

Original Research Article

## The Role of Rural Educational Leadership in Influencing Societal Behaviour: A Case Study of Goromonzi District: Educational Leaders' Perceptive

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### ABSTRACT

This study establishes the role of rural educational leadership in influencing societal behaviour, focusing Goromonzi District. It was positioned alongside the behavioural theories and the African unhu/ubuntu philosophy, informed by a qualitative case study. It made use of interviews, focus group discussions and observations in the generation of data from a purposive sample of three rural secondary schools. The rural context has its own set of unique community identifiers, making rural schools remarkably different from those found in the urban centres. The rural community is experiencing an influx of urban migration and as a result, the disturbance of an ideal rural setting is posing a challenge to the educational leadership in impacting the societal behaviour in the way it ought to be. Moreover, the educational leadership in the rural community is often characterised by lack of understanding of the rural communities' traditional beliefs and practices, giving rise to contradictions with what the educational leadership intends to promote and encourage at times. Consequently, a cultural shift and contextual adaptation of distinctive attitudes and behaviours that enhance positive behaviour transformation becomes imperative. Above it all, studying rural behavioural trends as a response to educational leadership was paradoxical journey. The study thus, concludes that while literature points out that leadership has a direct influence of the behaviour of its community, this cannot go far unless the educational leadership deliberately aligns its own behaviour with the dictates of unhu/ubuntu philosophy which has a place in the African rural context.

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### Introduction

This study is a theoretically-led conceptual investigation of the critical role of rural educational leadership in influencing societal behaviour in Goromonzi District. It addresses the research gap in the existing relationship between the educational leadership on one hand and specifically the rural community on the other hand; which it will be argued lacks adequate substantive literature of informed body of research to provide the existing behavioural trends based on empirical findings. The study synthesises a range of separate and related models in an effort to construct an analytical and conceptual framework for understanding emerging forms of behavioural trends and attitudes educational leadership is confronted with in the rural communities in which they operate.

The term educational leadership is consistently used throughout the study to designate all forms of personnel available at educational institutions. It encompasses every staff member; ranging from classroom practitioners, subject specialists, as well

as deputies and school heads; whose leadership is felt and emulated by those they relate with directly or indirectly, at varying times and levels.

Rural educational leadership in Zimbabwe (and Africa, in general) extends back to the pre-independence colonial era, where its effects on society could be felt one way or the other (Shizha and Kariwo, 2012). Preston et al, (2013) argue that rural societies exhibit one of the clearest and most direct responses to educational leadership. However, over the years, educators and policymakers have paid scant attention to rural educational leadership; and in particular, its influence on societal behaviour. Only a few argue that only in the countryside could life take on a truly human meaning; a life in which the best qualities of humankind could flourish. As a result, the contribution on social behaviour of schools incorporated in such settings cannot be totally ignored as far as rural educational leadership is concerned.

However, schools in the rural areas can be very difficult places to lead. Despite the general notion that rural communities are harmonious places, they are in reality spaces often fragmented along class lines, with political factions promoting competing values and interest regarding the purpose of schooling. McHenry-Sorber (2014) in her article "*The Power of Competing Narratives: A New Interpretation of Rural School-Community Relations*" painfully illustrates the ways in which opposing groups consolidate political power around competing narratives in the community. Here it is clearly illustrated how dominating forces at play would attempt to outplay others in an effort to influence decision-making processes; and ultimately societal behaviours. This leads one to reflect on the historical impact that rural educational leadership has on rural communities. Corbett (2014) addresses how the concept of community has been central to the discourse of rural education for generations and at the same time, how community has been and continues to be a deeply problematic concept.

It is therefore, beyond reasonable doubt that rural educational leadership is valuable when looking for causes or triggers of particular patterns of societal behaviour. In Zimbabwe, the immediate reaction that the society gives in response to the prevailing educational leadership is quite remarkable. Of particular case here is Goromonzi District in Mashonaland East Province. The behavioural patterns displayed by this community compel one to take a closer look at the current rural educational leadership in an effort to assess possible catalysts of such behavioural trends. One cannot avoid noticing that the Goromonzi rural community seems to be at loggerheads with most educational leaders of the schools in their community.

Consequently, rural educational leadership becomes a crucial topic which is worth investigating. The value, intellectual contribution and new message of this study is providing a thought framework of the overarching role of educational leadership in influencing community behaviour in a rural context from a new perspective based on a case study.

## **Literature Review**

In Zimbabwe, not much research has been carried out on rural educational leadership and its impact on societal behaviour. However, research reveals that leadership plays an important role in the effective running of educational institutions Salfi (2014). Boateng (2012) contends that effective leadership is an asset to any organisation. Thus, educational leadership is the most important element in the successful running of an institution (Dinham, 2005, Townsend, 2007). However, Hallinger and Heck (1998) argue that the leadership style of an *educational leader* is also an equally important factor in the effectiveness of educational institutions. This is supported by Eyal and Roth (2011) as they further point out that leadership style plays a significant role in teacher motivation and student achievement. However, it is critical for the educational leader to adopt an appropriate leadership style to ensure effectiveness of the educational institution. As alluded to before, Bass (1999) and Leithwood et. al. (2014) maintains that much study on *rural* educational leadership and its impact on the effectiveness of educational institutions and societal behaviour have been done mainly in developed countries.

According to Boateng (2012), the concept of leadership carries many different connotations such as power, authority, management, administration and supervision. Northouse (2001) defined leadership as a process in which an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal. Thus, it can be seen that leadership is virtually the use of power and/ authority to influence the thoughts and actions of other people. Therefore, leaders are able to direct, guide, influence or control the thoughts, feelings and actions or behaviour of individuals to achieve organisational goals. In the context of educational leadership, a leader can influence groups such as teachers, students, community and even policy makers towards achievement of institutional goals.

As put forward by Leithwood and Jutzi (1999), leadership style is a set of leadership activities that influences subordinates or individuals to achieve organisational goals. Therefore, the leadership style of an educational leader plays an important role in influencing societal behaviour. Zvobgo (1997), Muchumu and Kaitila (2014) point out that one of the key factors influencing

*educational institutions'* effectiveness is the nature and quality of the leadership style and administration provided by the *educational leader* (Commonwealth Secretariat, 1996). Hence, leadership style is a critical factor in influencing behavioural trends in any community a leader finds himself / herself in.

The Unhu/Ubuntu concept, as commonly represented by communal relations, communal ideals and human excellence forms part of the knowledge and wisdom of how African communities and families should live and exist along each other in harmony. The philosophy represents the worldviews of indigenous black populations of Sub-Saharan Africa, transmitted from generation to generation through observation, experience, language and art. The widely acknowledged maxims: 'I am because we are, and a person is a person through other persons;' indicate that relations are a crucial ingredient for human excellence. This suggests that, as people we "develop personhood or humanness through other persons," which means that they must "prize communal and harmonious relationships with others" (Metz, 2015). In this optic, educational leadership plays a critical role to create the relational conditions that enable the community to realise the need to behave in a manner that portrays their personhood. Therefore, there is no doubt that Unhu/Ubuntu African philosophy informs ideal community behaviour shaping practices in African context. Unfortunately, modern day practices seem not to fully acknowledge and embrace the potential of Unhu/Ubuntu to inform perspectives, concepts and models. As put forward by Rankopo and Osei-Hwedie (2011), practitioners across the board tend to be inclined towards Western models and theories. Such perspectives and approaches fail to match the aspirations and ideals of the African communities, within which educational leadership is practiced and community behaviours modelled.

In the recent literature of leadership (that is over the last 80 years or so), the researchers identified four main 'generations' of theories that guided the study. These are: Trait Theories, Behavioural Theories, Contingency Theories, and Transformational Theories.

### **Trait Theories**

Stogdill (1948) and Mann (1959) set out the general qualities or *traits* they believed should be present in exceptional individuals. In their early trait research, they reported that many studies identified personality characteristics that appear to differentiate leaders from followers. It therefore follows that, within some educational leaders, there are some inherent characteristics that are present in them that make them influence societal behaviour in either a positive or negative manner.

### **Behavioural Theories**

These focus at what leaders do: how they behave; especially towards followers. Blake and Mouton (1964; 1978) grouped together different patterns of behaviour and labelled them as styles. The four main styles that emerged were; concern for task, concern for people, directive leadership and participative leadership. A school head that is task-oriented is likely to have a different influence on society from the one that is people-oriented. The same applies with the one whose inclination is directive, against the participative leader. These four behaviours would impact societal behaviour differently.

### **Contingency (Situational) Theories**

These look at the context in which leadership is exercised and the idea that what is needed changes from situation to situation; the central idea being that effective leadership depends on a mix of factors. One major proponent of such is Fiedler (1967) who argued that effectiveness depends on two interacting factors: leadership style and the degree to which the situation gives the leader control and influence. An effective educational leader would then assess the situation presented before him then decide on the appropriate course of action to be taken. This would also call for a particular response from his followers and the general society. However, it does not necessarily follow that the same course of action would be appropriate in the future, given that circumstances are constantly changing.

### **Transformational Theories**

Burns (1977) argued that it was possible to distinguish between transactional and transforming leaders. The former, 'approach their followers with an eye to trading one thing for another (1977: 4), while the latter are visionary leaders who seek to appeal to their followers "better nature and move them toward higher and more universal needs and purposes' (Barnett, 2001). In other words, the leader is seen as a change agent. It is possible to have an educational leader who strives to lead the community towards a particular desired goal. This can be done after needs assessment, then deliberately adopt a particular set of behaviours that influence the desired responses from the community.

## **Unhu/Ubuntu Theories**

The pre-modern Africa was characterised by an enduring moral fibre which sustained traditional societies, with the thrust of unhu/ubuntu being the main force behind this cultural moral presentation. This entailed an African communitarian way of life which can be easily summed up by the popular aphorism, "a person is a person through relationships with other people". This can be translated as "a community is a community through relations with the educational leadership". Therefore, in African traditional societies an individual was defined according to the environing community. Such should still hold if the effects of today's educational leadership are to be traced through the rural community behaviour. Thus, immorality by an individual was a disgrace to the whole community. On the other hand, the success of a community member was a community's success. This was so because any behavioural pattern was supposed to be a reflection of the community's values. Although not much formalised, traditional education had the main aim of producing people who were acceptable in that particular community. Unhu/Ubuntu was not necessarily confined to individual communities as the values could be exhibited beyond the bounce of these communities.

While reviewing the available literature, it became obvious that a limited number of these studies focus on how school leaders directly impact on community behavioural trends in unique geographical contexts – namely, in rural schools. In the context of rural educational leadership, this demands for a differentiated attention since there seems to be insufficient research on this specialized focus.

## **Methodology**

The dynamic nature of the study called for the adoption of a qualitative case study. This was extremely useful in understanding the portrayed behavioural trends in an in-depth way. Thus, the qualitative methodology was seen as most appropriate because apart from having a natural setting, societal behavioural trends use interactive and humanistic method and are fundamentally interpretive. Below is the examination of the specific methodology, philosophy, paradigm and method that underpinned this research study.

The study utilised the qualitative research methodology. The choice for this methodology was mainly guided by the fact that societal behavioural trends are generally qualitative rather than quantitative. Thus, few participants provided the empirical platform in descriptive words and thereby provide depth to the analysis, as well as giving multiple perspectives of the study (Stake, 1995). As a result, the researchers deemed it fit to make use of subjective modeling as a tool to express any responses to the behavioural trends of the Goromonzi rural society in response to the operations of their educational leadership.

