); b) consequent differences in studentship (in terms of learners' psychological resilience and orientation towards learning, achievement and overall appreciation for the value of education); c) differences in physical infrastructure and other amenities (i.e., sports facilities, learning and teaching support material (LTSM), science apparatus, laboratories and so forth); as well as, d) differences in personnel resourcefulness, (around issues of qualifications levels, soft and hard skills, psychological and invariably, inclinations for the job, school and the profession itself).

The consequential effect of the above-mentioned factors, as expounded by Coleman et al (2003), is replicated in various studies. In relation to South Africa, it is generally accepted that most of the challenges faced by HODs in under-resourced schools are but not limited to dealing with (a) the insufficiency of professional development opportunities and contending with inadequately trained teachers (Bambi, 2012; Nkabinde, 2012); (b) heavy teaching and administrative workload (Fikani, 2003; Mulaudzi, 2019); (c) inadequacy of support in executing pastoral duties (Mulaudzi, 2019); (d) often irrelevant professional development training; (e) chronic teacher absenteeism (Nkambule, 2020); and, (f) lack of internal support mechanisms, leadership guidance, as well as professionally adept and highly motivated teachers (Rajoo, 2012).

Substantiation of the Suitability of Ubuntu as a Theoretical Lens

Dewey (cited in Saltmarsch, 1996) explicates that people generally lack awareness of the extent to which the world's thriving democracies are thrust on people's cultural orientations. Organisational leadership, as a concept, largely drew from cultural tales and best practices wherein elders in their local constituencies were known as the moral campus and directors of

proceedings (Davis, 2020; Hofstede et al., 2010). Mandela (1994 cited in Mpofo, 2002) endorses this view by pointing out that democracy has always been a prototype of South African indigenous culture. He recounted how he had always known of how even before the colonial era, various indigenous communities converged under trees and held robust discussions that were chaired by elders to ensure that law and order prevailed in their homesteads and broader communities. The study argues that the interconnectedness among communities that Mandela refers to, does not only apply to the continent of Africa, but across the globe's geographical terrains where indigenous communities are found.

The United Nations (UN) estimates "the interface between" the world's indigenous peoples' ways of life at "more than 370 million in some 90 countries" (UN, 2009, p. 1). Letseka (2013) adds that Ubuntu is an all-encompassing trait that when practiced earnestly can spearhead harmonious undertakings in which multiculturalism, multiracialism and non-sexism are the order of the day. This, however, does not mean that acting within the midpoints of Ubuntu completely absolves human fallibility. The key issue to note is that *Ubuntu* is not only an impulsive (re)action, but also a conscious one, which according to Davis (2021), makes it not a virtue that always "comes naturally" (p. 2), but that which may sometimes, require one to relentlessly reflect upon the impact that their actions might have on the integrity of social undertakings with others in various life and professional settings. What this means is that, *Ubuntu* is a virtue that ought to be at all times practiced from the ethical point of interrogating "*unembeza*" [i.e., conscience] and giving "*inhlonipho*" [i.e., respect] (Maphalala, 2017, p. 10239).

Iwowo (2015) infers that the truism: "*umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*" (loosely translated from the Zulu language as a person is a person through other people) is by no means a cultural expediency (or whatever its critics may choose to call it) but a heartfelt call for Africans (including everyone who regardless of race, creed, religion and ethnicity draws affinity from Africa or calls it home) to consciously evaluate the extent to which their role might or might not fracture the integrity of the social interdependence, cordiality, reciprocity and respect that abides in their respective communities.

Mbigi (2005) argues that *Ubuntu* presents a context-specific solution to Africa's organisational leadership challenges. He further argued that *Ubuntu* in leadership moderated the imposition of leadership practices that bear no relevance to local indigenous organisational contexts. To play their part in awakening the episteme of *Ubuntu*, Mbigi (2005) contends that leaders of these organisations must: (a) engrave African social experience (i.e., *Ubuntu* ways of life) in their management and leadership functions; (b) ensure that in organisations where they are deployed, African leadership harmoniously moderates non-indigenous models of leadership; (c) regard cultural diversity not as a threat but a window of opportunity for acquiring intercultural understanding and multidimensional social perspectives; (d) evoke a sense of distributed leadership that is devoid of counter dialogical and authoritative undertakings; (e) always forecast on the potential danger that might arise and have a bearing on the integrity of

the organisation; after which (f) act promptly to tackle issues that can potentially destabilise the wellbeing of the organisation.

Using *Ubuntu* as a theoretical framework made it plausible for the researcher to draw parallels between effective and ineffective practices in how HODs applied the values of Ubuntu to manage teachers' curriculum delivery and knowledge sharing behavior at selected schools. Furthermore, it enabled the researcher to propose practically relevant and context-specific recommendations from an informed perspective in terms of what it would mean for HODs to perform their curriculum and knowledge sharing leadership role effectively.

METHODOLOGY and ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Methodological Orientation

Designed as a multiple case study, this qualitative research article drew inspiration from the social constructivism paradigm. In this paradigm, the presence of the researcher in the participants' environment meant that he was actively involved in co-constructing a depiction of their lived experiences (Lincoln & Guba, 2013). This was done by considering the merits of each case in terms of the commonalities and differences that applied in the studied schools; based on which, the researcher was able to come up with an empirically grounded comprehensive summation of the findings across all sites/cases (Gomm et al., 2000). For example, across all three schools, the researcher observed that there was indeed some element of under-resourcefulness, albeit at varying degrees. The fact that the degree of under-resourcefulness varied meant that some schools were better off than others; such as school A, which is located within the vicinity of a coal mine and frequently benefits from sponsorship towards building renovations. A stark contrast was found in school B, which is situated between an informal settlement and an RDP (free housing) housing scheme, and whose survival is at the mercy of the government subsidy and donations. School C, on the other hand, is relatively smaller when compared to the other two schools and is by far better off in terms of the state of ICT infrastructure and learning facilities. Based on the variants that each schooling context presented, the onus was upon the researcher to interpret the tone of each context as he interfaced with participants in their natural settings.

Sample Size and Sampling Procedure

According to White (2004), selecting participants who are deemed crucial to the facilitation of data collection implies that purposive sampling has been applied. Concerning the size, the inquiry was centered around nine (9) teachers who were drawn from three schools within the radius of three education circuits in Emalahleni. The criteria for choosing the schools was influenced by the need to have comprehensive representability wherein it was deemed important for all three educational circuits to be represented in some way (Romm & Nkambule, 2022). The first school is a combined school (from Grade 1-9), the second school is a primary school (Grade 1-7), and the third school is a secondary school (Grade 8-12). Below is a tabulated description of participants who took part in the study.

Table 1*Participants Description*

Participant	Age	Gender	Area(s) of Specialisation	Field Experience
#Teacher 1	34	Female	Afrikaans First Additional Language	10 years
#Teacher 2	33	Female	Life Orientation & Economic and Management Sciences	07 years
#Teacher 3	37	Female	English Home Language	15 years
#Teacher 4	51	Male	Technology & Creative Arts	24 years
#Teacher 5	47	Female	Natural Sciences & Creative Arts	23 years
#Teacher 6	46	Male	Social Sciences	18 years
#Teacher 7	57	Male	Afrikaans Second Additional Language	35 years
#Teacher 8	29	Male	Mathematics & Natural Sciences	3 years
#Teacher 9	52	Female	Creative Arts & Economic and Management Sciences	28 years

Data Collection, Applied Instruments and Analysis Procedures

In keeping with Lincoln and Guba (2013), data collection was done in the participants' preferred locations, which mostly took place in their classrooms at schools after they had concluded their teaching duties. Interviews entailed a series of semi-structured questions in sessions that ranged between 20 and 45 minutes each. A tape recorder was used to record participants' verbal utterances whilst a notepad was used to record impressions and (re)actions that emanated from participants' body language. All the interviews were captured and saved on a laptop as a Microsoft word document. No quotations were tempered with and in instances where participants spoke in vernacular (i.e., any of the nine official local indigenous languages), phrases glossed by an equivalent word in the English language were placed in parentheses next to the vernacular word.

Generally, in the inquiry data were drawn and cross-examined from multiple sources to "identify themes and categories that seemed of interest" (Esterberg, 2002, p. 158). Content analysis was used to identify, code and categorise data according to themes (Mohlakoane, 2004). This contributed to triangulation for the study, which took into account data sourced through interviews and documents. Some of the documents perused included teachers' files, which entailed previous reports issued by HODs, templates of curriculum monitoring and evaluation instruments, evidence of the frequency of professional development meetings and other knowledge sharing events among staff.

Ethical Considerations

Before commencement of the researcher's engagement with participants, an ethical review was sought, as provisioned by the University's College of Education Research Ethics Committee. This was preceded by seeking permission from the Mpumalanga Provincial Department of Education (MPDE). Once permission was granted, schools were visited whereby principals were asked to coordinate meetings between the researcher and participants, for the researcher to explain the importance of their participation in the study and address questions pertinent to the research processes. It was at that juncture that participants were briefed on the protocols to be taken in actualising the investigation and were also assured that their participation would not put them in harm's way.

In terms of ensuring that all the footprints of the research processes were traceable, an audit trail was compiled by the researcher, which included archives of tape-recorded interviews, a journal containing written records of observable characteristics, and (where permissible) copies of documents that were perused, copies of ethical clearance certificates from the university and MPDE and also letters sent to the principals as well as those that the researcher received from them.

Anonymity was ensured by using alphabets (for schools). Teachers were assigned a hashtag sign next to their occupational title, followed by a number signifying their order of participation (e.g., #Teacher 1). After the transcription of the interviews, the researcher revisited the schools to conduct member checking so that participants could check on the accuracy with which the researcher documented their narratives.

RESULTS

From the data that were generated through the interviews with teachers in their respective schools, the following themes emerged.

Leadership Styles Applied to Enhance HODs' Instructional Leadership Role

Naturally, as was demonstrated in the literature review section, HODs back up their practice of instructional leadership style with another leadership style (Bush, 2003; Kwan, 2020). Teachers generally commented about the other leadership styles which they presumed to have been used by their respective HODs. In school A, Teacher 2 argued: *"that we work towards the same goal."* This was supported by Teacher 1, who commented:

HOD Trevor is very helpful and never shouts and wants you to understand when you are confused. He is truly a democratic leader. I say this because he is a people person and is never moody that one (#Teacher 1, Interview).

Teacher 3 directed her comments to HOD Leticia.

When working under her we know that we can say suggest how we want things to happen anytime we need to. We are all a team, that's what she usually says (#Teacher 3, Interview).

As has already been stated by the participants, HODs in this school are more attuned to democratic leadership, also known as participative (Hickman, 2017) or distributed (Msila, 2008) leadership style. It thrives on ensuring that duties are shared among staff and are facilitated through an inclusive and non-hierarchical approach (Nkambule, 2022, 2023).

On the contrary, in school B, teachers had mixed feelings. Teacher 4 recounted how both HODs in the school generally tended to put pressure on them to perform certain tasks within short intervals and yet they still expected their work to be perfect.

We are constantly told what to do. The SMT sits and discusses things and imposes them on us. When you suggest something, they purge you. They call you a bad influence. That is why we lose good teachers to other schools because people are not happy in this environment (#Teacher 4, Interview).

A similar view was posited by Teacher 5, albeit politely:

We still have a long way to go. If our SMT can stop taking decisions on their own, then they have more cooperation from us (#Teacher 5, Interview).

Minimal dialogue between stakeholders implies that decisions are taken unilaterally. As a result, there is a strong sense of despondency among sidelined personnel (Root, 2016). These are traits of an autocratic leader (Choi, 2007).

Teacher 6 concluded:

Here we have politics, but I can tell you, HOD Cindy does her best to make us work as a team. However, when you don't submit her work, she writes a bad report about you, but when you do things according to your agreement with her, she will congratulate you and say well done (#Teacher 6, Interview).

In this instance, the HOD reacts according to how teachers perform their duties. Hickman (2017) classifies this way of leading followers as a transactional leadership style. In any event, depending on the performance of the followers, either a reward or punishment is to be meted out (Hickman, 2017). In that sense, failure to perform effectively warrants a punishment, whereas good performance is worth a reward of some sort (Bass, 2008).

In relation to school C, Teacher 9 had the following to say about HOD Paul:

When you say, you fail to submit your work for moderation, he will just come with a smile to remind you that you need to submit. In addition, he will negotiate with you on the next date of submission. Although he might not be impressed by bad results, he will still motivate you to try harder next time. And he makes follow-ups with you frequently after your meeting (#Teacher 9, Interview).

As illustrated above, the flair with which followers [i.e., teachers] are motivated to persist in trying hard to achieve organisational goals, exposes this leader's resonances with transformational leadership style (Chi & Pan, 2012; Mittal & Dhar, 2015).

Summarily, Teacher 7 commented:

HOD Marcus is strictly professional and does not really care about other things. You can't even talk to him about other things except for work. I don't agree with his character, but the guy works, and no one dares to miss moderation deadlines under him (#Teacher 7, Interview).

While this leader's work ethic is unquestionable, it is however, worrisome that he does not exude openness, accessibility and humor that is required to put the followers at ease [for them] to regularly share with him issues that might have either negatively or positively affected their performance (Bush, 2003). A breakaway from autocratic leadership, this style of leading followers is known as a managerial leadership style and is very popular in South African schools (Bush, 2003).

Ubuntu in HODs' Curriculum Leadership

In light of the view that HODs are custodians of curriculum leadership (Bipath & Nkabinde, 2018; Bush, 2003; Mashiane-Nkabinde, 2020; Nkabinde, 2012; Nkambule & Armsterdam, 2018), interviews were geared towards understanding how teachers characterised the impact that their respective HODs had on teachers' curriculum delivery.

Teacher 5 expressed that:

At times curriculum policies are implemented without an in-depth understanding of what is required, especially when there is a new task that must be done as requested by the district in respect of the newly introduced way of doing it. But our HODs still find a way to explain to us how they think we should approach things. I suppose that is how they show Ubuntu (#Teacher 5, Interview).

Teacher 7 added:

Experience is what counts in our favor. We discuss things as adults when the need comes for everyone to sit around the table as adults and work things out. Otherwise, everything is enough to get by. No extra effort to introduce new things. These HODs are average in upholding curriculum delivery standards (#Teacher 7, Interview).

More comprehensively, Teacher 9 elaborated:

The school has a well-structured approach for curriculum implementation and management. HODs try to follow the school approach, which is done in the following ways: lesson planning is monitored though not regularly, learners' books are controlled by HODs, class visits are planned each term but not always done, pre-moderation is done on all formal tasks to ensure that we meet the required standards and is CAPS aligned. Post moderation is also done on all formal tasks to ensure the marking and recording of marks was done correctly (#Teacher 9, Interview).

There is a general perception among teachers that although HODs' leadership role averagely sustains curriculum implementation, they however do not go the extra mile to foster reciprocal understanding and a collective sense of duty among all stakeholders (Nkambule, 2020).

HOD's Influence on Ubuntu in Internally and Externally-directed Knowledge Sharing Behavior

While Teachers 1 and 2 appeared contented by the rate at which HODs exhibited Ubuntu towards internally and externally directed knowledge sharing transactions, Teacher 3 was not entirely convinced by this. This teacher hinted that although knowledge sharing behavior was not at a desirable level, *Ubuntu* was being projected by some HODs to facilitate dialogue among themselves and teachers, albeit at different levels of fervency.

Until recently, we didn't have fully functional committees. Nonetheless, I would say that both HODs that I work with are lovely. They are not perfect, but they assist where they can. They show Ubuntu by making copies for us because they understand how heavy our workload is. For the most part they are on top of the game through leading by example. Never will you find them ill prepared for anything that has to do with their jobs (#Teacher 3, Interview).

