



## Salvaging the Educational System through Effective Leadership: A Case Study of Rural Secondary Schools in South Africa

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### ABSTRACT

The South African education system is currently experiencing various challenges such as school violence, drug abuse, vandalism and burning of school properties. Educationists, administrators, policy custodians and leaders of institutions are in a dilemma regarding effective managerial leadership of their organizations. This article discussed appropriate measures that institutional leaders must develop to ensure an open space for other community leaders to actively participate in the running of institutions. The rationale behind this paper was to come up with solutions that would help school leaders to lead and manage schools effectively and efficiently. A phenomenological study was conducted with an interpretive-constructivism approach in schools to establish the capabilities and competencies of school principals regarding the incorporation of other community leaders in their schools. Data was collected through face-to-face in-depth individual interviews with the School Governing Bodies (SGB) chairpersons, SMT members, LRC representing learners in the SGB, community leaders, religious leaders, and business leaders. Data was thematically analyzed and it revealed that: Principals have failed to open up space for community leaders to participate in school matters; Education leaders lack the competencies and capacities to share leadership with other community leaders. The study thus advocates firstly, for school principals through SGBs to accommodate Community Resource Centres (CRCs). Secondly, highly esteemed leaders from various community stakeholders should be involved in prominent school decision-making processes and problem-solving practices. Thirdly, training workshops should be conducted to help school leaders develop necessary leadership skills and to map out strategies to effectively involve community leaders in school matters. Fourthly, the institutional leaders must organize training workshops for both school and community leaders on how to work collaboratively and peacefully for effective school management. This article adds to the existing literature on enhancing the South African Educational System.

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## INTRODUCTION

Social ills in rural secondary schools have contributed tremendously to poor quality education in South Africa. There is evidence which indicates that the South African education system indeed is in crisis. According to Modisaotsile, "In South Africa, many signs indicate that there are crises in the education system."<sup>1</sup> Ziduli et al. concur that schools in disadvantaged areas are engulfed with the prevalence of school violence, teacher burn-out, HIV/AIDS, drug abuse, teenage pregnancy and crime.<sup>2</sup> Angie Motshekga (the Minister of Basic Education in South Africa) disagrees with the above scholars and argues that the South African education system is not in a crunch, but rather, only the education of black children is in crisis.<sup>3</sup> She blames the unhealthy environment in schools on the lack of discipline and focus on the part of both teachers and learners. The authors, however, refute the above assertion and describe it as a political cover-up that shifts the blame to other sources instead of the government addressing the real issues.

The historically disadvantaged background of black schools which is encapsulated in poverty-stricken communities cannot be denied while the lack of resources and corruption have escalated the phenomenon. The authors perceive that principals and teachers are left alone to deal with intimidation, aggressive and violent behaviour of learners in classrooms and in schools, which impedes teaching and learning processes. Nevertheless, to a certain extent, some teachers indeed lack discipline and their conduct perpetrates violence in schools. It has also been said that the lack of involvement of other community stakeholders has led to the destabilised educational system being experienced in South Africa. The lack of effective leadership has also been mentioned in this discourse. Efforts must be increased and policies must be developed to ensure that both learners and teachers are well-equipped to ensure progressive education.

This paper, therefore, seeks to come up with solutions on how to restore quality education through the development of effective leadership in rural South African schools. It seeks to address the following questions: Do principals open up a space for leaders in communities to actively participate in education matters? Do principals in poor-performing schools display capacities and competencies to share leadership with other leaders in communities?

It is the view of the authors that positive answers to these questions would help to minimize, if not completely eradicate violence and vandalism in schools which disrupt teaching and learning and could result in poor academic performance of learners. The objectives of this paper, therefore, are the following: To open up a space for leaders in communities to actively participate in education matters; to make sure that principals have acquired capacities and competencies to share leadership with other leaders in communities. This paper aims to present possible ways to salvage rural schools from poor quality education with the involvement of community leaders. The authors are of the view that this could result in the eradication of violence and vandalism that mostly occur in disadvantaged schools. Using a qualitative research approach whereby face-to-face in-depth individual interviews, data was collected from various stakeholders for assessment and to proffer possible solutions to curb this menace in secondary schools in South Africa. The details of the research are presented in the subsequent sections.

## Violence in South African Education Institutions

The lack of resources in both higher education institutions and schools has led to an education crisis in South Africa. The lack of educational resources has been re-echoed during the 'FeesMustFall' protests of the students in higher education institutions all over South Africa (SA) since 2016. Students have embarked on demonstrations throughout the entire country with their 'FeesMustFall' protests and have in the process burnt some university properties. Some universities were therefore temporarily

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<sup>1</sup> Brenda M. Modisaotsile, *Policy brief: The Failing Standard of Basic Education in South Africa. Briefing Number 72*, (Pretoria: Africa Institute of South Africa, 2012).

<sup>2</sup> Mlungiseleli Ziduli et al. "Leadership Styles of Secondary School Principals:South African Cases." *International Journal of Education Sciences*, 22, no. 1-3 (2018), 1-10.

<sup>3</sup> Department of Basic Education, 2011.

closed as learners refused to write end-year examinations<sup>4</sup> Seemingly, these students were fighting for free education as promised in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act 108 of 1996.

