



Improving Quality Education in Rural South African Schools through Shared Leadership Style: A Case Study of Three Rural Secondary Schools

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ABSTRACT

This paper discussed how to improve the quality of education in rural schools in South Africa by advocating for the inclusion of community-based leaders (CBLs) such as traditional leaders, religious leaders and business leaders in school affairs by principals. The study was premised on the observation that principals lack the competencies and capabilities to share leadership with community-based leaders such as traditional, religious and business leaders. The exclusion of community-based leaders in crucial decision-making processes resulted in poor learner performance. The study was grounded on the assumption that sharing leadership expertise by principals would sustain quality learning and teaching culture in rural schools. The belief is that community-based leaders are the most respected people in their communities and therefore their voices can be heard when it comes to parent participation and combating social ills in schools. The study was conducted purposely in poor-performing rural schools whereby community-based leaders were excluded in school matters. A phenomenological study with an interpretive-constructivism paradigm was conducted to establish sustainable principals' shared leadership roles for quality education. Data collected through interviews in three schools were thematically analysed and it revealed that: Principals lack competent and capable leadership skills to include community-based leaders in school matters. Also, social ills prevail which affect learning and teaching negatively. Furthermore, community based-leaders were only invited when there was a crisis and once the crisis solved, their input was no longer needed. Thus, the authors recommended that the Department of Basic Education could spend more resources on training rural school principals about the importance of including community-based leaders in crucial decision-making processes to improve and sustain quality education in rural areas. The authors also recommend ZiCBLs Model for the improvement of quality education in rural areas.

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INTRODUCTION

This paper focuses on principals' shared leadership roles in sustaining quality education in poor-performing rural schools. It has been noted that 27 years after the promulgation of the South African Schools Act No 84 of 1996, some rural poor-performing schools still experience a challenge of principals who lack competent and capable leadership skills to include community-based leaders (CBLs) such as traditional, religious and business leaders in school matters. Research has detected that rural school principals who lack these proficiencies have a tendency to exclude CBLs in school affairs and the outcomes are learner indiscipline and low learner academic performance. Mbokazi in his study of the role of traditional leaders in Kwazulu-Natal rural schools found that traditional leaders were excluded in school matters and were only invited during school crises, once the crisis was over, their opinions were no longer tolerated.¹ This school leadership deficiency is an indication that indeed rural school principals in poor-performing schools lack the competencies and capabilities to share their leadership expertise with community-based leaders and this is affecting the quality of education. Using the shared leadership theory and invitational leadership theory, and a phenomenological case study research design with an interpretive-constructivism paradigm, research was conducted in 3 purposely selected poor-performing rural schools to ascertain the effects of principals solely making decisions. This paper proffers ways in which principals in rural schools in South Africa can consult other stakeholders to assist in making decisions that would holistically enhance education in these deprived areas. This is done by advocating the ZiCBLs Model which prefers the inclusion of other community stakeholders in crucial decision-making processes to improve the quality of education in rural areas.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Community-based leaders are one of the crucial community stakeholders that could play a major role in improving the academic performance of learners if they can be fully involved in school activities. This has been shown in a study conducted by Mbokazi in KwaZulu Natal Province which indicated that traditional leaders in particular have contributed meaningfully to improving learner performance in schools.² This study examined the role of traditional leaders in school governance. In one school he selected, there was a drastic decline in learner performance from 75% in 2009 to 32.36% in 2010 and a further decline to 29% in 2011 but with the intervention of traditional leaders, learner performance increased drastically to 88.32% in 2012. This is an indication that indeed community-based leaders had a major role to play in improving the good academic performance of learners in rural areas.

A plethora of researchers have further found out that the non-involvement of community-based leaders by school principals in rural areas has resulted in poor learner performance. In support of the above deficit, Mohapi and Netshitangani, and Gamede indicate that school governance in South Africa, particularly in poor-performing rural areas seems to experience a challenge of non-participation of community-based leaders in schools' crucial decision-making processes and the outcomes are poor learner academic performance.³ Ziduli et al and Oupa postulates that the South African education system struggles to produce desired quality results, especially in rural areas.⁴ For instance, Allie elaborates that poor learner performance in Grade 12 is a persisting problem in South African rural

¹ Sandile Sam Mbokazi, "The Role of Traditional Leaders in School Governance: Learning from Two Communities in KwaZulu-Natal." (2015).

² Mbokazi, "The Role of Traditional Leaders in School Governance: Learning from Two Communities in KwaZulu-Natal."

³ S.J Mohapi and T Netshitangani, "Views of Parent Governors' Roles and Responsibilities of Rural Schools in South Africa," *Cogent Social Sciences* 4, no. 1 (2018): 1537056; Vangeli Wiseman Gamede, "Constraints to Effective Governance by the Parent Component of the SGBs in Rural South Africa," *International Journal of Educational Sciences* 13, no. 2 (2016): 194–201.

⁴ Mlungiseleli Ziduli et al., "Leadership Styles of Secondary School Principals: South African Cases," *International Journal of Educational Sciences* 22, no. 1–3 (2018): 1–10; Setlhodi-Mohapi Itumeleng and Lebeloane Ldm Oupa, "The Role of School Management Teams in Underperforming Schools: A Matter of Values," *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences* 5, no. 3 (2014): 475.

schools.⁵ Ziduli et.al posit that “schools in poverty-stricken rural areas are struggling to acquire quality performance due to lack of principal’s proper leadership skills.”⁶ For this reason, the researchers advocate for the inclusion of community-based leaders (CBLs) in school matters to improve quality education in rural areas. The assumption is that these CBLs are the most respected, influential and trusted leaders in their communities, and therefore their inclusion in school affairs can make an outstanding positive difference. As they are respected influential leaders, they can ensure that parents attend school meetings in huge numbers, learners are supported and motivated, and that voluntarism of community members can build a positive school culture. In addition to the above positive outcomes, learner indiscipline can be eradicated. This means that if school principals can involve CBLs in school matters learners’ strikes, school vandalism and burnings, bullying, substance abuse and other social ills that transpire in schools can be eliminated. It can be said that the manifestation of these social ills in South African schools disrupts learning and teaching practices with negative outcomes characterized by low learner academic performance in schools affected.

Poor learner academic performance in rural areas can be caused by a number of factors such as principals’ poor leadership skills which are manifested by excluding community-based leaders (CBLs) in crucial decision-making processes, poor infrastructure, lack of fiscal and human resources, bad roads, high rate of illiteracy, low morale on the side of teachers and learners, learner pregnancy, violence and school burnings, teacher-burn out and substance abuse to mention but a few. Buka and Molepo observe that poor-performing schools in rural areas are engulfed with the prevalence of school violence, teacher burnout, drug abuse, teenage pregnancy, and crime.⁷

This paper records the exclusion of community-based leaders in school affairs by school principals as the source of the above social ills that result in poor quality education in schools. In the past, community-based leaders such as traditional leaders, religious leaders and business leaders were at the forefront when it came to building and ownership of rural schools. As a result of this, some schools in rural areas bear the name of the chief, especially in the research sites where data were collected. This indicates that community-based leaders played a crucial role as initiators of building rural schools by collecting money from their community members to build mud structures (*izindlu zodaka*). Ziduli states that “through fundraising strategies agreed upon during *imbizos* (community-gatherings) *izindlu zodaka* were built by all community members irrespective of whether a community member is a parent of a child or not.”⁸ Although the current democratic government is working very hard to ensure that mud structures are replaced by solid well planned current structures to enhance conducive conditions for teaching and learning practices, mud structures in bad condition still exist in some poverty-stricken rural areas.

The unscrupulous side of community-based leaders is also evident in many cases. They have often used their powers to exclude ordinary people including parents from participating in school matters as they nominate individuals of their choice.⁹ This indicates that their system of governance resembled that of the apartheid regime. After the democratic elections in 1994, South Africa became a democratic country. As a consequence of this, the South Africa Schools Act Number 84 of 1996 was established to ensure that all schools have a democratically elected School Governing structure with three components. Firstly, the parent component must outnumber other School Governing Body components by one member and must hold the chairpersonship of the school governing structure. Secondly, the teacher component represents teachers in school governance. Thirdly, the learner component represents the Council of Representative Learners in the governance of the school.

⁵ Fadilah Allie, “The Influence of School Principals’ Leadership Styles on the Effectiveness of Schools” (Cape Peninsula University of Technology, 2014).

⁶ Ziduli et al., “Leadership Styles of Secondary School Principals: South African Cases,” 1.

⁷ Andrea Mqondiso Buka and Jacob Maisha Molepo, “Principals’ Perspectives on Socio-Psychological Support to Learners in Primary Schools: Caring for Those in Need,” *Journal of Social Sciences* 42, no. 1–2 (2015): 45–50.

⁸ Mlungiseleli Ziduli, “Shared Leadership Perspectives in Rural Secondary Schools. A Case Study of One Education District,” 2019, 156.

⁹ Mbokazi, “The Role of Traditional Leaders in School Governance: Learning from Two Communities in KwaZulu-Natal.”

Seemingly, the difference between school governing structures of apartheid government and democratically elected government is that the latter allowed schools to elect people of their choice while the former allowed school managers to select leaders they prefer most. This indicates that School Governing Bodies are elected democratically under the current democratic dispensation instead of being selected by one individual as was done during the era of the apartheid government. The problem that is left unresolved is that the South African Schools Act 84 of 1996 does not allow community-based leaders and other community members to participate freely in school affairs unless they have been elected democratically as the parent guardians of the children in the school. The Authors of this paper postulate that the initiators of this Act may have perceived that the inclusion of community members (including community-based leaders) in school affairs who are not parents nor guardians of children might not be effective like parents or guardians of children. Regardless of the inclusion of parents and guardians through democratically elected SGB members and the exclusion of community-based leaders in school affairs, the school principal is the solely accountable person who is responsible for whatever is taking place in the school. Ghamrawi states that:

*Although the Department of Basic Education developed policies to encourage the delegation of power to other staff members within schools, as well as to the school community members, in practice, education authorities treat principals as the only accountable figures within the school system.*¹⁰

This notion discourages even the most open school principals from taking steps towards shared leadership in their schools. For this reason, many rural school principals seemed to be in a dilemma. The South African School Act number 84 of 1996 excludes community-based leaders in school affairs or school matters as that might lead to them being dominated and undermined by these leaders and that might lead to unnecessary conflict which can disrupt teaching and learning culture. It has been observed that despite the above Act and its implications, some school principals take the risk and use their leadership expertise to include community-based leaders in school affairs and their school results improved tremendously. Mashau, Kone and Mutshaeni perceived that inviting community-based leaders to participate in school matters results in the provision of quality education in rural areas.¹¹