Teacher 6 anchored her discussion on HODs' non-committal attitude towards cultivating an environment that values knowledge sharing transactions among teachers, particularly junior and senior teachers. She further divulged that while *Ubuntu* values did not relentlessly underpin their knowledge sharing transactions among each other as colleagues, a different picture emerged when it came to how they handled knowledge exchange transactions with external stakeholders.

As a result, the ordinary staff does not see the need to collaborate, not unless they are forced to. But my guy!.....when those parents, SGB members, nurses, police and education officials come to our school; I am telling you, you will see us moving up and down to treat them with care (#Teacher 6, Interview).

Teacher 7 echoed a similar sentiment, at how HODs failed to exhibit the attitude of Ubuntu towards teachers in curriculum management. He compared this to the observation he made about the level of hospitality that HODs display towards external stakeholders. Unfortunately, Sir.....we do receive similar treatment like outsiders who come here to do something, maybe as parents or anybody who comes for something. They [referring to HODs] take outsiders seriously more than us. I don't know maybe you must ask other colleagues they will tell you this story I'm telling you (#Teacher 7, Interview).

In closing this point, Teacher 5 remarked:

We smile and laugh together, in that sense, Ubuntu is there sometimes. We have meetings to discuss how to do things. We must sit together and work together. In that way, our job is done and HODs monitor, discuss and give feedback on the quality of work. But knowledge sharing is not always coming from collaboration by everyone but the big guns only [referring to HODs and the entire SMTs], which is not right, I guess (#Teacher 7, Interview).

As a consequence of HODs' not applying themselves with vigour to create a climate that embraces extensive knowledge sharing, on a daily basis these schools incur a loss of precious knowledge, specifically tacit knowledge, which requires that social meetings must take place for co-workers to have it shared and transferred (Nkambule, 2022).

Leadership Styles that most Embody the Ethos of Ubuntu

Instructional leadership tends to be too fixated on-line function which often fails to infuse extensive dialogue and flexibility in the assignment of instructional duties at a collegial level (Loock, 2003). Therefore, to palliate its inherently top-down undertakings, Hallinger (2003) points out that it is usually accompanied by another leadership style. According to the narrative of participants, as evidenced in School A, where most participants did not seem to question their level of inclusion and engagement by HODs in the decision-making processes around instructional matters. Also, in School C, where HOD Paul used motivation to rally teachers behind a common goal, as evidenced below.

He is truly a democratic leader. I say this because he is a people person and is never moody that one (#Teacher 1, Interview). We work towards the same goal (# Interview, Teacher 2). We are all a team, that's what she usually says (#Teacher 3, Interview). Although he might not be impressed by bad results, he will still motivate you to try harder next time. And he checks you frequently after that (#Teacher 9, Interview).

Through these narratives, it can be ascertained that both participative (democratic) leadership and transformational leadership styles moderate HODs' incorporation of *Ubuntu* values in their curriculum leadership role.

DISCUSSION

Discussion Based on the Interviews Held with Participants

The article was set on determining the perceptions of teachers about HODs' infusion of *Ubuntu* values in curriculum delivery and knowledge sharing leadership. One of the findings validates the already empirically documented sentiment, that in school setting, HODs are likely to adopt another leadership style alongside instructional leadership (e.g., Bellibaş et al., 2021; Bush, 2003; 2007; Hallinger, 2005; Loock, 2003; Kwan, 2020). In the context of this article, democratic (participative), autocratic, transactional, transformational and managerial were found to have been used by individual HODs to strengthen their curriculum leadership role. It however, became apparent that both participative and transformational leadership styles sufficiently promote the ethos of *Ubuntu* in HODs' curriculum leadership role. Otherwise, the other leadership style namely, transactional, autocratic and managerial were found to have largely contributed to the erosion of *Ubuntu* values, specifically in internally directed knowledge sharing transactions, where HODs were reported to have failed to exude interpersonal undertakings towards teachers. Resultantly, this discouraged teachers from engaging one another in knowledge sharing undertakings on a frequent basis. This implies that under the stewardship of these HODs, there was daily forfeiture of tacit knowledge, which according to Nonaka (1994), is the kind of knowledge that gives credence to innovation, productivity and competitive edge in organisations. To that end, senior teachers, who also happened to be highly experienced, did not sufficiently receive the platform to impart their tacit knowledge to their beginner and mid-career counterparts.