Since there was no predetermined hypothesis, no treatment, and no restrictions on the end product; there was also no manipulation of any variables or administration of treatment in this research study. Instead, the researchers observed, intuited, and sensed what was occurring in their natural rural settings. There was prolonged engagement (two months at each of the three sites, making a combined period of six months) with the participants and this allowed the researchers to distinguish what people do to what they say (Hughes, 1997). This also provided the researchers the opportunity to observe activities not based on one-time events, but on how parties conduct their everyday life in the natural settings. Meaning was also read through the 'word' and thus, there was thick description of data. By using qualitative research, this research focused on context as it was important in understanding the social world around the interaction between the educational leadership and the rural community in Goromonzi district. Thus, the meanings that were derived from the study of behavioural patterns Goromonzi rural community were informed by the social context in which they occurred.

The nature of the study qualified the research into the phenomenology philosophy; also known as non-positivism, which is a variation of interpretivism. This was a valuable philosophy for exploring the experiences of the rural communities in Goromonzi district in response to the how the educational leadership presents themselves to them. This philosophy also accorded the researchers a better understanding of meanings attached by both parties in interpreting their various forms of behaviours. It also contributed immensely to the development of new insights and explanations to the status quo.

In an effort to recognise the importance of the researchers' perspective and the interpretative nature of social reality, the study was conducted from a qualitative, interpretive research paradigm. Thus, according to Cantrell (1993), the study sought the subjective views of individuals. This was the main thrust of the study. It aimed at viewing the narratives of the key informants against the context in which it was set and the subjective viewpoints thereof. Due to the fact that the leading theoretical framework was the behavioural African unhu/ubuntu, this made the interpretive framework most appropriate for the study.

This enabled the study to explore and unearth the participants' perceptions and narratives in the context of their indigenous/cultural environments and through the lens of their cultural norms, customs, beliefs and values. However, the researchers had to be careful and sensitive to what the participants felt and narrated as this was crucial to them, to their 'working theories' and to their understanding and attributions of meanings. It is for this reason that the researchers went at great length to constantly be cautious of their own cultural biases, 'local knowledge' and conceptual structures. This was guided by Patton's (2002) assertion that continual self-reflection and reflexivity on the analytical process and the obligation to observe one's own processes helped in the illumination and reformulation of data.

The case study of one district in Mashonaland East Province was seen as enabling this study to probe deeply and analyse intensively the phenomena that led to the existence of disharmony between the rural educational leadership and its community. It also allowed the researchers to probe beneath the surface of the experiences of educational leaders and community (Best and Kahn, 1993). The purpose of such observation, according to Cohen and Manion (1994), is to probe deeply and analyse intensively the multifarious phenomena that constitute the life cycle of the unit with a view to establishing generalisations about the situation in other rural settings in Zimbabwe.

The researchers discovered this case study to be a great source of ideas in terms of studying the pattern of behaviours in the chosen area. The researcher was able to zero in on the role of rural educational leadership in influencing societal behaviour. This enabled the researcher to gain insight and knowledge on the factors contributing to the existence of an inharmonious relationship between the educational leaders in Goromonzi district and the community. This gives a platform for applying results of the research to the rest of the Zimbabwean rural settings. This has undoubtedly increased the knowledge base, not only to the researcher but other interested stakeholders. It came out to be a very good method for studying this rare phenomenon that exists in Goromonzi district. It also gave the researcher the opportunity to scrutinize some of the current theoretical assumptions pertaining to leadership. By so doing, a platform for innovation and improvement was also realised.

### **Data Generation Methods**

The primary data generation methods used in this study were interviewing, observation and document collection and analysis. These methods provided insights into what was taking place in the dynamics of rural educational leadership in influencing the societal behavioural trends observed in Goromonzi district through detailed descriptions, direct quotations, and excerpts or passages from written documents.

### **Interviewing**

The research tool chosen for this work was in-depth interviews. The direct face-to-face were used in an attempt to obtain reliable and valid measures in the form of verbal responses from one or more participants (Mattison and Pistrang, 2000). All the educational leaders in the three research sites were specifically selected for face-to-face interviews. This enabled the construction of a rich description of the varied and multi-dimensional world of the interviewees (Shapira, Arar and Azaiza, 2010). This also gave the researcher the liberty to seek understanding from the participants in some areas that required further explanations, through the process of probing. Patton cited in Hoijer (2008) identifies three types of probes. These are detail-oriented probes, elaboration probes and clarification probes. The researcher used the key technique of probing when he conducted interviews for this study. Detailed probes were used to get more about the issues being discussed through follow up questions. Elaboration probes were used to encourage the participants to tell more about the issues that were being discussed and exposed. Clarification probes were used whenever the researcher was not sure of what the interviewee was trying to put across. As plainly put forward by Stake (2005), through this key technique of probing, the researcher attained a rich and broad understanding of the studied phenomenon.

### **Focus Group Discussions**

The study also made use the focus group discussions as a data generation technique in gathering the views of the participants. This technique was used as complementary to the observation and interviews. It assisted the researchers to obtain comprehensive and in-depth perspectives from the key informants. According to Fern (2001), focus group discussions enrich the researcher's preliminary insights into the research area and the problem thus, enabling more effective data generation.

### **Observation**

Participant observation was also utilised as a means of collecting information from Goromonzi rural communities that were under study. This allowed the researchers to give a description in words, the behaviour of the participants under observation.

Being individuals outside the system, the researchers were non-participant observers. Focus was on the language, interaction patterns, communication, voice intonations and critical incidents among other things. Great effort was made to observe life as it was and reported accordingly. The process of observation was made on all participants across the board. Apart from observing participants during interviews and focus group discussions, they are also observed as the researcher studied their normal interaction patterns. At the time of observation, no judgments or inferences were made as these were taken care of at the data analysing stage.