As influential, trusted and respected leaders by all community members including parents, community-based leaders (tradition, religious and business leaders) have the power and ability to ensure that all social ills are eradicated in rural schools and that all parents contribute positively to the education of their children. Ntekane and Garcia and Thornton found in their studies that parental involvement in learning helps to improve student performance, reduce absenteeism, and restore parents' confidence in their children's education.¹²

Excluding community-based leaders in school affairs can lead to conflicts between schools and community members and that adversely affects learners' performance. According to Mbokazi, conflicts exist between community-based leaders and school principals across the globe.¹³ The general experience in the countries of the world is that there is an unhealthy relationship between schools and their communities, and this often leads to poor governance of schools, which ultimately creates a situation where schools fail to contribute towards human improvement and betterment in society.¹⁴

¹⁰ N. Ghamrwi, *A policy review of school leadership in the Arab states*, Faculty of education, (Lebanon: Lebanese University, 2015), 39.

¹¹ Takalani Samuel Mashau, Lufuno Reginald Kone, and Humbulani Nancy Mutshaeni, "Improving Participation in Quality Education in South Africa: Who Are the Stakeholders?," *International Journal of Educational Sciences* 7, no. 3 (2014): 559–67.

¹² A. Ntekane, *Parental Involvement in Education*. North West University: South Africa (2018). Retrieved on 27 October 2021, from <http://www.researchgate.net> ; Lily Eskelsen Garcia and Otha Thornton, "The Enduring Importance of Parental Involvement," *NEA Today*, 2014.

¹³ Mbokazi, "The Role of Traditional Leaders in School Governance: Learning from Two Communities in KwaZulu-Natal," 59.

¹⁴ Mbokazi, "The Role of Traditional Leaders in School Governance: Learning from Two Communities in KwaZulu-Natal."

Makibi adds that conflict has been observed as a major problem in educational organizations and it decreases the performance of learners in schools.¹⁵

Seemingly, community-based leaders (traditional, religious and business leaders) are the most respected, trusted and influential in their communities, therefore, their inclusion in school matters can instigate parents' participation in the education of their children. Ziduli speculates that community-based leaders' voices can be heard and trusted by parents and may cause full participation of parents in the education of their children.¹⁶ Some researchers have found that parents' participation in school matters has positive outcomes when it comes to learners' performance.¹⁷ Researchers such as Ntekane and Garcia and Thornton indicate that the inclusion of community-based leaders in school matters can result in high-quality education in rural areas.¹⁸ Mashau, Kone and Mtshaeni posit that opening up opportunities for community-based leaders to participate in school affairs could result in the provision of quality education, especially in rural areas.¹⁹ Ziduli concurs that the inclusion of community-based leaders in school matters can instill good learning and teaching culture in rural schools.²⁰ Various researchers have documented that successful school leadership that includes community leaders in crucial decision-making is a catalyst for improved student achievement and wellbeing.²¹ These authors conclude that the inclusion of community-based leaders in education improves learner academic achievement.

This indeed indicates that the involvement of community-based leaders in school affairs can directly improve quality learner performance, especially in poverty-stricken rural areas where the performance of learners is always low. The inclusion of community-based leaders in school matters can make them feel honoured and respected, and for this reason, they can work hard to give the necessary support to schools. When community-based leaders feel that their ideas and opinions are considered and are given the opportunity to participate fully in the planning process, they can work hard for the achievement of high-quality education.²²

Maphoke postulates that school leaders that have close relations with community-based leaders experience fewer problems related to discipline and the misbehavior of learners.²³ Mashau, Kane and

¹⁵ M.A. Makibi, *The nature of teacher conflict and conflict management in sixteen selected primary schools in Lesotho*, (Dissertation, University of KwaZulu-Natal: RSA, 2010).

¹⁶ Ziduli, "Shared Leadership Perspectives in Rural Secondary Schools.."

¹⁷ I. Ahmad, H.B.Said, Role of school principals in promotion of school home relationship: Case of government secondary schools Khyber Parkishtukhwa, Pakistan. *International Journal on New Trends in Education and Their Implications*, 4(1), (2013):115-124.; Steven B Sheldon and Joyce L Epstein, "Getting Students to School: Using Family and Community Involvement to Reduce Chronic Absenteeism.," *School Community Journal* 14, no. 2 (2004): 39–56.

¹⁸ García and Thornton, "The Enduring Importance of Parental Involvement"; A. Ntekane, *Parental Involvement in Education*.

¹⁹ Mashau, Kone, and Mutshaeni, "Improving Participation in Quality Education in South Africa: Who Are the Stakeholders?"

²⁰ Ziduli, "Shared Leadership Perspectives in Rural Secondary Schools.."

²¹ Lucy Sibanda, "Understanding Distributed Leadership in South African Schools: Challenges and Prospects," *Issues in Educational Research* 27, no. 3 (2017): 567–81; James Sebastian and Elaine Allensworth, "The Influence of Principal Leadership on Classroom Instruction and Student Learning: A Study of Mediated Pathways to Learning," *Educational Administration Quarterly* 48, no. 4 (2012): 626–63; Christopher Day, Pam Sammons, and Ken Leithwood, *Successful School Leadership: Linking with Learning and Achievement: Linking with Learning* (McGraw-Hill Education (UK), 2011); Karen Seashore Louis, Beverly Dretzke, and Kyla Wahlstrom, "How Does Leadership Affect Student Achievement? Results from a National US Survey," *School Effectiveness and School Improvement* 21, no. 3 (2010): 315–36; Sheldon and Epstein, "Getting Students to School: Using Family and Community Involvement to Reduce Chronic Absenteeism." Sebastian and Allensworth, "The Influence of Principal Leadership on Classroom Instruction and Student Learning: A Study of Mediated Pathways to Learning." Ronald H Heck and Philip Hallinger, "Assessing the Contribution of Distributed Leadership to School Improvement and Growth in Math Achievement," *American Educational Research Journal* 46, no. 3 (2009): 659–89.