South African school violence, vandalism and burning of schools have escalated to poor rural areas and seem to be out of hand. According to SABC News, violence and burning of schools in South Africa started in Limpopo Province, which involved over 30 schools that were burnt by Vuwani community members.<sup>5</sup> The community members protested against a decision to be included in a newly formed Malamulele Municipality. It seems that these protests were based on ethnic and cultural problems that were purely political issues and not related to education matters. However, schools were adversely affected.

This incident among others shows the low premium that community members place on education. The reason may be linked to the fact that school leaders do not involve them in school matters. For this reason, they do not own and protect their schools when crises arise. Consequently, some community members regard schools and educational institutions as the nearest government property that can be used to fight for their rights and make the authorities listen to them which should not be so.

The scourge further moved to the Eastern Cape Province where several schools were set ablaze. City Press reported that over 10 schools were either burned or vandalized by learners around Mthatha City in the Eastern Cape Province.<sup>6</sup> Seemingly, these learners were fighting for the shortage of educators, misrepresentation of an assessment instruction on modularization of subjects, mismanagement of funds, fighting against the application of corporal punishment which was abolished by the government, payment of fees in no-fee schools, educator-learner sexual relationships, and breaking of extra-mural activities' policies.<sup>7</sup> Seemingly, quality education in public schools in South Africa appears to be jeopardized as the escalation of disruption turns into violence and crime which stop teaching and learning activities. In light of the above, the leadership skills of policy implementers in creating and sustaining a good school climate for a quality teaching and learning culture come into question.

School violence in South Africa has become an escalating problem that disturbs teaching and learning practices. It has adverse and awful consequences for learners. The government of South Africa, like any other government across the globe, is working hard to achieve quality education for its learners. It is believed that quality education cannot be achieved if violent activities continue to persist in South African schools. To salvage effective leadership for quality education in schools, there is a need to consolidate leadership in a school community in addition to partnership or collaboration strategies.

Despite the presence of School Governing Bodies and School Management Teams, school violence still persists. In a study conducted by the Department of Basic Education in the Western Cape Province, data shows that incidences of violence, intimidation, illegal possession of drugs, inappropriate sexual behaviour, alcohol abuse and bodily injury to learners, verbal abuse and weapon possession were high in the schools sampled.<sup>8</sup> In this study, most teachers indicated that disruptive learners limited teaching and learning activities in schools. They stated "when a learner starts violence, he or she swears at a teacher and when the teacher reports the incident to the principal, the principal will also be sworn at."<sup>9</sup> This implies that there are no clear disciplinary measures in place that replace corporal punishment which has been constitutionally abolished in schools.

In its survey, the Department of Basic Education revealed that the greatest number of perpetrators of school violence were learners, followed by teachers at a small number.<sup>10</sup> The Western Cape Province had the highest cases of school violence of learners having been threatened, assaulted,

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<sup>4</sup> SABC News, 19 October, 2016.

<sup>5</sup> SABC News, 29 September, 2016.

<sup>6</sup> City Press, 08 May, 2016.

<sup>7</sup> Daily Dispatch, 03 May, 2016.

<sup>8</sup> Department of Basic Education, 2007.

<sup>9</sup> Department of Basic Education, 2013,1.

<sup>10</sup> Department of Basic Education, 2013.

robbed and sexually victimized mostly by teachers at school followed by Limpopo Province and Free State Province.<sup>11</sup> Another study conducted by the Department of Basic Education in 2015 indicated that most learners aged 7 to 18 in KwaZulu-Natal had endured violence, verbal abuse and corporal punishment at school than learners living in other provinces in the country. Learners in the Western Cape Province posited that “It was easy to bring weapons to schools” while KwaZulu-Natal learners declared that, “they had easy access to drugs and alcohol”.<sup>12</sup> Homophobic bullying is also highly prevalent in Western Cape schools.<sup>13</sup> Again, it has been reported that some schools in the Western Cape Province exacerbate the situation by selling liquor on school premises for fundraising purposes during school functions.<sup>14</sup>

When compared with learners from other countries, South African learners experience higher levels of violence in schools than in most other countries in the world. It comes second after Jamaica with the most incidents of violence and burning of school property.<sup>15</sup> In Kenya, it was reported that more than 120 high schools have been set ablaze since early June 2015.<sup>16</sup> The reasons for the violence and burning of schools in Kenya were ethnicity, politics and ineffective leadership of school leaders.<sup>17</sup> Comparatively, in South Africa, ethnicity and politics in the Limpopo Province (the Vuwani incident) and ineffective leadership practices of school leaders (in the Eastern Cape Province) have led to school burnings and vandalism.

The Department of Basic Education conducted two studies on violence caused by teachers against learners in 2008 and 2013.<sup>18</sup> The outcomes of these studies showed that 22 % of learners in the country were found to have been threatened with violence, assault, robbery or sexually abused by teachers. Almost, 100 learners were either sexually violated or raped by teachers in 2015/2016 which showed an increase of 18 learners as compared to 2014/2015 which recorded 82 learners victims.<sup>19</sup> There were perceptions that in most of these cases, parents did not defend their children in an attempt to hide information to favour the teachers. Such bad conduct by parents seemed to be caused by teacher bribery. In an attempt to save themselves, teachers tend to compensate those parents with money, and for this reason, most cases were withdrawn.<sup>20</sup> Under these appalling conditions, the question may be asked: can the principal through the SGB and School Management Team (SMT) manage or lead a school alone without any assistance from wider community members and its leaders?

The current situation in schools across South Africa indicates that school authorities are struggling to enforce appropriate and viable disciplinary measures that can be applied to discipline disruptive behaviours and this is hindering effective teaching and learning. Violence has thus become normal in some of the schools in South Africa. These incidents transpire in the presence of internal stakeholders such as SGBs and SMTs including policing system. The policing system in South Africa however, encourages community members to be part of community police forums. The South African Police Service (SAPS) struggles to receive proper information on perpetrators from the communities. Criminals seem to have an upper hand and prospective informers fear for their lives as the prosecution and law-enforcement practices seem to clash with each other. It appears that these stakeholders have failed to wipe out violence in education institutions in particular and in the community at large. The predicament faced by internal stakeholders (SMTs and SGBs) puts the educational system in South Africa in jeopardy.

### **Effective Leadership and School Development**

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<sup>11</sup> South African Council of Educators. *SA school violence shock. Seminar on violence at schools.* August 6, 2015. Durban, South Africa.

<sup>12</sup> South African Council of Educators. *SA school violence shock. Seminar on violence at schools.*

<sup>13</sup> South African Council of Educators. *SA school violence shock. Seminar on violence at schools.*

<sup>14</sup> SABC News, 19 October, 2016.

<sup>15</sup> South African Council of Educators. *SA school violence shock. Seminar on violence at schools.*

<sup>16</sup> Fox News, 30 July, 2016.

<sup>17</sup> Fox News, 30 July, 2016.

<sup>18</sup> Department of Basic Education, 2013.

<sup>19</sup> New Age Newspaper, 4 October, 2016.

<sup>20</sup> New Age Newspaper, 4 October, 2016.

Studies show that adequate training and professional development opportunities for school leaders in South Africa remain a challenge.<sup>21</sup> Sibanda argues that there is a gap between the talk of shared leadership and its reality in many schools.<sup>22</sup> Witten concurs that in South Africa, the broader community participation in school level decision-making takes on symbolic rather than authentic forms.<sup>23</sup> This implies that schools claim that they share leadership with community leaders but the reality is that they exclude them in crucial decision making. This kind of leadership practice shows that school principals lack leadership capabilities and competencies. Witten states most school leaders in rural display poor leadership and lack of competent and capability skills but in the majority of cases, this is not their fault because they themselves are poorly educated by the South African education system.<sup>24</sup>

Effective leadership starts at the top.<sup>25</sup> According to Amanchukwu, Stanley and Ololube, “no nation grows further than the quality of its educational leaders.”<sup>26</sup> This implies that the quality of leadership expertise of school principals determines the success or the failure of the school.<sup>27</sup> Despite the training workshops conducted by the Department of Basic Education on effective principals’ leadership to improve the quality of education, rural secondary schools are still producing poor quality education, especially in the Eastern Cape Province. Eastern Cape Province is one of the most remote rural provinces in South Africa which shows unsatisfactory matric results despite its steady improvement.<sup>28</sup> Authors assume that on top of the training workshops for school principals for improvement of the quality of education in rural areas, effective leadership in schools can be achieved if school principals can decide to include highly esteemed community leaders in prominent decision-making and problem-solving practices. Witten maintains that principals cannot solve all the challenges faced by their schools on their own but can only solve those problems by working collaboratively, tapping into the collective knowledge, skills and expertise of community leaders when they seek to address the issues at hand.<sup>29</sup> Kotter has this advice for principals who have the desire to make their schools effective:

*No one person, no matter how competent, is capable of singlehandedly developing the right vision, communicating it to vast numbers of people, eliminating all of the key obstacles, generating short term wins, leading and managing dozens of change projects and anchoring new approaches deep in an organization’s culture. Putting together, the right coalition of people to lead a change initiative is critical to its success.*<sup>30</sup>

This implies that an effective principal is one who displays competent and capable leadership expertise to include both staff personnel and community leaders in crucial decision-making and problem solving practices. Preston and Barns posit that effective school leaders nurture good interpersonal relationships among staff members, parents, students, and community stakeholder

<sup>21</sup> Allistair Witten, *Shifting paradigms: Changing Practice. Value-based instructional leadership in schools.* (SA; ACP Project Management and Publishing Services, 2017).

<sup>22</sup> Lucy Sibanda, “Understanding distributive leadership in South African schools: Challenges and prospects.” *Issues in Educational Research*, 27 no.3, (2017): 567 – 581.

<sup>23</sup> Witten, *Shifting paradigms: Changing Practice. Value-based instructional leadership in schools.*

<sup>24</sup> Witten, *Shifting paradigms: Changing Practice. Value-based instructional leadership in schools.*

<sup>25</sup> P. du Toit, Debeer and A. Antonites. “Leadership Development Programme for School Principals: experiential leadership training and skills development that ignites change in schools, classrooms and communities,” 2016. Retrieved on 17 January 2018. Available online from <http://www.up.ca.za>

<sup>26</sup> N.A. Amanchukwu, G.J. Stanley and N.P. Ololube, “A Review of Leadership Theories, Principles and Their Relevance to Educational Management.” *Scientific & Academic Publishing*, 5 no.1(2015): 6-14, 1.

<sup>27</sup> Mlungiseleli Ziduli, “The Managerial Leadership Styles of School Principals for School Effectiveness: A Case Study of Six Secondary School Principals,” (Walter Sisulu University: Mthatha M. Ed Dissertation, 2016).

<sup>28</sup> Ziduli et al. “Leadership Styles of Secondary School Principals:South African Cases.”

<sup>29</sup> Witten, *Shifting paradigms: Changing Practice. Value-based instructional leadership in schools.*

<sup>30</sup> John P. Kotter, *Organisational leadership. Faculty & Research*, (Harvard: Harvard Business School, 2010), 52.

leaders.<sup>31</sup> Jentz and Murphy have also indicated that successful principals build a trusting relationship with leaders of community stakeholders.<sup>32</sup> According to Smith and Riley, successful school leaders are motivated and motivating visionaries who are also skilled communicators that listen, reflect, learn and empower their staff.<sup>33</sup> Preston and Barnes make the point that successful rural school leadership is founded on the healthy establishment and maintenance of relationships with other leaders in schools and in the community.<sup>34</sup>

It has been advocated that effective principals should always seek to build good relationships with other leaders in the community. Sullivan et.al., contend that building trust, commitment and profitable relationships with stakeholders with community members are critical aspects of contextual leadership development. This helps school principals to improve teaching and learning activities in their institutions.<sup>35</sup> DuFour and Mattos found that good relationships with leaders of the community can foster and maintain school growth.<sup>36</sup> Principals foster strong relationships with community leaders when they allow community members to use school infrastructure. Barley and Beesley describe the vital role that the rural school and its principal played within one rural community by allowing access to the school building for weddings, craft shows, business meetings, and other social activities.<sup>37</sup> In this way, schools become community resource centres (CRCs). Rural schools also provide employment opportunities for local community members and a space for community volunteerism.<sup>38</sup> Ziduli in his study of shared leadership perspective for high quality education in rural secondary schools found that community members were employed by the SGB members to erect a fence, cook for learners, clean the school environment, and work as security guards to ensure safety and security in schools. As a consequence of this, there is no way that the community members can burn and vandalise schools when they seek delivery services from the government because they will regard them as their property instead of regarding them as government property.<sup>39</sup>

Principals need to be seen as active community members.<sup>40</sup> In a research conducted by Morrow involving seven rural school principals in British Columbia, results showed that rural principals need to be both school leaders and active community citizens.<sup>41</sup> Effective principals in rural areas are characterized by the strong relationship between them and the communities they serve. Johnston, et.al., maintain that effective schools in rural areas are characterized by a strong partnership among school staff, families, youth, and community members to raise student achievement by ensuring that children are physically, emotionally, and socially prepared to learn. They found that in effective rural schools, community leaders work collaboratively with school leaders in designing and planning school progress according to its strengths and needs.<sup>42</sup> Pashiardis, et.al., in their study, found that a certain principal

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<sup>31</sup> Jane Preston and Kristopher Barnes, "Successful Leadership in Rural Schools: Cultivating Collaboration." *The Rural Educator*. 38(2018), 10.35608/ruraled.v38i1.231.

<sup>32</sup> Barry Jentz and Jerome Murphy, "Starting confused: How leaders start when they don't know where to start." *Phi Delta Kappan*, 91 no.1, (2005): 56–60.

<sup>33</sup> Larry Smith and Dan Riley, "School leadership in times of crisis." *School Leadership & Management*, 32 no.1 (2012): 57-71.

<sup>34</sup> Preston and Barnes, "Successful Leadership in Rural Schools: Cultivating Collaboration."

<sup>35</sup> P. Sullivan, et.al., *School Leadership Development Framework for the Gauteng Department of Education*. (Gauteng; Matthew Goniwe School of Leadership and Governance, 2013).

<sup>36</sup> R. DuFour and M. Mattos, "Improve Schools." *Educational Leadership*, 70 no.7, (2013): 34-39.

<sup>37</sup> Z.A. Barley and A.D. Beesley, "Rural school success. What can we learn?" *Journal of Research in Rural Education*, 22 no.1, (2007): 1–16.

<sup>38</sup> Barley and Beesley, "Rural school success. What can we learn?"

<sup>39</sup> M. Ziduli, *Shared Leadership Perspectives in Rural Secondary Schools: A Case Study of One South African Education District*, (D. Ed Thesis). Walter Sisulu University: Mthatha, 2019.

<sup>40</sup> Department of Education (South Africa Pretoria: Government Printers, 2007).

<sup>41</sup> J. Morrow, *Through the lens of the rural lifeworld: A phenomenological investigation of the rural school principal*. Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation. Simon Fraser University, Victoria, BC, 2012.

<sup>42</sup> W.R. Johnston, et.al., *Developing Community School at Scale: Implementation of the New York Community Schools Initiative*. (New York: RAND Corporation, 2017).

regularly donated blood to the community health center and regularly attended local church services.<sup>43</sup> This is a sign that collaborative work between school leaders and leaders in the communities can result in effective schools, especially in rural areas where there is always a cry for ineffective leadership and poor academic performance of learners. Sharma argues that without the active involvement of community leaders in schools, quality leadership of principals is not possible.<sup>44</sup>

Shared leadership skills acquired by the school leaders play a crucial role in determining success in some of the rural schools. Amanchukwu, Stanley and Ololube state that an effective school leader inspires, motivates and directs activities to achieve group or organizational goals.<sup>45</sup> Successful school leadership can be achieved only when school leaders have an explicit mandate and capacity, motivation and support to use their autonomy to focus on the responsibilities most conducive to sharing their leadership with other leaders in a community to enhance school learning outcomes.<sup>46</sup> A plethora of researchers have documented that successful leadership that involves community leaders in crucial decision-making and problem solving practices is a catalyst for improved student achievement and wellbeing.<sup>47</sup>

