

An investigation into democratic practices in Botswana primary schools

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Summary

This paper reports the findings of a research study conducted among 64 undergraduate in-service teachers at primary schools in Botswana. It uses the qualitative research method to examine and discuss the different leadership approaches used by principals of primary schools. The study concludes that the majority of the principals adequately involve teachers in the decision-making processes of schools. The analysis of the data shows that by and large, qualification is not a significant issue that affects the management style practiced by primary school principals. Rather, the democratic practices that prevail in schools are mainly the result of the existing school improvement initiatives introduced in schools in the 1990s.

Background

Botswana is a landlocked country lying between countries that have experienced or are still experiencing political instability. Until the 1990s, South Africa to the south and Namibia to the west of Botswana, have been politically unstable countries. To the north-east of Botswana is Zimbabwe, whose politics are a potential threat to peace and stability in the region. In the 1970s, there was an influx of political refugees from neighbouring Angola and Namibia (the latter have now been repatriated following the attainment of political independence in those countries). Economic refugees from Zimbabwe continue to enter the country in large numbers because of the political heat that has plunged the country into economic turmoil. Despite its geographical vulnerability, Botswana remains an oasis of peace and democracy within a politically volatile surrounding. The good governance of the country is founded and grounded on ideals that respect and uphold the rule of law and on a constitutionally established non-racial democracy that affords all citizens equal rights, freedom of speech, freedom of press, and freedom of association (Botswana and UNESCO Report 2005:115). The country also has an independent judiciary with a High Court presided by the Chief Justice (ibid:2005:115) The basis of the country's democratic practices lies in the following statements by Botswana's former President Masire (2006:57). On the formation of a new government in a "new" country he proclaimed: "For the nation to survive it had to be democratic; it had to be united; ... We had to be sure that we did not encourage tribalism but rather encouraged nation building." Despite the presence of many different ethnic groups in the country, ethnocentrism is not an issue of real concern. If it exists it is at the individual level. On the whole, the different ethnic groups enjoy a harmonious co-existence with one another. Regardless of whether teachers prefer to stay and teach in their hometowns or villages, or to work in areas outside their birth areas, in many ways the system of a centralised teacher posting has contributed immensely to the existing social and cross-cultural

fertilisation and diversity among the different ethnic groups. The merit in such a system is that it contributes to national unity (Harber & Davies, 2001:67).

The Botswana Ministry of Education, through many programmes, seeks to extend the spirit of democratic governance that exists at the macro-political level in the country to schools. At the primary school level, efforts to achieve this are being made partly through the *School Management Manual* (Republic of Botswana, 2000b:28-30). This is expressed in the manual in the following way:

- i) initiating and implementing a staff development policy that encourages the sharing of ideas, expertise and experience based on assessed needs;
- ii) providing an environment in the school that allows opportunities for staff participation to resolve conflicts and solve problems;
- iii) planning and developing the formal and informal curriculum of the school in consultation with the senior staff to develop their potentials and personal qualities and
- iv) providing the type of leadership that promotes working relationships in the school to establish high morale.

Furthermore, other performance improvement strategies that are consistent with democratic ideals and values of the country were introduced in schools in recent years, for example the School Development Plan (SDP) that emphasises group effort towards the achievement of school goals. The Works Improvement Teams (WITS), another performance improvement strategy, as its name suggests, stresses teamwork as being central to successful organisational performance. The success of the most recent strategy, the Performance Management Systems (PMS), like the SDP and WITS also depends on the sustained cooperation and continual collaboration between teachers and the school leadership and among teachers themselves. Characteristic of the three innovations is their emphasis on collegiality, partnership, a shared decision-making, transparency, mutual trust and respect for each other's opinion and a common purpose (Republic of Botswana, 2000b:31). Like in Botswana, in South Africa reforms regarding the democratisation of education, particularly those which "can improve the culture of teaching and learning" have been initiated in schools by government. Principals now enjoy some devolved authority through the decentralisation of certain structures such as school-based management and stakeholder participation in decision-making at the site (Steyn, 2002:251). All these have expressions of democratic governance. However, theory and practice do not always coincide, as theories are not always implemented.