### **Document Collection and Analysis**

The researchers collected and analysed documents related to the subject under investigation. The main techniques include: content analysis in order to describe the characteristics of documents; interpretative analysis in order to explore meaning within content; and critical analysis in order to focus on the relationship between documents and aspects of social structures (Kariem, 2010). The researchers looked at documents like SDC-AGM minutes, ministry policy circulars and any other documents related to the subject under study. Minutes of the SDC-AGMs made particular reference to incidents where complains pertaining to some teachers behaviour were raised as a cause for concern. Of the meetings held in the previous five years, only in one meeting was the issue of school leadership / parents (students) relation was not mentioned. A latest and worst case was that of teacher being physically assaulted by a fourth form student during a sporting function. The same was also revealed by ministry policy circulars; bringing the attention of the school leadership to the policy position of the ministry on how the teachers should relate with the students and community. In some cases, a number of anonymous letters were sent to either schools or ministry (then copied to schools) referring to the unruly behaviour of either school teachers or students. Such documents became vital source of information and assisted in corroborating with other methods of data generation.

### **Results and Discussion**

This section presents findings of the study as informed by interviews, observations, focus group discussions and document analysis. Data were collected and generated in at least three separate visits to the schools that lasted for about three months. Thus, the insights afforded by this process of data generation are limited: the observation data are based upon few incidents taken on particular visits, and should not be taken as indications of typical school business. Educational leaders were the key informants in each of the three schools that participated in this study. The schools were also located in three different wards of Goromonzi Rural District Council. Amongst the educational leaders that were interviewed were the following personnel: the school head, the deputy head, the senior master/woman, the Head of Department and the teaching staff. The majority of questions in the interview instrument were aimed at gaining an understanding of the key informants' perceptions, attitudes, beliefs and experiences related to the role of rural educational leadership in influencing societal behaviour in the district under study.

The findings of this study are based on the three (3) leading research questions which guided the study. The questions unearthed the dominant and unheard voices in response to rural educational leadership in Goromonzi District. The findings of this study revealed are thus revealed in the following scenarios.

#### **1. Why is there disharmony between the rural community and the educational leadership of the schools in their community?**

##### **Background**

An important aspect that was noted, according to the participants in this study was the issue of background and how it greatly contributes to issues of harmony between the rural community and educational leadership. It has been pointed out that the basis of any relationship in any set up is largely dependent upon the various backgrounds of the parties. Such backgrounds can be family, educational or social. Individuals' background is an important aspect, particularly when it comes to the extent of how people relate because of its critical implications on the harmony amongst the members (O'Connor and Paunnonen, 2007). Therefore, these inform one's position when it comes to how they relate or behave towards others. The following is a testimony to this:

Head A from school X had this to say:

*What brings about disharmony between the school leadership and the community has to do with the background of individuals. We have those people who come from a background that believes that school heads always abuse school resources, especially funds. Such people will never see anything good coming out of the school leadership, no matter*

*how best they execute their duties. And you don't expect such to be in agreement with the school personnel at any given time. They always look for the wrongs based on where they are coming from.*

Head C from school Z concurs with this:

*The current situation is largely influenced by where people are coming from. We come from different social, educational and religious backgrounds. Naturally this will cause people to see things differently, disturbing any form of harmony that might exist.*

There is a tendency of allowing past encounters to determine beliefs and perceptions. People should then always have in mind that when individuals are coming from different backgrounds that mould their beliefs and value system, disagreements are bound to occur. However, in the context of rural settings, the community holds a deep rooted desire to pursue harmony when it comes to relationship building. Ironically, harmony, which is considered to be the most critical underlying value in a rural community, seems to be absent. This has been mainly attributed to the varying degrees of diverse backgrounds currently experienced in Goromonzi district. All participants in the study were in agreement that harmony and a lack of conflict were the most crucial elements of a stable and progressive community. Rural communities have been widely suggested to be typically peaceable, submissive, and friendly, and to dislike resistance, defiance, opposition, competition, and fighting. So crucial is the aspect of background on its contribution to harmony between the educational leadership and the community. As it emerged from this study, community members whose backgrounds are pro education tend to display a positive and accommodating behaviour towards the educational leadership, as compared to those backgrounds shun education.

### **Perception**

An interesting finding regarding the issue of harmony between the community and educational leadership is that of different perceptions being held by various stakeholders. This determines the lenses through which one views life and how he/she then relates with the circumstances around him/her. Thus, perception has a direct effect on one's social behavioural responses as perceptual inputs are translated automatically into corresponding behavioural outputs. As a result, people often react to what they believe have seen and interpreted from what others doing. Of particular mention is the expression made by one participant and this view is shared by others:

Teacher 3 from school Y:

*Relationship is built based on what the parties are seeing and interpreting. The underlying issue now is whether or not they have seen and/or interpreted things aright.*

This is in concurrence with what some behaviourists' notion when they observed the direct effect of perception on behaviour. They argue that responses follow directly from perceived stimuli, and also hold that perception directly leads to action. Such was the position of early behaviourists scholars like Skinner (1938) and Watson (1913). These argued that such responses will not be imitations of the perceived events, but are rather stamped in responses to stimuli based on one's observations and the interpretation thereof. This is in sync with the happenings currently experienced in Goromonzi rural community. The rural community carries the notion that educational leaders have a superiority complex. As a result, they look down upon members of the community as people who are somehow backward and primitive. With this in mind, members of the community naturally resents and rejects any attempts by the educational leaders to reach out to them, no matter how sincere and genuine they could be. Therefore, behavioural tendencies are put into motion directly by perceptual activity. It has emerged in this study that there is the perception-behaviour link, where members of the educational leadership and the community tend to act in a particular way towards each other based on the way they see and/or interpret each other's actions. This phenomenon flows directly from individuals' dispositions. The effect is a natural consequence of the automatic activation of the behavioural response by the perception of others as a result of what they would have observed. Thus, there is a functional relationship between perception and behaviour. However, the consequence of this relation in Goromonzi rural community has been the existence of disharmony between the educational leadership and the community. There is evidence that indicate that this from of social perception has led directly to corresponding overt behavioural tendencies between the parties concerned. This appears to be a recurrent problem that most schools in rural settings are faced with. As a result, the rapport that would have prevailed for is adversely affected.

### **Trust**

People's levels of trust are displayed by the kind of behaviour towards each other. Trust becomes the driving force behind a particular set of behaviour. People value trust more than anything, especially where issue of finances and other resources are

concerned. Behaviours such as resentment, rejection and resistance were mentioned as an illustration of eroded trust. According to Anderson's (2006) assertions, trust which is said to affect human relation processes must be evident in all their dealings because this is a strong foundation upon which meaningful relations are made. It is one of the major determinants when it comes to behaviours that are invited from those we deal with on a daily basis. In support of this assertion, the following was extracted from the interviews:

Head B from school Y:

*The genesis of it all is to ensure high levels of trust. As such it is upon us as the school leadership to be trustworthy in all our dealings. There are times when one listens to the sentiments from some sectors of the community that point to the fact that the trust base has been compromised. As such, conditions fostering continuous harmony must be based on trust and faith in the ones that have the mandate to drive the educational system and this is the school leadership. There must therefore, be some deliberate efforts to regain that trust if we are to build a harmonious relationship.*

Trust forms part of the conditions for a harmonious relationship. However, the rural community has lost faith and trust in the school leadership along the way, yet this is a crucial part of one of the conditions fostering meaningful harmony between the two parties in as far as influencing societal behaviour is concerned. Therefore, as a matter of fact, relationship building must be based on trust in order to sustain the so much desired harmony. Navarro (2017) points out that trust is the key to social harmony. He argued that no one can succeed in relationships or in business without this vital key.

### **Doubting the entire system**

As unearthed by this study, there are some sectors of the community which have their own doubts about the entire education system. All this emanate from the fact that trust, which is the foundation of harmony in community relationship has been compromised. This is also as a result of the trust base that would have been eroded in the first place. They do not believe in the abilities and capabilities of the educational leaders in their community. A considerable portion of the participants in this study expressed that some members of the community have a general resentment towards the current educational leaders for various reasons. In support of this assertion, the following was extracted from the interviews:

Head B from school Y:

*We have a group of parents that doubt almost everything that comes from the school. As a result, they do not support school programmes and projects. They shoot down everything from the school head to the least teacher.*

The underlying problem here is that there are some community members who totally doubt that the school leadership can deliver. Such attitudes have proved to have damaging effects. Allen, et al (2008) concur that attitudes have a negative impact. However, their assertion does not address the effects of doubting in relation to creating disharmony between or amongst parties as revealed by this study.

### **Suppressed Voices**

An interesting finding from the participants is that some believe that there are suppressed voices that adversely affect the harmony between the school leadership and the community. The opinions appeared to be too loud to ignore. These are viewed to act as inhibitors harmony. They have been labelled silent assassins of harmony. Their direct effect is the loss of motivation to create, improve and sustain any form of harmony. In support of this, the participants had this to say:

Teacher 3 from school Y:

*The failure by the government to address the concerns of the educational personnel has produced a breed of teachers who feel oppressed. As a result, they respond by non-performance, a situation that the community is not happy about.*

Teacher 5 from school Z:

*We are experiencing a scenario of low remunerations across the board. The meagre salary levels are forcing most teachers to devote their time to other means to supplement their income. You don't expect these to be fully committed to their work.*

Head 1 from school X:



*The level of disgruntlement among teachers is so alarming. This is compromising even on service delivery, a situation that is causing a lot of problems with community.*

The finding in this study is that such silent voices, are expressed negatively in some areas. Mostly this is expressed through negligence of one's duties and bad attitude towards work. However, their ripple effects are felt by the entire community. The sum effect of this scenario is that the community members begin to respond negatively towards the entire school leadership. Related to this is the revelation that the current quality and calibre of teachers is also a major contributor of the current status quo. It was argued that such individuals are in the education field not as a call or value addition to the system; but as a result of what they can get. Comments of this nature are a witness to this:

Senior Teacher 2 from school X:

*At any given point in time, you are met with teachers who have degrees but in fact they are not trained teachers. These lack passion for the profession. They compromise the teaching profession. They do not represent the real teacher.*

Senior Teacher 1 from school Z:

*The old and principled teacher is long gone. The current ones, who are mostly not from educational background, are the laissez-faire type where everything goes.*

It is portrayed by these sentiments that this breed of staff amongst the educational personnel dents every effort to build a harmonious relationship with the community. Most of them do not have an understanding of most educational issues. They may have the expert knowledge about the subject areas they are assigned to, but this alone is not enough. There is need to complement with some human relation skills, which are critical when it comes to relating with the community. An analyses of the staffing returns indicate that on average; at every school that was investigated there was a portion of the teaching staff that does not have a teaching qualification.

Some revelations were that there are community members who opt not to register their complaints, views or concerns about how the schools are run, but instead adopt a wait-and-see stance. These neither contribute anything on every possible platform made available. It is either the fear of reprisal or victimisation of their children by the school leadership that such individuals adopt such an approach. Therefore, they voice their concerns through their actions – they let their behaviours speak for them, in a negative form though. This is evidenced by the narrations of this nature:

Head C from school Z:

*There is a group of parents who decide not to air their views concerning issues that affect them at the school. No matter the effort you put, they will never utter anything. You will only observe by their kind of behaviour in order to tell where they actually belong.*

Given this kind of a scenario, it is left for one to deduce and interpret the kind or nature of the relationship that exists between the school leadership and the rural community. Whichever direction the suppressed voices are coming from, their effect cannot be ignored, especially when their contribution is argued to be having a negative toll on the school leadership / community relations.

### **Failure to Deliver**

Throughout the participants' narratives, there were indications that the participants placed a high value on performance based on what has been agreed upon or generally accepted as the norm. In particular, the participants echoed that in many instances the parties will be at loggerheads with each other due to failure by either party to deliver on their promises and on what they are expected. What was bemoaned as a contributing failure on the part of the community was the inability to pay school fees or agreed levies on time so that schools can also operate effectively. There seem to be neglect on the part of some parents when it comes to the fulfilment of their financial obligations. The following are excerpts to that effect:

School Head C from school Z:

*The majority of parents do not pay their fees and levies. They just send their children here for free. This incapacitates us in most of our operations.*

School Head 1 from school X:

*Slightly above 30% of our parents are consistent in fees paying. The rest are in arrears. Our greatest challenge is we are not allowed to exclude those who do not pay from learning. Our hands are tied.*

School Head 2 from school Y:

*Those paid up parents end up blaming the school authorities for abusing their funds. Most of them do not actually know that the majority of parents do not pay their fees. We do not make much noise about this scenario fearing that those paying may also follow suit upon learning that their counterparts are not paying anything.*

This kind of failure on the part of the community creates disharmony in every aspect. Most of the community members, particularly those who default in payments, expect schools to be well-resourced and function above average. It is alleged that the moment they do not see things flowing according to their expectations, that is when allegations of misusing of funds, misappropriation and embezzlement are raised against the school leadership. The participants were of the view that it is ideal to seek clarification and understanding of some underlying facts before rushing to make uninformed conclusions. Hence there is the assumption that, the moment schools are opened, everyone is paid up and things should flow. The study also discovered that most non-paying parents do not even come forward to the school with their payment plans. Moreover, they do not even attend most meetings where issues of this nature amongst others are discussed. As a result, these are the very same parents who are usually against some resolutions made at such meetings. What such behaviours propagate is disharmony as in their endeavours they try as much as possible to 'recruit' other community members to their side, so that they begin to see and analyse things from their side of view. All this, coupled with the failures by the school leadership to deliver on what is expected of them, has the devastating effect of widening the fissures between the parties that are meant to work together.

## **2. To what extent does rural educational leadership affect the behaviour of the community in which they operate?**

### **Empowerment**

The extent to which the school leadership affects the community goes beyond classroom achievement that is measured by examination results. It has more to do with empowerment that is evidenced outside the physical boundaries of the school. Some points to note here are as follows:

Deputy Head 3 from school Z:

*The effect of educational leadership on the community behaviour has far more reaching effects. This is seen in the manner in which the students; both former and current, carry and present themselves within and outside the community. It is through the school leadership that their confidence is enhanced as well as boosting their self-esteem and self-worth.*

The revelation here is that what constitutes effectiveness and influence is not only limited to the examination results, but has more to do with empowerment. Weeks (2012), postulates that in a culture of learning, the student (*and the community*) must be empowered to work and fit into a global village. Thus, the general consensus here is that schools are impacting on their rural society in the form of empowerment, which has overspill effects, not only to the immediate surroundings, but the region and beyond. Interestingly, rural schools in Goromonzi district boast of having produced four councillors in the past 20 years, consecutively. Statement such as the ones below point to these sentiments:

Deputy Head 1 from school X:

*We have to a great extent influenced these communities in a positive way. Apart from producing academics who are very successful in their own right, we have produced several political leaders who are directly linked to this school. The past two councillors, as well as the current one are all products of this school. Undoubtedly, it is the school leadership that has had a great impact the behaviour of these fellows during their formative years at this school. That's what has been seen by the community and they voted them into positions of influence.*

The general feeling amongst the participants is that the impact does not end only in the rural community alone, but the entire society at large as these individuals will be relating with the global community in different capacities. This in part agrees with the analysis by Witziers (2003) when they examined the direct effects of leadership on student behaviour during the years 1986 and 1996. By "Direct effects" they referred to leadership practices contributed by the principal (school leadership) whose actions influence school community behaviour outcomes. More specifically, the practices by educational leadership were positively

related to student and community behaviour in the long-run. Thus, the schools in Goromonzi rural community are making a huge impact as reflected by several political and religious leaders who have passed through their hands.

### **Personal Conduct of School Leadership**

There was a general consensus from the participants' narratives which indicated that the manner in which the school leaders conduct themselves both within and outside the school premises has a large bearing on the behaviour of the general community. School leadership is deemed to be a role model in rural communities and thus its influence on community behaviour cannot be underestimated. The participants here were of the opinion that there is need for the school leadership to be cautious of how they conduct themselves. Hence concerns about educational leadership behaviour and their relationship to community behaviour are not new. There has been much debate about whether leadership behaviours impact community behaviour or whether community behaviour is related to other external factors. However as unearthed by the findings of this study; the fact remains that it is not practical to examine community behavioural trends without considering the behaviours of the school leadership. The leaders' personal conduct becomes core when it comes to sending signals that can be easily emulated by the community. Their conduct can be viewed as the backbone that is essential in providing support, direction and stability in promoting positive community behaviour. In some cases, the participants in this study even blamed the highest authority in the school. They lamented that:

Senior Teacher 3 from school X:

*The school head is just too soft and doesn't do anything to instil discipline. That is why the members of staff and the students do as they please.*

As a result, some junior members of the educational leadership begin to adopt behaviours that are directly confrontational to the efforts of the general leadership. They take advantage of the slackened leadership and adopt the 'carefree' attitudes. This general feeling is portrayed by statements like:

Senior Teacher 2 from school Z:

*Our standards across the board are gradually lowering. The administration and the leadership are getting too relaxed.*

Senior Teacher 1 from school Y:

*The system is not encouraging. The school heads are very weak.*

With this kind of the status quo, one would notice that the majority of the community is not satisfied by the type of leadership provided by the school leaders. There is some level of expectation which is not forthcoming from the school leadership in general.

### **Peri-Urban Diffusion**

A considerable number of key informants in this study bemoaned the effects of urbanisation which is fast encroaching into the rural areas of Goromonzi District. This, they argued that it is negatively affecting the schools' efforts in trying to mould the students' and community behaviour. It has been noted that:

Senior Teacher 1 from school X:

*There has been an influx of residents coming from the urban centres. These bring along new systems and a new set of beliefs. The rural child is then found wanting as he tries to catch up with the modern trends. Thus, we are now faced with the challenges of drug and substance abuse, teenage pregnancies and school drop outs.*

Such trends are in a big way negating on the general behaviour trends of the rural community. The impact is said to be so strong that it is diluting the efforts of the rural school leadership in considerable way. In has also been observed that some of these 'new comers' are practically child-headed families. Such excerpts bemoaned that:

Senior Teacher 4 from school Z:

*Some of these people just come here, acquire a piece of land, build there then leave their children while they go to the diaspora for greener pastures. Such children become difficult to control and monitor. Their behaviour is usually emulated by their colleagues as they now view them as the trendy ones who have all the freedom.*

With this kind of a scenario, one does not expect the educational leadership to be as effective as they ought to be in positively influencing the societal behaviour. This is one of the many factors that would be at play and affecting the efforts of the school leaders from various angles at any given period of time.

### **3. How should the 'warring' rural communities and the educational leaders of the schools be reconciled?**

#### **Acknowledge the need for each other**

The general position is that both parties need to appreciate and acknowledge the need for each other. This was the contention of the key informants in this study that no entity can operate in isolation. The parties were viewed as two sides of the same coin – they are inseparable and hence need each other. Here are some supporting sentiments from the interviews:

Head 3 from school Z:

*No one is bigger than the other in this matrix. The roles differ, but no party can replace the other. Thus, we need each other in developing what we both have interest in.*

These views are a clear indication that educational leaders and the community must recognise the value of each other in as far as the mending of relationships is concerned. As such, some efforts must be seen from either party. It is therefore, critical to identify some areas deemed to be causes of constraints and come up with possible and practical ways to create some understanding. It may also require the identification of key players from both the schools and the community, and then begin from there in making in-roads in the reconciliation process. The bottom line is the two parties must find each other.

#### **Creating Awareness**

Another related finding in this study regarding to reconciling the schools and the rural community was that the participants indicated the need to create some awareness concerning the value of each other. With the right approach and the appropriate players, it is believed that some reconciliation will be realised in some way. Statements that appear to support this position are thus:

School Head 2 from school Y:

*Either the community or school leadership must spearhead some awareness campaign, to educate the general masses on the importance of these two being in collaboration.*

All that can be concluded from these precepts is that the knowledge about the value and importance of schools and community collaboration must be put across to the concerned parties. Individuals from both parties who are knowledgeable about this must take the leading role in doing so. Such reaching out exercises must be well-calculated with the intention of bridging the information gap. One way or the other, the school leadership and the community is likely to be reconciled by such deliberate efforts.

#### **Promoting Collaborations**

One striking finding in this study related to reconciling the schools and the rural community was that the majority of the key informants indicated that at some point, the schools have initiated some collaborations of some sort, one way or the other. However, they were indications that there hasn't been mutual reciprocation from the other party, due to lack of zeal and/or interest. The culture of collaborations, if fully utilised could perform wonders for both parties if they are intertwined for the purpose of fostering health relationship between the schools and community. Statements that appear to support this position are thus:

Head C from school Z:

*We can safely say the schools are doing enough to foster some collaboration with the community. However, there is need for some energy and expression of willingness to cooperate from the community.*

What can be deduced from the above sentiments is that most schools in Goromonzi rural community are making some efforts to engage their communities one way or the other but their endeavours are not being met by corresponding energetic, committed and willing members of the community. It appears this is an important finding in this study. The promotion of collaboration in the area of reconciling the schools and their communities was cited as indispensable. Thus, teamwork in this respect is viewed as an enabling tool. The following statements bear testimony to this:

Head B from school Y:

*The school leadership and the community must work together rather than in competition.*

Thus, the calls for reconciling in this regard are quite clear. Therefore, the need for the school leadership and the community to work in teams and networks that promote collaboration becomes imperative. Consequently, the notions emerging from these perceptions is that meaningful reconciliation of the two parties can only be effective through collaborative, purposeful interaction between the key role players. The point here is that, schools working alone cannot achieve the greatest possible influence on the community.

### **Open Door Policy**

It was the contention of the key informants of this study that schools are working hard and employing all means possible to promote and maintain an open door policy for the community. Indications are that the parents and the community at large are encouraged to make use of all possible channels to approach the school leadership and bring to their attention any issues of concern. In such circumstances, the communities are given the opportunity to contribute to the general operations of the schools by either pointing out areas that need improvement, initiate new ideas or even commend and reinforce on the positives. Supporting statements are:

Deputy Head 1 from school X:

*We have a system of allowing the community to come forward and express their views on any subject they feel needs to be addressed by the school. We do this in an effort to minimise the effects of spreading rumours around, which have an even greater negative impact. Where some feel they need to maintain their anonymity, we have availed the suggestion box system which is at their disposal. All this is done in the spirit of closing in any gaps that may exist between the schools and the community.*

The views expressed here are an indication that the educational leaders were quite aware of the existence of an “unhealthy” relationship with the community. Thus, some deliberate efforts to interactivity with the rural community have some importance in bridging the gap. However, there has also been a general feeling that not all members of the community are that progressive and as such do not embrace or take advantage of this development. This prominent finding came from the participants. Some substantiating statements are:

Deputy Head 2 from school Y:

*Not every member of the community is taking advantage of the open door policy introduced by most schools. Some still feel they are not part and parcel of the school community and watch from a distance. They adopt a wait-and-see attitude. As a school leader you would later see by their manner of attitude and behaviour towards the general school leadership. These individuals would have deemed themselves outsiders who have no part in the affairs of the school.*

These incidents that occasionally crop up have a drawback effect on everyone’s efforts of mending relationships. The interactivity and connectivity between the schools and the community would not be fully realised. According to Lomas (2007), without such connectivity, both parties may experience frustration, isolation and procrastination.