An effective school principal needs to be able to develop leadership skills that would help to involve other leaders present in the community to take part in prominent decision-making processes. This is how leadership could be shared between school and community leaders to achieve high quality education in rural schools. Witten suggests that schools require leadership practice that is shared out across the broader context of the school and its community.<sup>48</sup> This can only happen if school principals can be equipped with capable and competent leadership skills to involve school and community leaders in prominent decision-making processes. School improvement efforts need the leadership and the support of a skilled principal.<sup>49</sup> Skilled school leaders have a responsibility to nurture positive school-community relationships.<sup>50</sup> It is advocated that the success of any school is almost always dependent on the competencies and capabilities of principals in working collaboratively with school staff and community leaders. Christie suggests that principals should integrate the functions of leadership and management and possess skills that would help them to work collaboratively with community leaders to improve the quality of education in their schools.<sup>51</sup> Debeer and Antonites, argue that principals require specialized skills, knowledge and values to contribute to improved education across the school

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<sup>43</sup> P. Pashiardis et al. "Successful school leadership in rural contexts: The case of Cyprus." *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 39 no.5, (2011): 536–553.

<sup>44</sup> T.N. Sharma, "Structures and mechanisms of community participation in school management." *Journal of Educational Research*, 1 no.1, (2008): 72 – 85.

<sup>45</sup> Amanchukwu, Stanley and Ololube, "A Review of Leadership Theories, Principles and Their Relevance to Educational Management."

<sup>46</sup> Sharma, "Structures and mechanisms of community participation in school management."

<sup>47</sup> UNESCO, *Education for people and planet: Creating sustainable future for all*. (Paris: UNESCO Publishing, 2016).; Sibanda, "Understanding distributive leadership in South African schools: Challenges and prospects"; J. Sebastian, and E. Allensworth, "The influence of principal leadership on classroom instruction and student learning: A student of mediated pathways to learning." *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 48 no.4, (2012): 626–663; Christopher Day, et.al., *Successful school leadership: Linking with learning and achievement*. (Maidenhead, England: McGraw Hill Education, 2011); R.H. Heck and P. Halliger, "Assessing the contribution of distributed leadership to school improvement and growth in math achievement." *American Educational Research Journal*, 46 no.3, (2011): 659–689; V. Robinson, *Student-centered leadership*. (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2011); K.S. Louis, B. Dretzke, and K. Wahlstrom, "How does leadership affect student achievement? Results from a national US survey." *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, 21 no.3, (2010): 315–336; S. Dinham, *How to get your school moving and improving?* (Melbourne, Australia: ACER Press, 2008); K. Leithwood, A. Harris, and D. Hopkins, "Seven strong claims about successful school leadership." *School Leadership & Management*, 28 no.1, (2008): 27–42.

<sup>48</sup> Witten, *Shifting paradigms: Changing Practice. Value-based instructional leadership in schools*.

<sup>49</sup> K.L. Wahlstrom and K.S. Louis, "How teachers experience principal leadership: The roles of professional community, trust, efficacy, and shared responsibility." *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 44 no.4, (2008): 458–495.

<sup>50</sup> B. Ashton and H.E. Duncan, "A beginning rural principal's toolkit: A guide for success." *The Rural Educator*, 34 no.1, (2012): 19–30.

<sup>51</sup> P. Christie, "Landscapes of Leadership in South African Schools: Mapping the Changes." *Educational Management Administration Leadership* 38 no.6, (2010): 694–711.

system. Skilled principals, therefore, are those who are able to work harmoniously with leaders of community stakeholders to improve the quality of their schools.<sup>52</sup>

## METHODOLOGY

The paper adopted a qualitative research approach and a case study research design. Purposive sampling was used to select 8 secondary school principals that have high levels of school violence and crime in one South African Education District. Out of 8 secondary school principals selected and interviewed, 3 were females and 5 were males. An open-ended interview schedule was used as an instrument of data collection for individual interviews. Participants were guaranteed that researchers would adhere to ethical research procedures. Research participants were informed of the purpose and procedures of the study. Written consent from individual participants was sought before the inquiry commenced. The confidentiality and anonymity of participants were assured through the use of pseudonyms during the transcription of interview responses. To ensure the reliability and validity of the research instrument, an interview schedule used for data collection was tested and scrutinized during the pilot study and corrections were made before it was formally implemented. This means that the interview schedule was used for the second time during data collection.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The following findings are presented under the themes that emerged from the participants' responses: Firstly, the data revealed that school principals failed to share leadership with prominent local stakeholder community leaders. Secondly, principals lack competent leadership skills to share leadership with community stakeholder leaders. Both of these findings indicate that school principals still find it difficult to practice democratic principles of shared and participative leadership skills. Thus, they still act as dictators in their schools even in these days of democracy due to the lack of leadership training workshops by the Department of Basic Education.