Gender and qualifications in primary schools

For this study, it is important to bear in mind that women dominate the population of teachers in Botswana primary schools. The March 2003 government educational statistics reveal that there were 12 990 teachers in all the primary schools in the country. Of these, 10 108 (77.8%) were women. In the 764 primary schools, the number of male principals was 309 and that of female principals stood at 455. On average, each school had only one or two male teachers. In some schools it is not uncommon to find the only male teacher being the principal. These figures show a disproportionate gender distribution of

principals, with male principals being vastly over-represented in the female-dominated institutions (Republic of Botswana, 2003b:7).

A similar scenario existed in schools in the UK in the 1960s and 1970s, because cultural norms supported by both men and women upheld male superiority where men and women worked together (Roddy & Moyo, 2003:13). When leadership practices in schools are examined, it is also important to know that in Botswana, the majority of teachers at the primary school level have received training only up to diploma or certificate levels (Republic of Botswana, 2003b:7). Graduates have only recently started to join the primary school system. These statistics will be useful in determining whether gender and qualification have any bearing on the type of leadership practiced by the principals. It is also important to note that the ages of primary school children range between 7 and 13 years: culturally, this age cohort rarely questions instructions from teachers. Their behaviour may therefore have an indirect bearing on the way principals run the schools.

Statement of the research problem

For a long time, the post of the primary school principal has been occupied by certificate holders, but currently more holders of a diploma and a few graduates are being appointed to this position (Republic of Botswana, 2003:vii). This scenario followed the upgrading in the 1990s of the teacher training colleges to colleges of education and the introduction of the Bachelor of Education programme at the University of Botswana. A significant number of the principals were promoted from their teaching positions without any qualification in educational management. Their subordinates, on the other hand, are young and a good number of them have degrees, with some holding a master's degree (Botswana, 2003b:7-8). Moswela (2006:630) made the observation that leaders who have formally learnt management systems are more likely to engage their subordinates in participatory leadership, and that in a situation where the leader has lesser qualifications than the subordinates, there is a tendency for such a leader to use his/her position of power to suppress the followers' views. Given this and the fact that male principals in Botswana primary schools are disproportionately in the majority in a female-dominated teaching staff, this study is aimed at establishing the extent to which heads involve teachers in the management of the schools. The investigation is also made against the backdrop of a particular country (Botswana) that cherishes and upholds democratic principles.

Research questions

- a) To what extent do principals practice democratic management in schools?
- b) Why do principals practice certain leadership styles more than others?
- c) Do democratic management practices in schools have any benefits for schools and for education as a whole?
- d) Do the qualifications of principals have any influence on democratic practices in schools?
- e) Does gender make a difference in leadership style?

Literature review

The purpose of this section is to review and discuss literature that has informed this study. It is important from the outset to understand the context in which the concept of democracy is used in this article. Democracy is defined as the fair and equal treatment of everyone in an organisation and their right to take part in decision-making (Hornby, 2000:309; Armstrong, 2003:21). Democracy is also defined as the planning and carrying out together of activities by group members Hoy & Miskel, 2001:341; Harber & Davies, 2001:2-3 & 154). Cummings and Worley (2001:313) refer to leadership that involves employees in the management of organisations as “participatory management” or “industrial democracy”. This approach to management, they argue, enables employees to “gain greater participation in relevant workplace decisions”.

In the sixteenth century, leadership theories were primarily culture-biased. Leaders in industries were assumed to have much more power than their followers. There was a “large power distance” between the leader and the subordinate and the assumption was that the farther the two are apart, the more productive the worker will be (Handy, 1993:109). But unlike industries, schools are open systems that do not deal with processes that can be standardized, that is, where products can be quantified in terms of so many passes per so much expenditure. New trends in leadership are that leadership should be based on a consensus where ideally, power is distributed more equally (a small power distance) (ibid:109). Political theorists refer to this type of leadership as deliberative democracy. Proponents of this leadership theory believe that it is not only the leader who is smart enough to provide leadership; others in the organisation are also smart enough to participate meaningfully in the deliberative process of decision-making. Furthermore, the theory purports that all people have the right to let their voice be heard in the workplace (Hendriks, 2002:3). In this article, the terms *participatory decision-making*, *shared decision-making*, *group decision*, and *distributed decision-making* will be used interchangeably to refer to democratic practices. The terms *leadership* and *management*, although they may differ with regard to their specific meaning, are also used interchangeably to convey the same meaning.

Although principals are also employees just like the teachers, they have some power edge over the teachers in that they have delegated authority mandated upon them. They enforce governmental education policies. But given the limited power principals wield, teachers are likely to feel they have as much of a moral voice in the decision-making process of the school as the principals and they might want their involvement to be formalised as well.

The notion that decision-making is scalar and that principals are the sole “think tanks” who decide for the whole school is not durable and can no longer be defended. Contemporary thinking on effective management/leadership espouses effective leadership as a function of groups and not individuals (Owens, 2004:259), where the leader is able to enlist the aid and support of others in the accomplishment of a common task (Chemers, 1997:1, in Hoy & Miskel, 2001:392; Steyn, 2002:251). This is described as representative leadership, as opposed to domineering leadership. The moral and ethical elements of leadership have now been added to the literature on leadership as ingredients of effective organisations. Because workers implement decisions, they must be involved

in making the decisions; furthermore, organisations are formed by people who are individually endowed with talent (Sergiovanni & Starratt, 2002:14-15; Hanson, 2003:48). These arguments strengthen the argument for shared decision-making in schools. These theories which recognise teachers as the “nuts and bolts people” in instructional delivery place them in the forefront in decision-making that affects their practice. This type of leadership differs from that described by Max Weber (1947), in Owens (2004:260-261), that was based on command and control, and involves leadership that increases the capabilities and determination of subordinates to achieve things on their own (Pedler, Burgoyne & Boydell, 2001:25; Hanson, 2003:47-48; Owens, 2004:260-261).

The democratisation of school management has a two-pronged effect on the quality of education. Firstly, a democratic approach to leadership gives recognition to the fact that people who form the organisation have talents. People feel they are part of the organisation and therefore are likely to commit their energy and time towards the achievement of the goals of the organisation – goals which/that they helped to formulate (Hanson, 2003:48). Secondly, democratic management practices promote the sense of teamwork (Sergiovanni & Starratt, 2002:5). There is evidence that democratic managers are better performers than autocratic managers, because they share problems with group members, obtain their collective ideas and reach consensus on a solution (ibid:5). Democratic decision-making has the potential to enhance the value of contribution of the people in the organisation, as it has an empowering effect on them. Empowerment, as viewed by Scott and Jaffe (1991:17), is the “new fuel for the growing workplace”. They also refer to it as an engine of professional growth that cannot be separated from school improvement. This important relationship between teacher empowerment in the school context and organisational improvement cannot be separated from a democratic leadership (ibid). Empowerment, organisational improvement and democratic leadership are therefore reciprocal and mutually reinforcing, Scott and Jaffe further argue. When leadership increases potential in the interest of the organisation, it is good leadership. Like motherhood, leadership should encourage independence (Ozga, 1993:71). But when it frustrates potential, it is not good leadership (Hoy, Bayne-Jardine & Wood, 2000:35; Pedler, *et al.*, 2001:25).

In contemporary literature on leadership, much has been written on the nexus between school improvement and teachers’ continuous learning resulting from teacher empowerment. Moswela (2006:630), for instance, argues that schools as organisations cannot improve without teacher learning. On the other hand, Pedler *et al.* (2001:27) argue that effective teacher learning cannot take place without group interaction. Arguably, there cannot be effective group interaction and learning when teacher behaviour is imposed from above. Principals, by virtue of their central positions in schools and as the persons who are ultimately accountable for the performance of their schools, are the appropriate people to initiate participatory decision-making (Armstrong, 2003:11). A partnership approach to school management does not serve ethical, moral or school improvement purposes only. It also has the advantage of reducing the amount of stress and overload experienced by senior management, especially in large institutions (Carnall, 1999:36). Large primary schools in Botswana have student enrolments reaching 1 000 (Republic of Botswana, 2003b:7). These enrolments do not allow the principal much time to reflect upon the school practices or to plan ahead. If principals of such schools cannot distribute the workload, it may be detrimental to the control of the school. In the past,

when schools were smaller and when the principal was the most qualified and experienced person on the staff, and when parents' involvement in the school was limited, it was possible for him (invariably principals were male) to perform all the administrative duties without much stress. This argument reveals a relationship, in terms of benefits, between democratic school practices and shared responsibility.

School management systems can have a bearing on the social programmes schools are obligated to implement. Schools in Botswana have not been spared from the ravages of HIV/Aids. Nationwide, a shocking 35.5 percent of the sexually active adult population are HIV positive (republic of Botswana, 2003a:12-14). According to a local newspaper; "Botswana has one of the world's highest HIV prevalence rates with nearly 40 percent of the adult population testing positive" (Gabathuse, 2004:8). From a population of 1.7 million, 300 000 people live with HIV (ibid).

Although education authorities run schools, the direction of education service is determined by the decision taken by politicians. Any government, whether democratic or otherwise, would want to be assured that its policies are being implemented at school and other levels. Education as a social commodity is always vulnerable to political attacks and influences and is prone to changes as the social and economic circumstances change. Schools in fact implement political decisions. Harber and Davies (2001:151) argue that "What applies to macro-political systems also applies to micro-political systems such as schools." Usually, people behave in the same way they are being treated or have been treated before. Teachers will not practice democracy with regard to students if they themselves had not experienced it. Neither are they likely to practice democracy with regard to teachers unless they recognise it at a national political level. In order for teachers to infuse democratic ideals in their teaching, they first need to operate in a climate where they are able to take part in the planning and decision-making processes. In this way, students will come to understand that democracy applies to more than just voting and that it can be learnt not only from politicians, but at schools as well (Harber & Davies, 2001:154).

According to Ginsberg and Keys (1995:143), an authoritarian as opposed to a democratic leadership style assumes that the person who is telling knows and the person who is being told does not know. They view this behaviour as a one-way communication process where the principal – in the context of this paper – sees himself/herself as a teacher of teachers. Under this type of leadership, people are not viewed as whole persons in their own right but as extensions of organisational machinery (Owens, 2001:211; Sergiovanni & Starratt, 2002:14 & 19) that can be manipulated in such a way as to achieve the goals of the organisation. Not all teachers, however, are keen on leadership that enlists their involvement. They believe that their role is to teach and that the management of the school is the responsibility of the principal. A study conducted in six schools in the USA on shared decision-making concluded that in three of the schools, teachers' involvement and their allegiance and enthusiasm in shared decision-making waned over time. The teachers no longer wanted to be active participants in the decision-making process because they felt such participation took up too much of their classroom time (Weiss & Cambone, 1994:291). A teacher is quoted as saying:

Principals are legally responsible for the schools, so let them do their job Shared decision-making takes a great deal of our classroom work. New ideas have to come from the principal and not from teachers the principal has got to give direction and has to make the final decision on everything (ibid, 1994).

Methods

The researcher wanted to understand how Botswana primary school undergraduate in-service teachers felt about the leadership styles principals applied in the management of schools. The population sample was small-scale and therefore could not yield data that could be representative of Botswana schools as a whole. The intention was not to hold up findings beyond the specific research subjects, but to offer insight into the aspect of principals' management orientations that might be resistant to or consistent with the national ideals of democracy. The investigation was a qualitative design that aimed at obtaining data rich in description of principals' managerial behaviour, using subjects who were experienced and well informed in how schools were being managed. The questions that guided this research essentially asked how the teachers saw their involvement in school management and how their involvement or lack of it affected education generally.

Population

The target population of the study was primary school teachers in Botswana. A sample was made from a class of 64 undergraduate students at the University of Botswana who were enrolled for the Bachelor of Education degree programme. Because the researcher took advantage of a readily available population, the sampling can be described as opportunistic. Only in-service teachers who had no previous experience as principals were selected for the investigation. The involvement of principals to reflect upon and describe their own management styles was avoided, as this would likely bring bias into the findings. The majority of the subjects were classroom practitioners whose teaching experience was not less than ten years. Forty-seven (73%) of the teachers were from 26 rural schools and seventeen were from 15 urban schools. The biggest schools from which the respondents came had between 500 and 1 000 pupils. In view of the small study sample, as hinted earlier, the conclusions of the findings cannot be extrapolated to the whole population of primary schools in Botswana. Nonetheless, they can offer some idea as to how the primary schools are run. Such basic knowledge could be useful in future bigger studies in this important area.

Data gathering procedure

A qualitative approach to research in the form of structured open-ended questions was used to collect data. Open-ended questions constitute a qualitative research design (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003:37-38). The instrument had been pilot-tested earlier on five other students of a similar profile to enhance its validity. The "pilots", however, did not participate in the eventual study. The research instrument was developed by drawing on ideas from the relevant literature. The respondents were assured that the exercise was not intended to grade them, but rather to gather data for purposes of research. The researcher was not interested in knowing who said what about whom. The identities of the respondents and the schools they came from were therefore not required. The questions

were completed outside class time, in the students' own time. In addition to the respondents' personal data and the principals' educational qualification as reflected by the respondents, the following critical questions were asked in the questionnaire:

- Which of the following three leadership styles do principals of primary schools practice most: democratic, autocratic, or *laizzes-fare*?
- Why is the leadership style you have chosen above the most prevalent among the principals?
- What are the characteristics of this type of leadership?
- What are the benefits of this type of leadership to the school clientele?
- Does the educational qualification of a principal have an influence on his/her style of leadership?
- Is there a difference in management style between male and female principals?

Data analysis

Data analysis techniques fall into two broad classes: qualitative and quantitative. For this study, a qualitative analysis was used, because the research was concerned with answering the questions "what" and "why" about the leadership styles practiced by individual principals towards the teachers. Such qualitative questions naturally lend themselves to a descriptive form of data analysis, where words or text is used. The study employed a simple analysis, which by nature of the questions had already been incorporated into the different question categories. For example, in the case of the question which enquired about the leadership style principals use most, the responses were presented in a table and their frequencies were determined. The questions which solicited opinions were analysed using the content analysis as suggested by Cummings and Worley (2001:123). Through the use of this method, the individual comments were summarised into meaningful categories.

Firstly, the responses to a particular question were read to determine whether some answers constantly recurred. Secondly, themes that captured recurring comments were generated, for example, in answers to the question "Why is the leadership style you have chosen ... prevalent among principals?" Typical responses in the case of the autocratic style of leadership were:

"Inferiority complex because of inferior qualification."

"The teachers encourage it by not wanting to be involved in school management. The principal then tells them what to do all the time."

When commenting on the democratic style, respondents made comments such as:

"The school development plan has changed principals' attitudes for the better."

"The school development plan has revealed our strengths and weaknesses which we can build on."

Since the responses mainly commented either on the democratic or autocratic style of leadership, it greatly simplified the analysis, as the researcher only needed to count the frequency of the responses in each category. The sorting of data according to similarities was consistent with Bogdan and Biklen's (2003:147) methods of developing coding categories.

Data presentation and discussion

Introduction

In the main, the study is hinged on the theme "democratic practices in primary schools". Specifically, it sought to determine the extent to which principals practiced participative democracy with regard to teachers. Management styles, however, can be influenced by other factors ranging from differences in educational attainment between the leader and the followers to cultural issues. Such factors which constitute sub themes of the bigger theme also have particular sub themes, here referred to as sub-sub themes. These other themes, although not the main focus, do not exclude the main theme, as they help inform whether or not democratic practices existed in schools and also why they existed or not. This section is therefore ordered and discussed under the following headings:

The prevalence of different management styles

Table 1 below shows the orientation of principals' management styles. Figures are given for responses on the male and female principals' leadership. The democratic style of management was the predominant style (77%). Eleven (17%) of the respondents believed that principals ran their schools in an autocratic manner. The results also show a tendency for the female principals (59%) to be more democratic than their male counterparts (41%), a conclusion consistent with Ozga's (1993) perspective that mothers encourage independence among their children.

Table 1: Perceptions of leadership style

Leadership style	Male principals	Female principals	All respondents
Democratic	20	29	49 (77%)
Autocratic	5	6	11 (17%)
<i>Laizzer-faire</i>	3	1	4 (6%)

Why principals practice democratic leadership.

Democratic practices in primary schools were largely attributed to the introduction of some performance improvement strategies, as suggested by respondents in the comments below:

"Since the introduction of workshops on school development plan and performance management systems in primary schools, there has been a change in the way [principals] run schools. There is now more teacher involvement in management issues than before. We now can hold meetings without the [principal] and make decision which he upholds without much fuss."

"Reports from the media on schools generally, have isolated some schools as having improved in performance because of the close working relationships between [principals] and their teachers. This, I think is the

effect of the performance improvement strategies schools have been exposed to.”

The above remarks clearly point towards a correlation between the innovations which were introduced in the background earlier, and the prevailing democracy in schools. The method through which these innovations, such as the school development plan, are being implemented, not only creates environments that allow opportunities for a shared decision-making between the principals and the teachers, but it also empowers the teachers in the job as they can confidently take decisions that affect their work, without the principal. Environments such as these make it possible to unearth the untapped talents of the individual and to put them to good use. The focusing of the mental ability and the different exploits of staff towards a common problem works like a converging lens that can light a fire by concentrating individual sun rays on a focal point.

Why some principals practice autocratic leadership

Three main reasons why principals practice autocratic leadership have been identified as:

(a) Authority based on a position of power

Although the democratic leadership style prevails among primary principals in Botswana, a few (17%) of the respondents indicated that the leadership style in their schools is autocratic (see Table 1). Contrary to the majority view that principals were democratic in their management, four (36%) of the eleven (N=11) respondents who felt that their principals were autocratic also indicated that the principal’s word was final, even when it was clear the majority of the staff held different views. One respondent remarked that “The [principal] always tells us what to do.” Principals in primary schools in Botswana are usually older and academically less qualified than the teachers they supervise (Republic of Botswana, 2003b). This is because education in Botswana does not have a long history, and the younger teachers attained their education at a stage when the standard of education in the country had improved, both in terms of opportunities and facilities. The older teachers who now dominate the leadership of primary schools rose to these positions mainly through classroom teaching experience. In situations where the leader is less educated than his subordinates, the micro-politics of schooling usually come into play. The more knowledgeable and/or skilled staff (the teachers) and the principals who command legitimate positions of power, are involved in a power struggle with each other. Principals can use their position of power to coerce teachers into compliance, while teachers, on the other hand, can influence decisions from their positions as experts. Usually, however, the principal’s power tends to prevail over the influence of expertise, in a typically autocratic fashion. This argument may explain why some principals (albeit only a few) practice autocratic leadership, as reported by 17% of the respondents, and why principals may feel threatened by their well-qualified teaching staff. The continuation of the existing qualification upgrading programme for both teachers and principals can go a long way in addressing this problem. Through this programme, teachers and principals are released from school for a period of time to study educational management.