²² Glossary of Education Reforms, *The glossary of Education Reforms for Journalists, Parents, and Community members*. Portland: Great School Partnerships (2014).

²³ Ben Maphoke Masha, "The Role of School Management Teams and Parents in Learner Achievement" (University of Pretoria, 2017).

Mutshaeni argue that community-based leaders should be involved and be allowed to participate actively in the provision of quality education.²⁴ This indicates that quality learning and teaching culture in rural schools can be instilled by involving community-based leaders in school affairs by the principals. DuFour and Mattos state that a principal's positive relationship with community-based leaders can foster and maintain growth and improvement.²⁵ Ice, Thapha and Cohen also add that engaging community-based leaders in school matters provide an essential foundation for successful school improvement efforts.²⁶ They anticipate that community-based leaders are the most influential and respected leaders in their communities and therefore, their inclusion in school affairs can play a crucial role in ensuring discipline and order, especially for learners. Ziduli argues that community-based leaders can play a crucial role in instilling discipline and order to ensure quality learning and teaching as expected by the Department of Basic Education if they can be involved in crucial decision-making processes by the school leaders.²⁷ This indicates that if community-based leaders can be allowed by school principals to participate in school affairs, they can shield schools from any social ills that may come to disrupt learning and teaching practices and in this manner, discipline can be instilled. The assumption is that discipline and order can establish conducive learning and teaching environment whereby school principals and staff members can find enough time to dedicate themselves to school work. It is under this positive school climate that learning and teaching can result in sustainable high-quality education in rural secondary schools.

Mashau, Kone and Mutshaeni have observed that the exclusion of community-based leaders from school crucial decision-making processes gives rise to their passiveness, lack of ownership, criticism, conflicts, resistance and even organized opposition by some of them.²⁸ This act has resulted in their decision to withdraw from school activities as they are no longer invited. Their withdrawal from school affairs could have resulted in poor parent meetings attendance and the presence of social ills in most rural schools which definitely lowered school performance in the schools affected.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study was underpinned by two theories namely the shared leadership and invitational leadership theories. Shared leadership theory was developed by Pearce and Conger in 2003. These authors define shared leadership theory as a dynamic, interactive influence and processes among individuals in groups for which the objective is to lead one another to the achievement of group or organizational goals or both. This indicates that principals as school leaders should consider and involve other leaders in the community to attain school goals. The assumption is that if school leaders could recognise community leaders in their attempts to improve the quality of education in rural areas high quality education can be achieved. This means that as an accountable and dominant leader, a school principal must display compatible leadership skills to ensure that their dynamic and interactive influences go beyond school premises to include community-based leaders. In this manner, principals could interact with community-based leaders who are outside the school premises in request of community resources that can have a positive contribution to improving the quality of education.

The second crucial theory underlying this study is the invitational leadership theory which was premeditated by Purkey and Siegel in 2002. These authors state that leaders are intentional in their work. This suggests that rural school principals should intentionally invite community-based leaders to participate in school affairs if indeed they wish to improve quality education in rural areas.

Authors advocate ZiCBLs Model that can also be practiced by school leaders to improve quality education in rural areas. This theory insists that community-based leaders such as traditional,

²⁴ Mashau, Kone, and Mutshaeni, "Improving Participation in Quality Education in South Africa: Who Are the Stakeholders?"

²⁵ Richard DuFour and Mike Mattos, "Improve Schools," *Educational Leadership* 70, no. 7 (2013): 34–39.

²⁶ Megan Ice, Amrit Thapa, and Jonathan Cohen, "Recognizing Community Voice and a Youth-Led School-Community Partnership in the School Climate Improvement Process.," *School Community Journal* 25, no. 1 (2015): 9–28.

²⁷ Ziduli, "Shared Leadership Perspectives in Rural Secondary Schools. A Case Study of One Education District."

²⁸ Mashau, Kone, and Mutshaeni, "Improving Participation in Quality Education in South Africa: Who Are the Stakeholders?"

religious and business leaders can play a major role in improving the quality of education in rural areas as they are the most respected and influential leaders in their communities. The belief is that as respected and influential leaders these leaders can influence parents to attend meetings in their great majority and can also play a major role in learner discipline. Authors believe that both learner discipline and parents' participation in the education of children can bring acceptable quality results, especially in rural areas.

METHODOLOGY

A phenomenological case study research design with an interpretive-constructivism paradigm was conducted in 3 purposely selected poor-performing rural schools. For purposes of anonymity, pseudo-names were given to participants. The schools visited were identified as School A, School B, and School C. The participants were categorized as School Governing Body parent (SGBp), School Governing Body teacher (SGBt), School Governing Body learner (SGBl), School Management Team (SMT), School Teacher Union Leader (STUL), Local Traditional Leader (LTL) Local Religious Leader (LRL), and a Local Business Leader (LBL).

Interview schedules were designed and used to collect data from 8 categories of participants from both internal and external school stakeholders. The study population was drawn from internal and external school stakeholders of the 3 selected schools. For internal school stakeholder leaders, the following participants from each school were interviewed, 3 SGB components (SGBp, SGBt, and SGBl) 1 SMT (principal), and 1 STUL (SADTU and NAPTOSA) were chosen. For external stakeholder leaders, the following participants per school were purposely selected; 1 LTL, 1 LRL and 1 LBL which gave a total of 27 expected participants. Unfortunately, 1 local business leader refused to participate and that reduced the number of participants to 26.

Key informant face-to-face in-depth individual interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner which allowed for more flexibility between the researchers and participants. An interview schedule was used to collect data which was first tested during the pilot study to test its reliability. Minor mistakes found were corrected and the same interview schedule was used for the second time during data collection. That was done to ensure the reliability of the data collection instrument (interview guide). Data collected through interviews were thematically analyzed and research findings were reported in a proficient and responsible way.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings and discussion can be regarded as the most crucial component of a research study and as such, they should be presented explicitly before they are discussed as themes. Data collected through interviews in 3 purposely selected rural poor-performing schools were thematically analyzed and revealed that: community-based leaders (traditional, religious and business leaders) were excluded in school matters by the principal and that had resulted in learner indiscipline and poor academic performance; conflicts between principals and community-based leader led to ineffective learning and teaching practices; non-invitation of community-based leaders in school matters resulted to their passiveness. The above three research findings indicate that indeed the failure of school principals to include community-based leaders in school affairs has led to poor learner performance. The above findings have been developed and discussed as themes in the subsequent sections.

Exclusion of Community-Based Leaders in School Matters

Almost all participants in three selected research sites indicated that principals excluded community-based leaders in school affairs. Side-lining these community-based leaders in school matters indicates that school principals lack the necessary leadership skills to include them (community-based leaders) in school activities. This has resulted in undesirable learner academic performance due to undisciplined learners, high rate of teacher and learner absenteeism, substance abuse and other social ills that emanate from schools. Buka and Molepo speculate that poor-performing rural schools are engulfed with the

prevalence of school violence, teacher burn-out, drug abuse, teenage pregnancy and crime.²⁹ For this reason, a school STUL participant in School C had the following response:

I think it could be historical where schools are seen as institutions that are out there which cannot attract people from outside. Lack of sharing leadership with community-based leaders by principals has led to disaster in terms of learner academic performance due to the lack of learner discipline in many rural schools. I think the time has arrived for us to involve community leaders in our schools.

Another SMT (principal) member in school A claimed that:

Sometimes we sit down in a certain meeting and crucial decisions are taken, yet community leaders are not represented. We find that they don't own those decisions and as a result of that, they decide not to participate in school activities and that has adversely affected learning and teaching practices.

Another LTL participant in school B complained that:

The school must not belong to the school principal only. This is our school, not his.

This is an indication that community-based leaders were not willing to participate in school matters. It can be said that the participation of community-based leaders might help to reduce crime in schools and may result in school improvement.

Conflicts between School Principals and Community-based Leaders

The study revealed that serious conflicts persisted between rural school principals and community-based leaders in the schools selected. These conflicts negatively affected school progress and learner academic performance. An SGB participant in School A confessed that:

The conflict between our principal and our traditional leaders is long overdue. It needs special attention and a mediator from the office of the Department of Basic Education because; it affects all to the extent that learner performance is decreasing.

The responses show that if the Department of Basic Education desires quality results in rural schools, it must intervene by ensuring that principals are provided with leadership skills that will equip them to share leadership skills with community-based leaders who will assist them to do away with social ills and learner in-discipline. Conflicts between school principals and community-based leaders are an international problem as has been stated earlier. Mbokazi has stated that the general experience in the countries of the world is that there is an unhealthy relationship between schools and their communities, this often leads to poor governance of schools, which ultimately creates a situation where schools fail to contribute towards human improvement and betterment in society.³⁰ Makibi adds that conflict has been observed as a major problem in educational organizations and it decreases the performance of learners in schools.³¹

Study outcomes indicated that almost all principals of the selected schools for the study were in conflict with community-based leaders. According to most participants, the conflict started to emanate when principals were not willing to include community-based leaders in school matters. In a school visited during data collection, one participant put it clear that the school principal and community-based leaders were not on good terms. One SGBt participant in School A had the following to say:

²⁹ Buka and Molepo, "Principals' Perspectives on Socio-Psychological Support to Learners in Primary Schools: Caring for Those in Need."

³⁰ Mbokazi, "The Role of Traditional Leaders in School Governance: Learning from Two Communities in KwaZulu-Natal," 59.

³¹ Marabele Alphoncina Makibi, "The Nature of Teacher Conflict and Conflict Management in Sixteen Selected Primary Schools in Lesotho." (2010).

Community-based leaders are always in conflict with the principal. For this reason, these leaders do not voluntarily visit the school unless they are called. They do not know what is happening inside the school. They only come during parents' meetings to cause havoc by shouting at the principal publicly.

One SGBp in School B had the following response:

Our local traditional leader is always in battle with the school principal because he does not call him when crucial decisions are taken in this school.

LTL participant in school A concurred:

What I can say is that sometimes there is a lack of cooperation between the principal and me to the extent that different views lead to matters being left unresolved.