### **Failure of School Principals to share Leadership with Community Leaders**

Responses from the participants revealed that school leaders failed to offer opportunities for other conspicuous community leaders to actively participate in prominent decision-making processes. They claimed that community leaders were ignorant about education policies. They fear that they might cause unnecessary conflicts and instability in schools because they have not been trained to work with professionals in a professional environment. Principals themselves have not been trained to work with community leaders. They fear they may be not respected. During the interview process, one participant complained that:

*I do not like to involve local school community leaders in this school because they are not informed on school policies. I lack the know-how to work with community leaders because I am not trained in how to work with them. Again, lack of training on the side of community leaders may cause them to overlap with the leadership and management duties of SMT. All this may cause anarchy in this school.*

From the responses of the above participant, it can be pointed out that those principals including SGB members who are reluctant to share leadership with local community leaders in various aspects of leadership and management in their schools lack capable and essential leadership qualities. Sibanda found that leaders who fear sharing leadership are those who are not empowered to lead and are reluctant to empower other leaders. The above author posits that such leaders are filled with fear, and an inferiority complex to empower others.<sup>53</sup> Harris concurs that school leaders who fear sharing

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<sup>52</sup> Debeer and Antonites, "Leadership Development Programme for School Principals."

<sup>53</sup> Sibanda, "Understanding distributive leadership in South African schools: Challenges and prospects."



leadership with other community leaders display low self-esteem as they think that community leaders may undermine their authority and negate their influence.<sup>54</sup>

Study findings further revealed that there was a hegemony issue where school leaders perceive other prominent leaders from larger communities could grab their influence and power and therefore their former respect might erode. In defense of their power and hegemony, most school leaders have decided to exclude community leaders from school affairs as they adopt an autocratic leadership style in order to demand recognition. One participant responded:

*A lack of knowledge on the side of local community leaders may lead them to think that they have more authority than me. As far as I know, I am the only one who should decide for this school because I am the only accounting officer.*

This response clearly indicates that some school leaders see leadership sharing as a way of taking away their leadership authority and giving it to local community leaders. Seemingly, these school leaders intensely defend their authority from being occupied by community leaders. In support of the above finding, Sibanda observes that some school leaders want to hold on to their authority and like to command and control people.<sup>55</sup> Bush concurs that some school leaders aggressively prevent community leaders from taking opportunities to lead new initiatives or bring about change in schools.<sup>56</sup>

### **Lack of Competencies and Capabilities to Share Leadership with Community Leaders**

The study found that principals do not have adequate competencies and capabilities to share leadership with community leaders. These school leaders seem to be power-hungry and are dictators in their schools. One participant stated that:

*There is no need to share leadership with other leaders in the community because I have the ability to do everything; there is no need to be assisted by illiterate people. I have a fear that if we can share leadership with community leaders, they would undermine my integrity and refuse to be controlled by me. If I disagree with them on certain matters, they may have a bad influence on learners and advise them to turn against me.*

The above responses indicate that some school leaders feared sharing leadership with community leaders because they want to lead alone without any collaboration. Sibanda argues that shared leadership fails in schools as school leaders do not prefer collective and collaborative work.<sup>57</sup> November, Alexander, and van Wyk, found that school leaders are traditionally power-hungry which makes them authoritative and undemocratic.<sup>58</sup> It seems that some school leaders approve of an autocratic leadership style in their schools even in these days of democracy.

In the field study, it was also revealed that school leaders believe that there is no space to accommodate community leaders in their schools as they fear dominance, confusion and conflicts. They are not prepared to listen to other people's innovations and creativities. A participant responded:

*I see no need to have many leaders in this school because this can cause confusion and conflict in many ways. One leader, one institution, is what I believe in. This helps me to avoid confusion which could result in anarchy.*

This finding revealed that school leaders are not ready to share their leadership responsibilities with community leaders simply because they are autocratic. This confirms the view of Naicker and Mestry, that the leadership exercised by some South African school principals is autocratic as such

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<sup>54</sup> A. Harris, *Distributive Leadership matters: Perspectives, practicalities, and Potential*. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, 2013)

<sup>55</sup> Sibanda, "Understanding distributive leadership in South African schools: Challenges and prospects."

<sup>56</sup> T. Bush, "Distributed leadership: The model of choice in the 21<sup>st</sup> century." *Educational Management, Administration and Leadership*, 41 no. 5,(2013): 543 - 544.

<sup>57</sup> Sibanda, "Understanding distributive leadership in South African schools: Challenges and prospects."

<sup>58</sup> I. November, G. Alexander and M.M. Van Wyk, "Do principal-educators have the ability to transform schools? A South African perspective." *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 26 no.4, (2010): 786-795.

they fear the loss of their power.<sup>59</sup> Dladla indicates that under the new democratic approach in the South African education system, some principals still resist sharing power with other leaders in schools and in communities and such resistance has resulted in conflict between them (principals and community leaders).<sup>60</sup> Williams confirms that the persistence of authoritarian leadership in schools by principals in many South African schools militates against the establishment of free space in which creative interaction and deliberative exchange of ideas are encouraged.<sup>61</sup> This is an indication that some school leaders have partial knowledge of a good idea of sharing leadership with prominent community leaders in this democratic South Africa.

One participant indicated that lack of training on the side of school leaders may cause them to battle leadership sharing. Principals confess that they involve community leaders minimally despite the encouragement received from the Department of Basic Education to involve them fully.

*As principals, we have not been trained on how to share leadership with community leaders. This lack of training causes us to lack the competencies and capabilities to share leadership with other leaders in communities around the school. Although the Department of Education keeps on encouraging us to share leadership with community leaders, we always fail to do that. We do it with sensitivity and in a very minimal way.*

The finding is supported by Witten who observed that in South Africa, the broader community participation in school level decision-making takes on symbolic rather than authentic forms. The above scholar detected that principals make community participation just a symbolic sign that indicates their understanding of the pseudo-implementation of democratic school policies.<sup>62</sup> Various researchers found that some principals allow little or no subordinate participation in school decision-making processes because such involvement is perceived by them (principals) as unproductive.<sup>63</sup> Despite the fact that the Department of Basic Education has developed policies that encourage the delegation of power to other staff members within schools as well as to the school community members, school principals still apply autocratic principles in their schools.<sup>64</sup> It seems that even though democratic principles have been established in schools through SGBs and SMTs, in practice, education authorities treat principals as the only accountable figures within the school system. Ghamrawi, argues that this action discourages even the most open school principals from taking steps towards shared leadership in their schools.<sup>65</sup> In order to rectify the above situation in schools, Heystek advises that principals should consider the participation of other stakeholders as equally important so as to avoid a situation whereby these stakeholders resist their autocracy.<sup>66</sup>

Study findings further concur with Mestry who found that principals lack the competencies and capabilities to share leadership with school and other community leaders in decision-making

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<sup>59</sup> S.R. Naicker and R. Mestry, "Teachers' reflections on distributive leadership in public primary schools in Soweto." *South African Journal of Education*, 33 no.2 (2013). Accessed 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2018  
[http://www.scielo.org.za/scielo.php?pid=S025601002013000200008&script=sci\\_arttext&tlng=en](http://www.scielo.org.za/scielo.php?pid=S025601002013000200008&script=sci_arttext&tlng=en).

<sup>60</sup> T.A. Dladla, *Principals' perceptions and experiences of school governing bodies in rural areas*. (Unpublished Master's Thesis. SA: University of Pretoria, 2013).

<sup>61</sup> C.G. Williams, "Distributed leadership in South African schools: Possibilities and constraints." *South African Journal of Education*, 31 no. 2, (2013): 190-200.

<sup>62</sup> Witten, *Shifting paradigms: Changing Practice. Value-based instructional leadership in schools*.

<sup>63</sup> V.S. Mncube "Social Justice Policy and parents understanding of their voice in school governing bodies in South Africa," *Journal of Educational Administration and History*, 39 no.2, (2007): 129-143; N. Van Wyk, "School Governing Bodies: The experience of South African Educators." *South African Journal of Education*, 24 no.1), (2004): 49-54; T. Bush and J. Heystek, 'School leadership and management in South Africa: principals' perceptions', *International Studies in Educational Administration*, 34 no. 3, (2003): 63-76.

<sup>64</sup> N. Ghamrawi, *A policy review of school leadership in the Arab States*. (Faculty of Education. Lebanon: Lebanese University, 2015).

<sup>65</sup> Ghamrawi, *A policy review of school leadership in the Arab States*.

<sup>66</sup> J. Heystek, "School governing bodies – the principal's burden or the light of his /her life? *South African Journal of Education*, 2 no.4, (2004): 308 - 312.

processes.<sup>67</sup> Authors speculate that working collaboratively with community leaders could improve the culture of teaching and learning in rural schools. This implies that ignoring working with community leaders by principals could result in school ineffectiveness. Msila in his study found that ineffective school leaders and minimal involvement of community leaders have resulted in a poor culture of teaching and learning in schools.<sup>68</sup> A study conducted by Witten also revealed that poor school leadership is failing learners in South Africa.<sup>69</sup> Findings by UNESCO concur that bad leadership negatively affects learners' results.<sup>70</sup>

There is a saying that 'everything rises and falls on leadership'. In the context of this paper, this simply means that good school leaders are the ones that produce the best quality outcomes in terms of teaching and learning whereas bad leaders produce poor quality teaching and learning outcomes. This indicates that principals are the heart-beat of their schools. Hence, if schools are not effective, the blame should be directed toward school leaders (principals). Ziduli posits that school principals are accountable for whatever is taking place in their schools. Equally, if schools perform well, praise should be given to school leaders.<sup>71</sup>

Literature has specified now and again that successful school leadership is achieved when effective school leaders have an explicit mandate and capacity, motivation and support to use their autonomy to focus on the responsibilities most conducive to sharing their leadership with other leaders in a community to enhance school learning outcomes.<sup>72</sup> This is an indication that the Department of Basic Education has a responsibility to train their school leaders to work collaboratively and collectively with their subordinates including stakeholder community leaders.

Debeer and Antonites speculate that one of the main barriers to the effective implementation of active community participation in school decision-making processes is weak leadership and limited buy-in.<sup>73</sup> This means that if school principals lack skills (competencies and capabilities) on how to involve community leaders in decision-making processes, schools would be deemed to be ineffective. Sullivan et.al., noted that building trust, commitment and relationships with community stakeholders and leaders are critical aspects of contextual leadership development in schools.<sup>74</sup> This shows that there is a high necessity for school principals to involve community leaders in school affairs if indeed they want to make their schools effective.

In order to rescue effective leadership in poor rural communities, it is advocated that school principals should make their schools Community Resource Centres (CRCs). A CRC is a two-way street, whereby school members, families and community leaders actively work and share resources together, create networks, and share responsibilities in sustaining the quality of life for student success.<sup>75</sup> In this way, they believe that community leaders will be cautious and protect school property from any form of vandalism. They will not see schools as government institutions that need to be vandalized when they complain about poor government delivery services. For this reason, school leaders must make sure that there is always an open communication channel between them and leaders of community stakeholders. The inclusion of community leaders in school matters must be a strategy that must be used first to avoid unexpected intrusions and secondly to curb antagonism between school and community leaders.<sup>76</sup> The belief is that there are talents within the school community that school

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<sup>67</sup> R. Mestry, "Empowering principals to lead and manage public schools effectively in the 21st century." *South African Journal of Education*, 37 no.1 (2017): 1-11.

<sup>68</sup> V. Msila, "In search of a liberating practice: Leadership, teacher commitment and the struggle for effective schools. *Education Leadership and Management*." South Africa, UNISA, 2014.

<sup>69</sup> Witten, *Shifting paradigms: Changing Practice. Value-based instructional leadership in schools*.

<sup>70</sup> UNESCO, *Education for people and planet: Creating sustainable future for all*.

<sup>71</sup> Ziduli, "The Managerial Leadership Styles of School Principals for School Effectiveness."

<sup>72</sup> Sharma, "Structures and mechanisms of community participation in school management."

<sup>73</sup> Debeer and Antonites, "Leadership Development Programme for School Principals."

<sup>74</sup> Sullivan, et.al., *School Leadership Development Framework for the Gauteng Department of Education*.

<sup>75</sup> G. Stuart, *Sustaining Community*. University of Newcastle's: Family Action Center, 2016. Accessed 7<sup>th</sup> March, 2017 from <https://sustainingcommunity.wordpress.com/about>

<sup>76</sup> Sharma, "Structures and mechanisms of community participation in school management."

leaders can tap from.<sup>77</sup> Thus the expertise of community leaders must be used for the benefit of school administration.

### **SUMMARY OF FINDINGS**

Study findings indicated that principals in poor performing schools fail to share leadership with community members and that principals lack competent and capable leadership skills to share leadership with community leaders. The reason for this exclusion is that principals have a fear that community leaders with certain expertise may overpower them in decision-making. Some participants indicated that community leaders may cause havoc in schools as they lack professional ethics and leadership skills while other respondents feared that community leaders might have a bad influence on learners which may lead to unnecessary strikes. Other participants confirmed that some principals are still autocratic even in these days of democracy. Some participants went on to state that sharing leadership with community leaders is impossible unless both school and community leaders receive training on collaborative and collective leadership.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

To recover from an abnormal situation, it is advocated that leaders in various communities should be involved in some key school decision-making processes. This might assist in getting varied opinions on issues and avoiding internal or external conflicts or competition from those not have the privilege of being SGB members. This would help to promote the ownership and protection of educational institutions by the wider community. School leaders should open up a space for community leaders coming from various community stakeholders to participate in school matters. This does not mean that they must replace other formal school structures such as SMTs and SGBs but they should support them with their expertise to make schools effective. The expectation is that school leaders should use their leadership skills to share leading practices with community leaders in a harmonious and respectful manner. In this way, schools are Africanised and education is decolonised. Schools are Africanised and decolonised when at times school principals call *imbizos* (community gatherings) when crucial decisions need to be taken. The inclusion of community leaders in decision-making processes would help school leaders to fight daily social ills that emanate from schools to disrupt teaching and learning processes. Community leaders should also be allowed to use school resources (classrooms, school halls for community gatherings and school playgrounds for local teams). This exercise would make schools CRCs. In this manner, communities would regard schools as community property that must be respected and protected against any form of vandalism and burning. It is also recommended that the Department of Basic Education should organise training workshops to train both school and community leaders on how school and community leaders should work collaboratively and collectively for school effectiveness.

The South African Schools Act 84 of 1996 only recognizes parents of learners who are enrolled in a particular school to be democratically elected to become SGB members while other community members who do not have children enrolled in a certain school are not eligible to become SGB members. However, it further allows SGB members to co-opt some community members whom they perceive possess skills required by schools. This indicates that if community leaders are not considered skillful, they shall not be included in school affairs by school leaders. It has been made clear from school principals' responses that the lack of knowledge of professional ethics and education policies on the part of community-based leaders may cause havoc in schools if they are involved in school decision-making processes. The community leaders on the other hand complain about their exclusion in school affairs. As a consequence of the above gap, authors recommend that the South African Schools Act 84 of 1966 should be amended to include community leaders in school matters to improve the quality of education in poor performing rural schools.

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<sup>77</sup> L.M. Mphale, "Shared Leadership Practices: Do Secondary School Heads in Botswana Matter?" *Journal of Studies in Education*, 5 no.2, (2015): 212-223.

## CONCLUSION

This article has discussed appropriate measures that institutional leaders must develop to ensure an open space for other community leaders to actively participate in the running of institutions. It was discussed that school leaders in poor performing schools lack capable leadership skills to share leadership responsibilities with community leaders. As a consequence of that, vandalism, violence, drug abuse, and other social ills prevail in schools in the presence of formal internal school structures such as SGBs and SMTs. Various recommendations have been provided to mitigate this challenge. The Department of Education must ensure the inclusion of all stakeholder community leaders to quell those social ills which make schools ineffective. The authors believe that the eradication of social ills in schools can improve the quality of teaching and learning.

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