(b) Management is not for teachers

Some teachers do not consider management as their responsibility, with the result that they will for instance send learners to the principal for offences committed in their classrooms. Typical views of teachers which express their reluctant involvement in management are:

“Teachers have more than enough in classroom teaching alone ...”

“School management is not in the teacher’s job description in-as-much as the [principal’s] job description excludes teaching.”

“Asking teachers to be involved in school management is asking too much from people who are already overloaded.”

Thus, in the view of a few teachers, management, or any issue of management for that matter, is the principal’s responsibility. They argue that they had been appointed for teaching and not for management. This is the perspective of a sizeable number (17%) of respondents in response to the question why some principals were more inclined to autocratic leadership. It also corroborates Weiss and Cambone’s (1994) conclusions on teachers who dissociate themselves from school management roles. However, such a perception by teachers towards management amounts to self-deprivation of an opportunity to exercise their democratic rights in education. When circumstances suit them, these teachers will then often blame the principals for not involving them in school decisions. This attitude by teachers towards management tempts principals to exclude them from decision-making processes and may create a false image of principals as villains. Principals do not generally expect teachers to run schools for them. The message of democratic participation is that teachers should be aware of what is happening and why things happen the way they do in the school, and that they should get involved in the management of the school. In the view of Sergiovanni and Starratt (2002) and Hanson (2003), this does not amount to an abdication of responsibility on the part of principals but rather to the empowerment of teachers to influence the decisions they implement; that is, for the teachers to be “at cause” rather than to be “at effect”.

(c) Cultural influence

36% of the respondents (4 of 11) who held that principals practiced autocracy ascribed this type of leadership to the once strongly held tradition or cultural belief among both young and older people that the leader’s words cannot be challenged. This tradition still prevails in a number of African cultures. Handy (1993) describes this as a “large power distance”. In the African tradition, democracy in its context of freedom of personal viewpoint does not impact on everyday life. In the Botswana tradition, for example, children could not question the factual correctness of a statement or an instruction by an adult. To do so was considered ill-mannered. This tradition could have influenced the few principals who still adopt an autocratic leadership style towards younger teachers. Autocratic management practices can be hard to dispense with, particularly if these managers were themselves subjected to autocracy as students or classroom teachers, which is very likely in this context. Some principals continue to practice autocratic management despite modern influences that are fast changing the culture of submission to adults. Such managerial practices are at odds with the Botswana traditional slogan of *ntwa kgolo ke ya molomo*, which embodies the power of dialogue as a means of resolving conflicts and solving problems as opposed to physical confrontation. The definition of

democracy by Hornby (2000) and Armstrong (2003) corresponds with the *ntwa e kgolo ke ya molomo* slogan. This slogan remains one of the strong principles upon which Botswana’s modern democracy is based. The population of Botswana is widely consulted and involved in important national issues that have a direct bearing on their lives. Regular national elections and other referenda are testimony to this. The establishment in the recent past of a Presidential Commission to widely consult on the location of a second university is another case in point.

Educational qualification of principals vis-à-vis their leadership style

Table 2 Educational qualification of principals

Degree	Diploma	Certificate	All respondents
7	31	26	64

Table 2 suggests that the majority of the respondents (89%, or fifty seven) worked with primary school principals who had either a diploma or a certificate as an educational qualification. Only seven (11%) of the respondents indicated that their principals had a degree qualification. This observation is consistent with the data from the 2003 Educational Statistics (Republic of Botswana, 2003b) which found that most teachers, including principals, have received training only up to diploma or certificate level. If the majority of the principals practice democratic management (see Table1) and if they do not hold a degree (see Table 2), the educational qualification therefore has no influence on how schools are run.

