Complex interplay between transformational leadership, teacher performance and systemic challenges

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Abstract: **This study explores complex interplay between transformational leadership, teacher performance and systemic challenges. Qualitative case study research design that emanates from constructivist worldview was employed to explore the complex interplay between transformational leadership, teacher performance and systemic challenges in Oshana Region in Namibia. Data was collected through interview schedule, field notes, open-ended questionnaire in which a criterion purposeful sampling technique was used to select 20 educational leaders from 20 schools. Data analysis was conducted through thematic analysis, typological analysis, and content analysis utilising Atlas.ti. The findings have established complex interplay between transformational leadership, teacher performance and systemic challenges, prevail leadership strategies used and complex interplay between them. School leaders should study and learn application of leadership strategies, apply them to optimise their success and enhance teacher performance which could results on student performance. School leaders should integrate element of leadership strategies to support teacher performance, enhance their job satisfaction and promote students success. Leadership strategies have the complex interplay on teacher performance which affects schools, teacher performance which could results in positive and negative student performance.**

Keywords: **School performance, teacher performance, transformational leadership.**

1. INTRODUCTION

Transformational leadership has been persistently studied in the educational leadership context considering that it can be a viable tool to respond to the increasing demands on school systems to allow its greater effectiveness. As a result, rich knowledge base has been accumulated. Although transformational leadership has become one of the most studied leadership (Buyukgoze et al., 2022), certain aspects of it still warrant further investigation such as its antecedents (Chen et al., 2020), the actual leadership acts that promote school improvement (De Mesa et al., 2023) and its relationship with a range of variables such as the teacher commitment and resilience, turnover intention, extra-work behaviour, and holistic development of students in addition to academic achievement (Karakose et al., 2023).

Theoretically, transformational variables with three dimensions include inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualised consideration and student engagement with their three dimensions, namely emotional engagement, behavioural engagement, and cognitive engagement influence dependent variable, namely academic performance. All these variables may be used as practical dimensions in the students' daily life. For instance, transformational leadership can enhance students to always come to class and not to skip all class in their schedule. For student engagement, students feel dimension can affect academic performance if they follow dimensions (Department of Education, 2022).

Transformational leadership, which characterises by visionary thinking and inspiration, has been recognised for its potential to instigate a positive change and fostering collective purpose among stakeholders. Transformative leadership, emphasising control of the responsibilities, has gained prominence to enhance collaboration, improve overall organisational effectiveness (Chen & Zhang, 2022).

Debates regarding the compatibility of transformational leadership remain a central theme in the literature. While transformational leaders are recognised for their motivational prowess, concerns arise regarding their potential reluctance to share leadership responsibilities (De Mesa et al., 2023). Visionary nature of transformational leadership and hierarchical educational structures may create barriers to implementation of transformative leadership. However, counterarguments presented by other researchers have contended that influential transformational leaders actively embrace diversity, encourage participatory decision-making align with principles of distributed leadership (Department of Education, 2022).

Critical examination of transformational leadership reveals its positive effect on organisational performance, potentially enhancing school outcomes, fostering a positive organisational culture, and promoting teachers motivation and commitment (DeWitt, 2020). Nonetheless, critics caution against potential pitfalls like dependency and passivity among followers which may undermine development of distributed leadership practices (Ertem, 2021). Effectiveness of transformational leadership in fostering distributed leadership depends on leaders' willingness to empower others and delegate authority, creating an environment conducive to shared decision-making (Gabr et al., 2021). However, challenges in its implementation such as conceptual confusion and/or resistance to change underscore the need for careful consideration of contextual factors and practical challenges (Ertem, 2021).

Transformational leader exhibiting transformational leadership behaviour is likely to empower teachers, delegate authority, and/or foster a culture of shared leadership within schools (Gabr et al., 2021). Studies highlight the active embracing of diverse perspectives, participatory decision-making; reveal nuanced relationship within transformational leadership practices in educational contexts. While several empirical studies generally support the idea that transformational leaders are inclined to embracing distributed leadership practices, challenges and variations exist. The literature underscores importance of considering contextual factors and diverse perspectives to fully understand how this transformational leadership interact within the dynamic landscape of educational environments (Grissom et al., 2021).

A synthesis of literature in transformational leadership reveals nuanced insights directly affecting any educational practice. Contrary to the initial contention, transformational leaders who embody transformational leadership traits are open to distributed leadership (Buyukgoze et al., 2022). On the contrary, they are more likely to foster a culture of shared leadership within their schools by actively empowering teachers and/or staff, delegating authority and cultivating an environment encouraging collaboration and collective efficacy (Karakose et al., 2023).

Transformational school leaders, characterised by visionary thinking and inspiration, are inclined towards supporting distributed leadership practices by empowering staff, delegating authority, and fostering collaborative decision-making. These findings underscore importance of contextual factors such as organisational culture and/or leaders' willingness to relinquish control in shaping effectiveness of transformative leadership (Kloutsiniotis & Mihail, 2020). Considering practical implications and integrated strategy which acknowledges benefits of transformative leadership is paramount. Instructors are encouraged to develop dynamic, adaptable leadership cultures specific to learning environments' requirements. Further empirical research is necessary to deepen our understanding of the interplay between leadership practices, teacher performance and systemic challenges, especially in diverse educational settings (DeWitt, 2020).

The purpose of this study is to address gaps in existing empirical findings by exploring complex interplay between transformational leadership, teacher performance and/or systemic challenges. This study expands on the previous efforts of quantitatively estimating effects of leadership on the students' outcomes by considering previously neglected leadership, namely transformational leadership (Chen, 2020). Several studies have specified leadership effects on students' outcomes. Non-academic writing and/or policymaking efforts have been intensified trying to link different types of leadership to students' achievement. Therefore, the need for empirically investigation of leadership effects on teacher performance is warranted (Tortia et al., 2022).

Considering the above, this study sees an urgent need to investigate complex interplay between transformational leadership, teacher performance and systemic challenges. The aim of this study was to explore complex interplay between transformational leadership, teacher performance and systemic challenges in Oshana Region in Namibia.

The overarching primary research questions the study explored were:

What complex interplay which exists between transformational leadership, teacher performance and systemic challenges in Oshana Region?

Which leadership strategies do school leaders use in Oshana Region?

Which existing leadership strategies that enhance teacher performance?

What existing teacher performance which associates with leadership strategies?

Transformational leadership and school improvement

Establishing an environment which motivates transformational leaders to embrace and support transformational leadership practices are significant factors of leadership development programs which entails offering instruction and materials to improve transformational leaders' abilities to empower others, to facilitate group decision-making, and/or to foster respect for one another and cooperation. Educational leaders can help create a more responsive and adaptable organisational culture which best suited to handle complicate issues which schools confront today by doing this (Grissom et al., 2021).

Comprehensive literature review has substantiated proposition that the transformational leaders, embody transformational leadership characteristics, are willing to implementing transformational leadership practices within their schools (Kloutsiniotis & Mihail, 2020). However, evidence has suggested a proclivity among transformational leaders to endorse and foster leadership practices as a strategic approach to elevate organisational effectiveness and cultivate collaborative culture of shared leadership (Mastura et al., 2021). Nevertheless, recognising complexity of educational contexts, additional empirical research is imperative to delve deeper into intricate dynamics of transformational leadership, particularly within diverse educational setting. Further empirical research exploration contribute to more nuanced understanding of how this leadership interacts and/or evolves in response to various educational environments, unique challenges, contextual factors in a diverse educational setting (Paais & Pattiruhu, 2020).

Educational policymakers and practitioners should take note of the inherent compatibility of the transformational leadership practices. