

Secondary School Leadership Practice in Botswana

Implications for Effective Training

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ABSTRACT

This article analyses the views of selected headteachers on the impact of the 10-year basic education policy on the leadership skills of secondary school headteachers in Botswana. Research literature on school leadership and management in Botswana is sparse. Despite this, demands for effective leadership in schools have continued as the education system changes. In 1996, the Botswana Government started to implement a 10-year basic education programme, which rapidly increased student numbers at both community junior and senior secondary schools and building projects for school expansion became the order of the day. Secondary school headteachers have to manage these changes. A central focus of this article is their perceptions of the practice used to appoint them, leadership skills required for the post, their leadership training, and how training for leadership can be improved to meet the educational changes. Using results of the interview data collected from eight selected secondary school headteachers, this article exposes the limitations of the practice and procedures that are used in appointing headteachers to school leadership position and the established procedures intended to develop a skilled leadership force in secondary education to ensure quality education. The article highlights the need for Botswana to establish a leadership training policy to guide the training of headteachers and ensure that schools become effective.

KEYWORDS *Botswana, leadership, lived experiences, principals, training*

Introduction

Since 1966, education in Botswana has been linked to both individual and national development. This thinking has influenced the rapid expansion of education in Botswana but has excluded training of headteachers because the focus was on access and equity. Therefore, the Ministry of Education (1994) adopted a practice of appointing headteachers on the basis of their teaching experience and school leadership at deputy-headship level in order to lead and manage this change and expansion. This practice however, does not take into account that the headteacher role has changed from instructional leader to encompass leadership and management tasks. Literature on school leadership

and management acknowledges that, as education expands, it presents new demands that headteachers found difficult meeting without training (Commonwealth Secretariat, 1993, 1996; Dean, 1993; Buckley and Caple, 1995). These problems, associated with a lack of leadership skills in schools, are evident in Botswana's schools and headteachers find themselves inadequate equipped to cope with them.

Literature developed in Western countries, especially in the UK and the USA, indicates that in order for headteachers to carry out their tasks effectively they need basic training in school leadership and management to ensure that the aims of education are achieved (Dean, 1993).

Leadership is understood and defined differently by those coming from different contexts, backgrounds and experiences (Mullins, 2005). In addition, the theory of leadership is divided into different categories, including that of leadership traits (Horner, 2003). The assumption here is that certain individuals have innate qualities that make them great leaders (Thew, 2001). In some cases the focus is on the leaders' 'good behaviour', which make them successful. The perception here is that effective leadership methods could not be taught (Saal and Knight, 1988 in Horner, 2003).

An alternative view is provided through the contingency model where the leader's traits, those they are leading and the situation are synchronized to meet the needs of the organization (Fiedler, 1967); implying that there are many ways of leading and styles of leadership (Mullins, 2005). Good leadership is associated with skilled leaders who have the interest of their schools, students and teachers 'at heart'; ensuring that their schools achieve their intended goals. As leadership research has grown, a new view has developed, which supports the idea that skilled leaders can be developed through appropriate training (Buckley, 1985; Caldwell et al., 2003). Buckley and Caple, for example, argue that headteachers who are not trained for school leadership have a lower self-esteem and feel ill-equipped for the role. This is evident in Botswana where as the education system expanded management tasks became central to the role of a headteacher. Headteachers need to acquire new skills to meet the new management challenges.

The Ministry of Education gave secondary school headteachers responsibilities for planning, budgeting, organizing and controlling their schools; for many these are unfamiliar tasks. There has been a lack of training provision for secondary school headteachers from their initial appointment throughout their entire service. Despite the fact that planned training of secondary school headteachers was excluded from the priorities of the new policy, secondary school headteachers were given new roles requiring headteachers to display specific skills beyond those that their teaching and deputy-head experience has provided them with.

The lack of leadership preparation for school heads is evident from the Commonwealth Secretariat reports (1993, 1996), which note that the practice in Botswana is to appoint teachers with considerable teaching experience, and

those who have been deputy headteachers, to headteacher positions. This is a concern because it would be difficult for headteachers to provide effective leadership in their schools and be able to ensure provision of quality education (Bush, 2003) in such circumstances.

The Botswana situation contrasts with recent studies that have revealed that leadership training of secondary school headteachers is linked to effective schools (Buckley and Caple, 1995; Grace, 1995; Bush, 2003). Buckley and Caple (1995) insist on the importance of leadership training for headteachers and argue that they will not acquire these skills naturally. The Commonwealth Secretariat (1996: iii) note that in Africa, 'experienced and skilled teachers are customarily appointed to run complex schools without adequate preparation and back up support'. The Botswana 1993 Commission, that reviewed the entire education system, raised a concern about headteacher leadership skills. This article, therefore, investigates the process of acquiring leadership skills by headteachers in the light of the 10-year basic education provision in Botswana.

The emphasis on training of headteachers for school leadership in the UK is a 'good' example for developing countries, such as Botswana, that have previously been British colonies and continue to link their education systems to the former colonial power. The research reported in this article focuses on establishing a training policy for secondary school headteachers in Botswana.

Policy Implementation and Criteria for Appointment

In response to the implementation of the 10-year basic education policy, the Ministry of Education put aside funds for infrastructure development, facility improvement, adequate books and teaching materials. The Ministry of Education (1999: 12) indicates that, 'nearly one quarter of the budget goes to education'. However, this funding does not include the training of headteachers in leadership skills because the Ministry of Education did not relate school expansion to skilled leadership. The funds were for schools' development, training and employment of teachers. The Ministry of Education, as the employer, is not addressing the issue of headteacher competency, and the role of training in improving leadership skills.

The immediate result of the new educational policy (Botswana Government, 1994) is greater access to secondary education. All pupils completing their seven years of primary education proceed to junior secondary education, which led to a 100% progression rate into junior secondary education by the year 2000 (Botswana Government, 2003: 272). In addition, more classrooms, equipment, teaching facilities and qualified teachers were required. The role of the secondary school headteacher then changed from being that of a professional leader concerned with 'good teaching' to include 'supervision of all staff members and students, planning and developing both formal and informal curriculum, ensuring proper conduct of both internal and external examinations, establishing a good relationships with the community, ensuring maintenance of the

physical plant, grounds and equipments, proper finance and general administration' (Ministry of Education, 1999: 1). These additional responsibilities expanded of the role of the secondary school headteachers, requiring more skilled school leaders, but training was not provided.

A major focus of this study is to find out how secondary school headteachers perceive the criteria used for appointing them, their competency to perform leadership tasks and whether training is necessary to improve their knowledge and skills to perform their new roles effectively. In Botswana, the criteria for appointing teachers to school leadership positions are: 'degree or diploma, and 3 years or more as deputy headteacher or head of department' (Ministry of Education, 1994: 12). These criteria confirm the assessment that 'good' teachers are appointed to school leadership without any specific qualification or skills for school leadership and management. It may be assumed by the Ministry of Education that secondary school headteachers have acquired leadership skills from their college or university education. The Second National Commission on Education (1993) recognized that the 10 years of basic education would require secondary school headteachers who are knowledgeable and skilful. It recommended a training framework for headteachers. The Commission's recommendation highlights the link between effective leadership and provision of quality education. However, there are no procedures in place to ensure that headteachers are trained.

Context of the Present Study

As noted above, training of school leaders is one aspect that has been overlooked by educational policy makers in Botswana. The emphasis of the RNPE (1994) was on training in areas (provision of adequate teaching facilities, provision of free textbooks and rigorous training of teachers) that are subject specific and exclude leadership training. These areas are important and crucial to the provision of quality education for all but there is no preparation to link all these with appropriate and skilled leadership in secondary schools in Botswana. Leadership skills cannot be simply acquired through work experience and therefore there should be research to find out how training can be improved in Botswana for current and future headteachers.

Literature on training for school leadership shows that it is possible to train headteachers in school leadership if a national training policy is established (Bush, 2003; Caldwell et al., 2003, McLennan and Thurlow, 2003). It can be argued that in-depth knowledge of various leadership theories may result in headteachers having knowledge of styles and critical reflections (Zeichner, 1994) of how one can adopt these and use them in different situations (Dean, 1993). This indicates that skills can be formally acquired if a training environment is cultivated. The emphasis on formal training draws attention to the process educational policy makers need to understand in ensuring the professional development of headteachers.

Methodology

I used a qualitative methodology, given that I wanted to develop insights into understanding practices of secondary school leadership, and their limitations in the Botswana, I used the interpretive approach (Cohen et al., 2000).

A single interview instrument was developed to gather information from headteachers on their views regarding whether there is a relationship between their appointment and the tasks they do, what type of tasks they carry out, whether they are trained for school leadership and what are the alternative methods of improving their leadership knowledge and skills. The focus of the interview revolved around the following major questions:

- (1) What qualifications do you have and are these related to school leadership?
- (2) How are teachers appointed to secondary school leadership?
- (3) How has the implementation of the 10-year basic education or two years of senior secondary education affected your role as the headteacher?
- (4) What do you understand by the term leadership?
- (5) Do you think leadership training is necessary and how can it be improved?

Before carrying out the interviews with eight, selected secondary school headteachers, the interview schedule was piloted with three secondary school headteachers to clarify interview questions and make them precise. Themes were built from the responses of the semi-structured interviews with the eight secondary school headteachers. Data collection began in July 2003 and was completed by November 2003.

Sampling: Choice of Schools and Participants

The participating secondary schools were selected through purposive sampling because the aim was to obtain a response from a number of secondary school headteachers who experience the problems of secondary school leadership and who could comment on how leadership training could be improved in Botswana (Punch, 2001). Purposive sampling was also necessary because I had limited time in which to do the study. Nine secondary schools were hand picked from nine districts, which have a total of 231 secondary schools nation-wide. From each secondary school chosen, the headteacher was requested to participate in the study. Eight of the nine headteachers agreed to participate. The interview schedule was conducted for one hour at each school at the time and venue chosen by the headteachers.

Table 1 Headteachers' academic qualifications and their school profiles

School name	Location	Headteacher qualifications	Headteacher experience (years)	Number of qualified teachers	Number of unqualified teachers	Student enrolment	School pass rate (%)
Thari	Major village	BA	10	94	0	1623	73
Shima	City	BA, PGDE, Studying for MEd	7	32	1	519	75
Wabobedi	Major village	Diploma in Secondary Education	15	34	7	552	59
Mothanka	Capital city	BEd, studying for M.Ed	6	36	2	677	74
Tuelo	Major village	BEd	6	43	1	743	75
Waboraro	Town	BA, PGDE, MSc	6	73	2	1151	70
Mime	Medium village	BA, CCE	20	33	3	514	61
Mokwadi	Major village	BEd	11	32	4	560	67

Note: School names are pseudonyms.

Data Analysis

The responses to all questions were categorized into themes based on analysing, searching and arranging transcripts, and answers (Boulton and Hammersley, 1996). I adopted Miles and Huberman's (1994) analysis model of reducing data, displaying it according to categories and verifying the conclusions drawn from it. The data analysis here was based on the interpretive approach to provide a specific view of these headteachers on the factors that contribute to their lack of training on school leadership in Botswana.

Findings

The secondary school headteacher responses from the interview were arranged into the following themes:

- (1) Headteachers' academic qualifications.
- (2) Headteachers' assessment of the relationship between their tasks and the criteria used for appointing them
- (3) Headteachers' views on a support system, which could be through well organised induction
- (4) Headteachers' perceptions of the impact of changes in the secondary school education policy on the role of secondary school headteachers
- (5) Headteachers' views on the fluid and contextual nature of leadership.
- (6) Headteachers' views on the need for training of secondary school headteachers in Botswana.

Heads' Academic Qualifications

There were differences in headteachers' academic qualifications and school profiles. The first difference is that five headteachers are not trained, those at Wabobedi Community Junior Secondary School, Mme Community Junior Secondary School and Sejang Community Junior Secondary Schools. The headteacher of Waboraro Senior Secondary School is trained while those at Motlhanka Community Junior Secondary School and Shima Community Secondary School are currently being trained. There are also significant differences in the numbers of untrained teachers and in school examination pass rates (see Table 1).

As expected, and on the basis of the criteria used for appointing headteachers, all the eight secondary school headteachers are qualified teachers. Most have not been trained specifically as heads and therefore it can be assumed that they do not have the requisite leadership skills to carry out all the tasks they have been assigned.

These data confirm the Commonwealth Secretariat's (1993, 1996) findings on the lack of leadership skills of African headteachers due to the non-availability

of training on school leadership in Africa. It further confirms that headteachers are appointed because they are 'good' and experienced teachers.

Criteria for Appointment

The second theme from this study is that headteachers are selected from those who have responded to the advertised vacancies. In selecting headteachers, the criteria indicated in the advertisements are applied. The research shows that headteachers do not feel equipped to provide leadership to teachers immediately after appointment. The headteacher of Motlhanka school's statement sums up the majority view: 'The criteria of degree and 3 years as deputy headteacher, without looking closely at the applicant's quality of performance and leadership skill, are not sufficient!' The criteria used to select headteachers are regarded as inadequate because they are not related to the job they do. Consequently they feel ill equipped for the post. The headteachers suggest that, in order to improve their leadership skills, the Ministry of Education should consider a compulsory pre-induction course on leadership for all prospective headteachers.