School management is similar to management in any other organisation, and Africa has had leaders who ruled their countries by decree, despite their high levels of education. Management style, as argued above, is also determined by the individual manager’s inheritance and upbringing. Children who were brought up in environments characterised by love, care and a sharing of ideas and material are more likely to behave in that manner towards others when they grow up. Conversely, people who grew up in a hostile environment will tend to embrace hostility as a virtue and to practice it over others. It may be concluded that the level of academic qualification does not affect a principal’s management style but that the principal’s professional training in management does. At certificate and diploma levels and even at degree level, teacher training programmes focus on academic subjects: the outcomes of this investigation could have been different if the variable of professional training in management had been taken into account as well. Managers who are exposed to theories of management tend to be dynamic, versatile and efficient leaders.

The educational benefits of democratic leadership

A correlation was found between leadership that empowers teachers and school performance. The following responses were recorded to the question “What benefits can be derived from participative democracy in schools?”

“Teachers get a sense of ownership of the school and work hard if they feel they are sufficiently involved in the decision-making process of the school.”

“Teachers give of their best in a collaborative and supportive work environment.”

A similar correlation has been noted by Luther (1996), whereas Scott and Jaffe (1991) argued that if teachers are genuinely involved in school decisions, they gain confidence, feel empowered and become competent. Teacher competence, a product of shared individual and/or group talent and experience, can in turn translate into improved students' and school performances. Democratic management also has the effect of reducing stress for managers who distribute the workload among members (Carnall, 1999). Not only can democratic school management practices improve performances and reduce workloads, but one respondent pointed that they can also "offer a pool of future democrats from the students". In this regard, Haber and Davies (2001) also stress that schools must of necessity perpetrate what governments practice at the macro-political level; in the context of Botswana that would be democracy.

In Botswana, both students and teachers are infected or affected by HIV/Aids. This therefore calls for schools to assume more responsibility and come up with programmes and strategies that can address the problem. This can be possible only if there is a culture of collaboration between teachers and principals. The presence of such a culture in a school has the potential for capacity building and support for students and teachers infected and affected by the disease. Democratic school management could therefore play an important role in as far as support and care for HIV/Aids victims in schools are concerned.

Conclusion

The study concluded that most primary school principals practice participative democracy with regard to their teachers despite their lower level of qualification. This was influenced in part by the school improvement initiatives introduced at the schools, notably the school development plan, and by implication also the political structure that is supportive of democracy. The performance improvement initiatives and the school development plan in particular, emphasise and encourage democratic working relationships and a shared vision or common purpose among all members in the school setup. Though a small minority of the respondents reported that principals do not practice democracy in their interaction with teachers, this remains an issue of concern and must be addressed. The few respondents who held this view did not attribute the behaviour of the principals solely to the individuals who practiced it, but rather saw such behaviour as being partly influenced by cultural practices and beliefs concerning leadership positions. Older people in power do not allow others, especially younger people, to challenge their decisions. The general belief that management is for the managers and that the teacher's job is in the classroom can also constrain deliberative democratic practices in schools. Principals who have been described as being autocratic in the management of their schools have perhaps exploited these customs and used their position to their own advantage, even when circumstances called for a dialogue. The study concludes that a democratic leadership style in schools can benefit students and teachers, as it can offer opportunity for professional growth to the teachers; furthermore, the performance of the school can improve if school managers and teachers are jointly responsible for decisions which affect the school. Pedler *et al.* (2001) and Owens (2004) argue that although democracy is not a perfect system (none is), at least it can engender positive attitudes in workers that can enhance their productivity. There is a correlation between democratic practices in organisations and high performance

(Sergiovanni & Starratt, 2002:5 and Scott & Jaffe, 1991:17). The same is true of schools that engage teachers in participatory democracy. Therefore, the findings of this study are not only important as another source of new knowledge to school practitioners and others, but also because principals who have not been performing well can appreciate the educational spin-offs of investing in deliberative or participatory democracy in schools and reflect upon their leadership styles.

Suggestions for further research

While this study offered an account of how primary schools in Botswana are managed, the number of participants who responded to the leadership practices of the principals was too small to generalise the findings. Future researchers on the subject may consider using more diverse samples that involve many participants from the same school.

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