Although the efforts of HODs towards curriculum leadership were reportedly informed about latest developments in their jobs, moreover along the lines of curriculum delivery, the majority of teachers (six altogether) remarked that, beyond curriculum undertakings, HODs often did not consistently exude the values of *Ubuntu* to cultivate collegial practices. On the contrary, HODs appeared to have committedly and consistently forwarded the gestures of *Ubuntu* towards external stakeholders of the school community. Teachers themselves unanimously agreed that they also minimally applied *Ubuntu* among themselves whilst towards external stakeholders they applied them fervently.

Discussion Based on Document Analysis

From a wide range of electronically and physically accessible documents at the researcher's disposal (Jansen, 2016), in this investigation, the researcher perused teachers' files which contained curriculum policy documents, moderation and post-moderation tools, previous reports issued by HOD to teachers and minutes of meetings held by teachers. This came to the fore in some of the interviews held with participants, as stated below.

The school has a well-structured approach for curriculum implementation and management. HODs try to follow the school approach, which is done in the following ways: lesson planning is monitored though not regularly, learners' books are controlled by HODs, class visits are planned each term but not always done, pre-moderation is done on all formal tasks to ensure that we meet the required standards and is CAPS [i.e., Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement] aligned. Post moderation is also done on all formal tasks to ensure the marking and recording of marks was done correctly (#Teacher 9, Interview).

As already pointed out by teachers in their respective interviews, the documents that were perused demonstrated that HODs monitored and evaluated teachers' composition of the curriculum content and pedagogical strategies that were used to deliver the curriculum, albeit at varying levels of commitment. Worth noting, is the observation made by the researcher during his visits to the selected schools to collect data, that is, although, in these respective schools, there were on display, framed pictures of the Batho Pele Principles— a public service policy which largely draws from *Ubuntu* philosophy to encourage mutual participation and care for others when rendering a service (Pietersen, 2014) — not all staff members were mindful of the need to work within these principles. This in essence, echoes the view of teachers who stated that best practices were often not fully taken into cognisance in undertakings between HODs and teachers.

CONCLUSION and RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

This qualitative inquiry was focused on understanding teachers' perceptions of HODs' *Ubuntu* directed curriculum delivery and knowledge sharing leadership in under-resourced public schools within the vicinity of Emalahleni (Mpumalanga Province). The article demonstrated how a blended approach to school leadership, that is thrust on a non-adversarial intersection

between indigenous and mainstream leadership practices, might add an impetus to HODs' curriculum leadership role and moderate the incorporation of a contextually relevant ethical grounding (upon which Ubuntu values can be seen to be) equal to the task of insulating the wellbeing and the sustenance of teacher curriculum delivery, teacher knowledge sharing culture, learner performance, and in the bigger scheme of things, school effectiveness.

Recommendations and Implication for Future Research

The article recommends that HODs should consciously embed teacher leadership in Ubuntu directed undertakings. Through acting in concert with this recommendation, it is envisaged that HODs' interface with sub-ordinate staff members will favourably contribute towards:

- a) Supporting a collective knowledge exchange enterprise that values "we" instead of "I" in carrying out a task;
- b) Forging a non-adversarial intersection between indigenous and mainstream (western-oriented) leadership practices; and,
- c) Moderating the incorporation of a contextually relevant ethical grounding, which sufficiently considers the well-being and sustenance of teacher curriculum delivery, teacher knowledge sharing culture, learner performance, and in the bigger scheme of things, school effectiveness.

To study a larger population of schools and participants, but without forfeiting the element of contact-based engagements with sampled participants, the suggestion thereof is that future research should be geared towards a mixed-methods approach. Doing so would facilitate the achievement of transferability and rationalisation of generalisability of the research findings.

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