The analysis also shows that selection of headteachers to undertake training is not clearly defined and easily understood by headteachers. The results show that the Ministry of Education sends application forms to all headteachers inviting them to apply for training with the criteria that two years of service is required. But these criteria seem not to be adhered to as some headteachers who have more than 15 years of service have still not been trained (see Table 1). One of the headteacher's comments summarizes their views: 'I started to be a head many years ago, I was not trained nor inducted. I was frustrated and I am still frustrated' (headteacher of Wabobedi). Marrant (1981: 3) states that 'the results of training are more readily usable in bringing about practical improvement', so training in school leadership should not be left to chance.

The process used by the Training Office to select headteachers for training also shows the lack of an appropriate procedure for determining the training needs of all headteachers. Without data on headteachers' training needs, the Office will not know the general difficulties headteachers are facing due to their lack of training. The Office seems to be oblivious to the personal and social expectations placed on headteachers 'which affect their behaviour and influence their aspirations' (Pajares, 2005: 4). There also appears to be a lack of formal communication between headteachers and the Ministry of Education on heads' personal training needs. Generally, headteachers are expected to know more than the rest of the school community and, if they do not, then their leadership abilities become questionable. The major flaw regarding this is the assumption by the Ministry of Education that headteachers can function without both induction and training.

Induction

The headteachers were asked what type of induction they received before taking up their position. According to Dean (1993), any headteacher requires basic skills to function properly. These basic skills include understanding the relationships within the education departments and who in those departments are responsible for which areas. In addition, the induction should include how to deal with human resources and financial issues. The interview data however, indicate that inductions are held irregularly. There are headteachers who have attended induction three weeks after being appointed while there are those who have attended inductions after two years of being in the post. Most headteachers' were 'thrown in the deep end without a life-line'. One headteacher says, 'I was inducted in the year 2002 after 2 years of being a head' (SSHT 5). As a result of not experiencing pre-service training, headteachers begin their role on unsure footing and they concur that they have established their own peer network, which has remained a reference for solving issues. The study reveals that headteachers use each other to determine appropriate action: 'I relied heavily on my peers'. There is a fear of not doing things according to the norm, so each headteacher has 'to rely on others to find out how one is doing' (Bandura, 1986: 398). The findings also indicate that inadequate support from the Ministry of Education has resulted in headteacher frustration and a lack of motivation.

Change of the Secondary School Headteacher's Role

This theme is based on the responses from headteachers on whether the implementation of the 10-year basic education plan had any impact on their roles. The responses show that, previously, the headteacher role was focused on instructional leadership. Following the plan, the focus changed following the increase in heads' responsibilities, some of which require specific skills, for example, understanding how one can develop her/his school vision to improve the problems associated with change.

Additional tasks mentioned by heads include: supervision of teaching and learning; supervision of curriculum implementation; extra curricular activities; discipline of staff and students; maintenance of equipment; students and staff welfare; staff development; creating a team; staff control; staff appraisal; public human relations; communication with staff, students and the community; conducting meetings; dealing with officials from the Ministries of Education and Finance; developing mission and vision statements; and the budgeting, planning, supervision and distribution of approved funds. I used Buckley's (1985) three model to categorize headteachers' tasks which are; technical, human relations and conceptual. The technical aspects mentioned are; supervision of teaching and learning, curriculum, extra curricular activities, discipline and maintenance of equipments. These require headteachers to ensure

that teaching and learning take place, and that the prescribed curriculum is implemented in accordance with the regulations laid down by the Ministry of Education. It is also the responsibility of the headteacher to ensure that staff members are allocated duties and that they carry those out. These imply that a 'good' learning environment has to be nurtured by the headteacher so that there is discipline within the school and regulations of conduct are clearly understood by all. The indication from headteachers in this study is that they enjoy carrying out the tasks in this category as they feel they have the skills to perform them.

The second category is that of human relations tasks, which include: student and staff welfare; staff development; creating a team; staff control; staff appraisal; public human relations; communication with staff, students and parents; conducting meetings; and dealing with officials from the Ministries of Education and Finance. This is confirmed by the headteacher job description (Ministry of Education, 1999). It is clear from the results of this study that headteachers have difficulties in motivating the teaching staff to be committed to teaching as a result of the strained relationship between teachers and their employer—the Ministry of Education. Headteachers have indicated that working relationships in their respective schools have broken down because teachers are no longer committed to their work, following the strike of 2003. As a result of the strike a strained relationship between teachers' organizations and the Ministry of Education arose because the Ministry of Education rejected teachers' demands, which were to be treated like civil servants and to improve their terms and conditions of service. The Ministry's decisions may explain why most teachers do not participate in extra curricular activities. There is an indication from headteachers that this situation has increased their workload because they have to deal with teachers' grievances and their resistance to taking part in non-teaching activities.