The above responses of the participants clearly show that school principals in the selected schools for the study lack the necessary leadership skills to involve community-based leaders in school affairs. This deficiency has led to unnecessary conflicts between community-based leaders and principals. The tensions mostly manifest during parents' meetings. Mashau et al. observed that conflict between school principals and community-based leaders gives rise to conflicts, resistance, and even organized opposition by some community-based leaders.³² Authors anticipate that these community-based leaders sometimes regard schools as government properties that should be burned when government fails to deliver services to the community. Ziduli postulates that some community members regard schools as the nearest government property that can be used to fight for their rights and quick service delivery.³³

Non- invitation of Community-based Leaders and their Passiveness

The failure of school principals to involve community-based leaders in school affairs leads to their passiveness in school activities. LTL participants indicated that:

The principal involves me only when there is a crisis in the school once the crisis is over he does not invite me. This action leads me as a community leader to become passive in anything related to this school. I want to be involved right from the onset of the discussions.

Another participant showed his passiveness by not bothering himself about what was happening in the school. He has noticed that the school principal invites him only when learners are on strike. A participant from LTL in school B indicated that:

Principals invite once there is a crisis, once the crisis is over, we are no longer invited.

These views confirm that of Mbokazi, who found in his study that *linkosi* (chiefs) were still concerned that schools were not as open as they should be with regard to communicating with community-based leaders.³⁴ This goes to the extent that principals are reluctant to invite community-based leaders to school affairs. Mashau et. al also posit that the non-invitation of community-based leaders in school affairs gives rise to passiveness, criticism and lack of ownership.³⁵ For this reason, they are reluctant to protect their schools from any form of school vandalism and burning as they regard them (schools) as government properties that can be burned to grasp government attention when communities fight for service delivery services. A participant from LTL in School C confessed that:

³² Mashau, Kone, and Mutshaeni, "Improving Participation in Quality Education in South Africa: Who Are the Stakeholders?"

³³ Ziduli, "Shared Leadership Perspectives in Rural Secondary Schools. A Case Study of One Education District."

³⁴ Mbokazi, "The Role of Traditional Leaders in School Governance: Learning from Two Communities in KwaZulu-Natal."

³⁵ Mashau, Kone, and Mutshaeni, "Improving Participation in Quality Education in South Africa: Who Are the Stakeholders?"

I have proof that the principal does not want to invite me to school activities, and because of that, I have decided to keep quiet, since, I do not want to disturb them, but I feel very hurt”.

Most participants indicated that community-based leaders are willing to participate but they can only participate if they can be involved from the initial stages of planning. One LTL in School C complained that:

I want to be involved right from the onset of the discussions.

Another LTL in School C complained that:

The principal involves me only when there is a crisis in the school once the crisis is over he does not invite me.

The response of these participants concurs with Mbokazi who found that school leaders involved community-based leaders only when they seek help.³⁶ This implies that school leaders need community-based leaders only when there is a problem is over, they tend to forget them which should not be so.

The outcomes of the study further showed that principals side-lined some of the community-based leaders, especially those whom they believe are illiterate. They believe illiterate people cannot contribute positively to school matters. An LTL participant in school C protested that:

I am regarded as illiterate, and for this reason, the principal looks down upon me. He does not inform or invite me to school meetings.

Mestry and Khumalo refute this assumption by stating that despite the problems of illiteracy, lack of confidence, and associated lack of knowledge of legislation by community leaders, some principals try their best to include them in decision-making processes.³⁷ These principals try by all means to ensure that community-based leaders feel important in their schools. A STUL participant in school C had the following to say:

The Principal has no choice but should make community-based leaders feel important, because, it is the education of their children, it is about their kids, and there is nothing principals can do about them without the input of their parents.

This proves that even if some of the community-based leaders are illiterate their involvement in school in school affairs can make a great improvement in terms of learner discipline and academic achievement.

Research findings indicate that principals with effective leadership skills who include community-based leaders in school affairs perform better when they are compared with those who exclude these leaders in their leadership practices. Mbokazi found in his study on the role of traditional leaders in school governance.³⁸ In one school he selected, there was a drastic decline in learner performance from 75% in 2009 to 32.36% in 2010 and a further decline to 29% in 2011 but with the intervention of traditional leaders, learners' performance increased drastically to 88.32% in 2012.

Various researchers have acknowledged that effective school leadership that includes community-based leaders in school affairs is a catalyst for improved student achievement and wellbeing.³⁹ The following researchers have also proved that the inclusion of community-based leaders

³⁶ Mbokazi, "The Role of Traditional Leaders in School Governance: Learning from Two Communities in KwaZulu-Natal."

³⁷ Raj Mestry and Jan Khumalo, "Governing Bodies and Learner Discipline: Managing Rural Schools in South Africa through a Code of Conduct," *South African Journal of Education* 32, no. 1 (2012): 97–110.

³⁸ Mbokazi, "The Role of Traditional Leaders in School Governance: Learning from Two Communities in KwaZulu-Natal."

³⁹ Sibanda, "Understanding Distributed Leadership in South African Schools: Challenges and Prospects"; Sebastian and Allensworth, "The Influence of Principal Leadership on Classroom Instruction and Student Learning: A Study of Mediated Pathways to Learning"; Day, Sammons, and Leithwood, *Successful School Leadership: Linking with Learning and Achievement: Linking with Learning*; Seashore Louis, Dretzke, and Wahlstrom, "How Does Leadership Affect Student

in school affairs escalates learner academic achievement.⁴⁰ A study conducted by Mbokazi in KwaZulu-Natal Province indicated that traditional leaders have contributed meaningfully to improving learner performance in schools.⁴¹

The Impact of the Inclusion of Community-based Leaders in School Matters

The non-involvement of community-based leaders in school matters can result in poor quality education in rural areas. This challenge had manifested itself in the lack of discipline, precedence of crime, violence, bullying, drug abuse and burning of school properties.