### **Focusing on Needs**

Another emerging finding from this study was that parties have their needs which seem to be neglected. Whenever a group feels that their basic requirements are being met to their satisfaction, issues will automatically retain to their normal position. This was corroborated in this study by the majority of the participants. There was the acknowledgement that the school leadership in general has needs which must be attended to. The study revealed that the needs of the educational leadership are two-phased. The first one is that the schools need to be fully resourced if they are to deliver as per societal expectation. It has been pointed out that most schools are under-resourced to the extent that they lack basic items to make them operate on a daily basis. Below are some of the narratives:

Teacher 7 from school Z:

*We lack basic things like textbooks and ordinary stationery. At times we go an extra mile to provide for the learners.*

Senior Teacher 3 from school Y:

*Most times the teachers are expected to perform miracles with practically nothing at all. People don't see our efforts. They only come forward and speak when things go wrong. All along no one will be seeing our efforts. We have no resources here.*

Teacher 1 from school X:

*How do you send a soldier for a battle without the armoury and expect him to come back victorious? Give us tools and see if we will not perform. You can them judge us from there.*

The cry is loud and clear from the school leadership. These are some of the challenges met by the rural teacher which needs to be addressed. It is argued that attending to these needs on the part of the responsible authority as well as the community would eradicate some of the challenges said to exist between the school and the rural community. Over and above these, the study also discovered another perennial need on the part of the school leadership which is yet to be attended to. From the onset of the study, it has been bemoaned that the school leadership is hard hit by the current economic challenges. Thus, they are struggling to meet basic needs like accommodation and transportation costs. As a result, most of them are forced to look for alternatives way to augment their salaries. For this reason, some can only be available to offer their services when they can afford. This is supported by extracts from the interviews:

Senior Teacher 3 from school X:

*Most of us desire to be on duty around the clock as required by the law. The challenge is that we can no longer afford to do so. We can only come to school when we have resources to do. And our employer is not doing anything about it. The situation is so bad.*

Teacher 4 from school Y:

*The government should do something about our situation. The major one is that of accommodation. We rent accommodation and at times some are even tenants at our learners' houses. This doesn't give a good picture, especially when you fail to pay the rent. You are supposed to look for alternative accommodation and expected to be at school at the same time.*

Teacher 6 from school Z:

*If only our plight can be looked into. Our salaries have become so low such that we have become the laughing stock of the community. No one approaches his/her job wholeheartedly in such a situation.*

Such were the concerns of the participants. It is believed that focusing on the needs of the educational leaders by the powers that be, in improving their working conditions would in a great way reduce the problems existing between the leaders and the rural community. As observed in this study, some of the problems arising between the school leadership and the community are not as a result of the direct actions of either party. Underlying issues and other factors would have contributed to the status quo.

## **Conclusion**

Despite some limitations in the methodological approach, the purposively sampled key informants in this study generated rich data and great insights into the subject matter. In its role in influencing societal behaviour, the rural educational leadership has several underpinning factors that work synergistically together as unearthed by the findings of this study. Influencing rural community behaviour has its own unique culture and settings that make the role of educational leadership somewhat stand out from that exercised in urban settings. This demands an apt educational leader with exceptional African unhu/ubuntu behavioural trends in a world of increased societal expectations that place high value on the concept of humanness, as defined by the display of good moral behaviours.

This study concludes that there is no single best leadership approach that triggers specific behavioural responses from a rural community as there are various competing leadership approaches and styles that simultaneously contribute to societal behaviour. This position recognises the potential for a number of different perspectives of leadership concepts and approaches to be defined in the rural community environment. While it is true that educational leadership can and do make a huge difference in terms of behaviour transformations in rural communities, the researchers conclude that this can be achieved in part and in a limited scope since educational leadership is also part and parcel of the wider rural society it operates in. It is

subject to the norms, customs, beliefs, values, rules and influences of the same society it operates in. There is therefore, the need to view issues as they unfold from a particular theoretical standpoint, draw conclusions from that angle on the role of educational leadership in influencing community behaviour, when done migrate to another perspective and study how the trends changes. In so doing, observe what is being revealed that was not revealed before and the other way round. In reality, the more the same scenario is studied from different angles and perspectives, the better the understanding.

The study further concludes that there is a lot of on-going debate amongst various scholars and academics on how educational leadership can impact and influence community behaviour. The researchers argue that the educational leadership in Goromonzi District can adopt some of the tenants of the behavioural theories, blend them with the African unhu/ubuntu philosophy to establish new patterns of thinking and a culture change to create a more harmonious relationship with the rural community because the latter is Afrocentric in its approach and its chances of appealing and success to a rural community are high. Failure to do this may spell jeopardy to the existence of an effective educational leadership alongside a supporting rural community. This is because of the nature of the crisis uncovered in this study. There is the formidable resistance of the new crop of educational leaders being injected into the education system in these modern days. These portray the opposite of the expectations of the rural community. This breed of educational leadership has been seen to be inviting the manifestation of negative attitudes and responses to their leadership in the face of conservative rural communities. There is also the failure by senior members of the educational leadership to expressly condemn the wayward and unbecoming behaviour displayed by this new crop of leaders. Such silence is being interpreted by the rural community members as being content with the status quo. Another aspect is the failure of the schools in the district under study to customise their leadership approaches and make them into home grown philosophies resulting in the utilisation and application of leadership behaviours based on the expectations of their rural communities and borrowed wisdom from the relevant leadership theories and frameworks.

The study takes a further position that community behavioural trends, especially in the rural community, are a reflection of the educational leadership provided by the school leadership in that community. Therefore, as adapted to the African unhu/ubuntu philosophy, educational leadership must be made to preserve the traditional values, norms and customs of the rural communities it operates in. While other flexible and relevant approaches are being developed, the relationship between educational leadership and the rural communities could be expected to change from one of disharmony characterised by animosity as at present, to one of healthy synergy and collaborations which is currently non-existence. The major thrust should be on responsible educational leadership behaviour, empowering community members to adopt behavioural trends that reflect a culture of good moral standing, setting the standards for an ideal African community which is an epitome of acceptable behaviour. However, the underlying issues emanate from the fact that the behaviours currently displayed by the present breed of educational leadership in the rural community under study are informed by contemporary, classic and modern concepts of conventional leadership. This might lead to situations in which leadership behaviour aspects in an African context may remain unattended. In this study, it was discovered that despite the need and the desire by the educational leadership to enhance positive behaviour transformations to the community under study, the argument is that the concept of unhu/ubuntu has not been fully embraced by those in leadership; yet this is fundamental behaviour dynamics in rural communities.

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