Furthermore, the study shows that headteachers are expected to function as liaison officers on behalf of their schools to the community, in turn requesting the community to participate actively in school projects and decision-making. This relationship dictates that headteachers, too, should actively participate in community issues. The headteachers indicate that they have some difficulties in performing staff appraisal and public relations tasks effectively.

The third category of tasks is the conceptual one, which includes budgeting, planning, maintenance and supervision of building projects as well as management and ensuring adherence to approved budgets and distribution of funds, which require specific knowledge and skills. The study shows that competency to perform these is not satisfactory. This can be explained by the absence of pre-service and in-service training. Despite these problems, the study reveals that most headteachers feel that they are contributing to educational development in Botswana. The headteachers commitment explains why they continue to do their jobs and that there are few resignations.

Headteacher Understanding of the Concept of Leadership

In order to understand whether headteachers have a common understanding of the concept of leadership, the investigator asked them to describe it from three different periods of their leadership: first, on their experience immediately after appointment; second, after some years of headship; and, third, after they have been trained in school leadership and/or management.

In the initial period, headteachers associated leadership with complete authority by the leader. This view changed with experience as headteachers, and they associated it with the leader's ability to assist others to achieve what the majority regard as their goal. This finding does not support Harber and Davies' (1997) view that leadership in African countries tends to be authoritarian but this finding should be interpreted carefully as it is based on self-reporting. Headteachers who are trained, or are being trained, take a different view, saying that leadership can be successful if teachers are willing to cooperate with the headteacher and teachers generally share a common goal for their school with the leader.

The headteacher's descriptions suggest that leadership can be understood from three dimensions: the leader's skills to lead; an understanding between the leader and the led; and an aim to reach an agreed goal. Those headteachers who described leadership in this manner are trained in school management and this has broadened their understanding of leadership. The findings support the view that the understanding of the concept of leadership is contextual, situational and periodical (Hodgkinson, 1983; Mullins, 2005).

Importance of a National Training Policy for School Leadership

The responses of headteachers suggest that there is no leadership training policy. They point out that leadership training can be properly and systematically carried out if there is a procedure, which formalizes and governs it.

From this point of view a training policy needs to be established to govern the processes of training of secondary school headteachers on leadership. Such a training policy is crucial because the acquisition of skills does not occur haphazardly (Buckley and Caple, 1995). The indication is that national training policy may lay the foundation for the process of establishing a leadership training institution.

The study shows that training is not carried out on a consistent basis because of the non-existence of a clear leadership training policy. The acquisition of leadership skills by secondary school headteachers is left to chance. At the root of this problem is that the Ministry of Education does not relate quality education to skilled leadership. The result is that there are no procedures to carry out leadership training needs assessment of headteachers; no clear selection criteria for leadership training; no clear relationship between the criteria

for appointing headteachers and their job; and there is no leadership training institution in Botswana. Overall, experience in school leadership alone is inadequate to equip headteachers with the requisite leadership skills. The situation in Botswana is in contrast to that in the UK, where a national leadership training policy has laid the framework for the establishment of a national leadership training institution (Bush, 2003; Caldwell et al., 2003). This difference can be attributed to the existence of clear training structures for headteachers in the UK, which are absent in Botswana.

Conclusion

The analysis of headteacher views show that leadership is complex and therefore the process of acquiring leadership skills is also complex. As a result, secondary school headteachers have not been able to acquire leadership skills that they could use in the expansion of the education system in Botswana. Headteacher experiences suggest that there is a need to establish a leadership training policy that will guide leadership training of headteachers in Botswana and prepare headteachers for their roles. This conclusion is consistent with the view that the purpose of training is to enable 'an individual to acquire abilities in order that she/he can perform adequately a given task' (Buckley and Caple, 1995: 2). The Ministry of Education's disjointed attempts to train, support and induct headteachers does not provide a strong enough foundation to enable them to acquire the required leadership skills. It is crucial for headteachers to be consistently assisted to develop in order to meet the changing demands of school leadership.

Acknowledgement

I would like to thank the secondary school headteachers who participated in this study.

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