It is assumed that these social ills need the attention of community-based leaders and has been predicted that the involvement of community-based leaders in school affairs could result in quality education in rural areas. The study outcomes indicate that the inclusion of community-based leaders in school matters could help to ensure stability, peace and discipline which could ultimately produce quality education in rural areas. One LTL participant in school A stated that:

Our involvement in school matters will help to ensure that there is safety and security in our school. We will do that by requesting community members and our local business leaders to donate money to pay security guards in our school.

The inclusion of trusted and respected community-based leaders in school affairs could play a crucial role in ensuring that school properties are not burned or vandalized. Maphoke postulates that school leaders that have close relations with community-based leaders experience fewer problems related to discipline and the misbehavior of learners.⁴² The involvement of community-based leaders in crucial decision-making processes can help to maintain discipline and order in schools. With regard to the above statement, the study revealed that inviting traditional leaders into schools will help to establish discipline which will lead to high-quality education. A participant from SMT in School B reported that:

Community-based leaders can play a major role in maintaining discipline in this school and that can help to improve quality teaching and learning.

A response from an SMT participant in school A indicated that:

Sharing leadership in schools can help to minimize conflicts because everybody will be allowed to participate actively.

The above responses from participants showed that community-based leaders can play a major role in maintaining discipline and order to create a conducive learning environment for high-quality education in schools. Ziduli (2019) declares that community-based leaders can play a crucial role in instilling discipline and order to ensure quality learning and teaching as expected by the Department of Basic Education (DBE) if they can be involved in crucial decision-making processes by the school leaders.⁴³ Dufour and Mattos state that a positive relationship with community-based leaders can foster and maintain growth and improvement.⁴⁴ Ice et. al also add that engaging community-based leaders in school matters provide an essential foundation for successful school improvement effort.⁴⁵ It is under

Achievement? Results from a National US Survey”; Steve Dinham, *How to Get Your School Moving and Improving: An Evidence-Based Approach* (Aust Council for Ed Research, 2008); UNESCO. Education for people and planet: Creating sustainable future for all. Paris: UNESCO Publishing. (2016).

⁴⁰ James H McMillan and Sally Schumacher, *Research in Education: Evidence-Based Inquiry* (Pearson, 2010); Sheldon and Epstein, “Getting Students to School: Using Family and Community Involvement to Reduce Chronic Absenteeism.”

⁴¹ Mbokazi, “The Role of Traditional Leaders in School Governance: Learning from Two Communities in KwaZulu-Natal.”

⁴² Masha, “The Role of School Management Teams and Parents in Learner Achievement.”

⁴³ Ziduli, “Shared Leadership Perspectives in Rural Secondary Schools. A Case Study of One Education District.” ;

⁴⁴ DuFour and Mattos, “Improve Schools.”

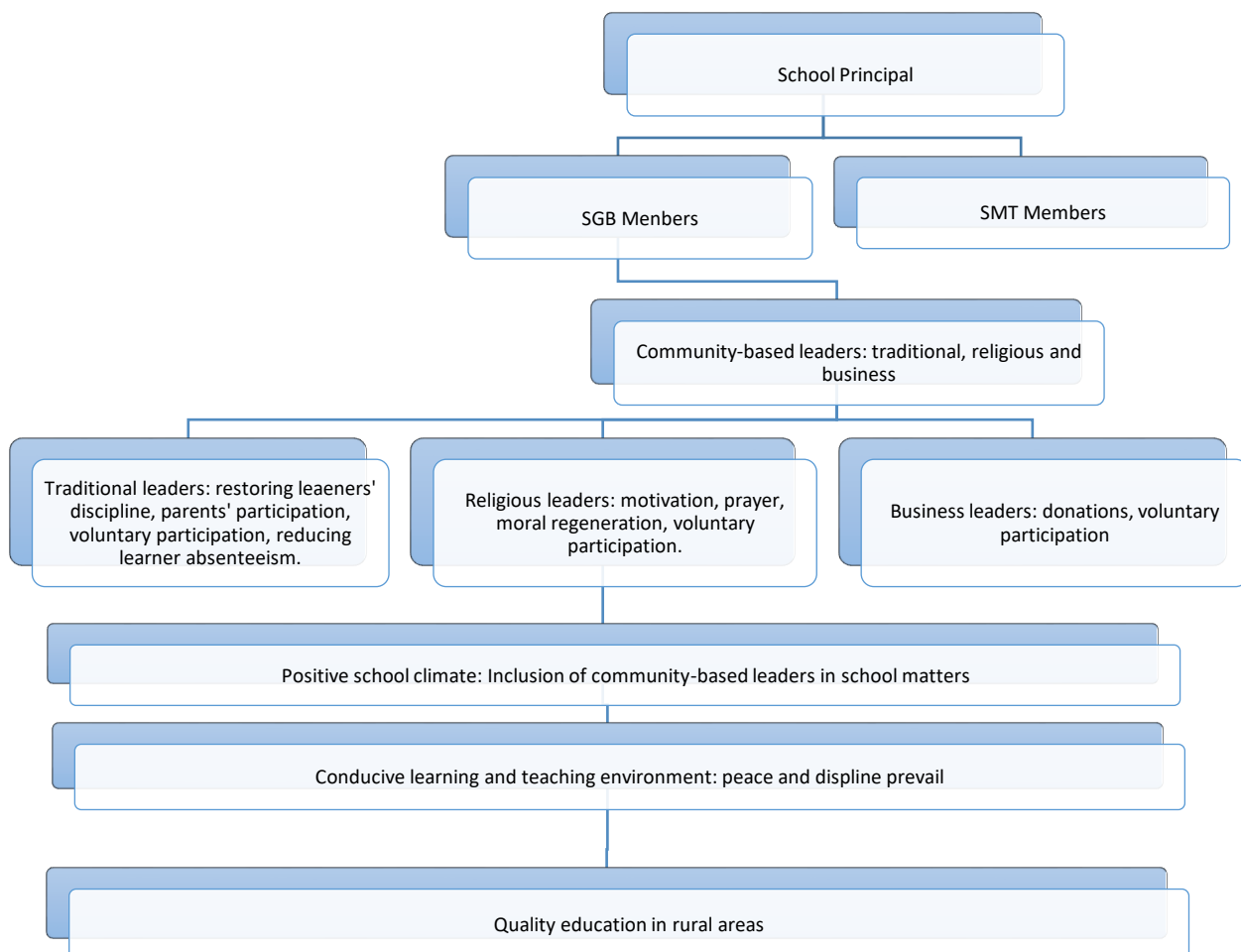
⁴⁵ Ice, Thapa, and Cohen, “Recognizing Community Voice and a Youth-Led School-Community Partnership in the School Climate Improvement Process.”

this peaceful, orderly and conducive learning and teaching environment that learner academic performance might be improved.

The ZiCBLs Model for Quality Education in Rural Areas

Ziduli’s Community-based Leaders Model, code-named ZiCBLs Model was proposed in the study. This model advocates that the inclusion of community-based leaders such as traditional, religious and business leaders by school principals in school matters could result in quality education in rural areas. This could be done through the invitation of these leaders by the school principal to perform various roles for the improvement of learners’ performance. For instance, various religious leaders can be involved in school matters by inviting them to come and address teachers and learners on issues of moral regeneration which could contribute positively to the maintenance of a moral and peaceful school climate. Various religious leaders should be also invited by school leaders to come to their schools to motivate and pray for school staff and learners. Local traditional leaders could play a major role in ensuring that learner discipline is maintained and social ills are eradicated and should also ensure that parents attend meetings in majority while local business leaders could assist by donations to ensure that school activities progress well. However, there are other roles that can be played by these community-based leaders if they can be involved during the initial and planning stages of school ceremonies, building projects, sports and other occasions that need financial contributions and voluntary workforce.

Figure 1: The ZiCBLs Model



The school principal is the only accountable leader in the school, as such, he or she is responsible for whatever is taking place in the school.⁴⁶ This is in accordance with the South African Schools Act No. 84 of 1996, which stipulates that the school principal is the only accounting officer in the school. The Act specifies that the school principal should work closely with two school formal structures namely, School Governing Body and School Management Team. The School Governing Body is responsible for the governance of the school while the School Management Team is responsible for the professional management of the school.

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The researchers, however, noticed that despite the presence of these two formal structures, schools in rural areas are not performing well. The reasons may be learner ill-discipline, lack of parent participation, community leaders and members do not voluntarily participate in the activities of the school, and there is a high rate of teacher and learner absenteeism. In addition, teachers and learners are demotivated, there is the ever presence of substance abuse and social ills which are caused by moral degeneration and local business leaders are reluctant to donate their money and other resources that might help to improve the quality education in rural areas. The researchers believe that if community-based leaders (as the most influential, respected and trusted leaders by their community members) can be involved in school matters by principals, the situation can change. Quality education can be attained as all the above causes of poor learner performance can be done away with. The lack of competent leadership skills of school principals which have led to the sidelining of community-based leaders in school matters in rural areas has been depicted by authors as one of the main reasons for poor quality education in rural areas. The authors recommend the Department of Basic Education should spend more resources and time in training rural school principals on competent capability leadership skills to include community-based leaders in school affairs to improve the quality education of education in rural areas.

CONCLUSION

The outcomes generated from the study indicated that the exclusion of community-based leaders in school affairs was a sign that indeed rural school principals lacked competent and capable leadership skills to include these leaders (community-based leaders) in school matters. The study outcomes further revealed that the exclusion of community-based leaders resulted in conflict that emanated between school principals and these leaders. As a result of these conflicts, community-based leaders have decided to become passive and only visit school activities. This has caused undesirable results such as learner indiscipline, less parental school support and fewer parents that attend meetings. The community-based leaders' exclusion in school affairs has resulted in school vandalism, social ills, school burnings, and a lack of discipline. Study findings and literature review indicated that the inclusion of community-based leaders in school matters by the school principal always results in learner discipline and quality education in rural areas. A model has been developed by the authors who indicate that there are crucial positive roles that can be played by community-based leaders such as traditional leaders, religious leaders and business leaders if they can be allowed by the principal to participate freely in school affairs.

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⁴⁶ Ziduli, "The Managerial Leadership Styles of School Principals for School Effectiveness: A Study of Six Secondary Schools of the Dutywa Education District."

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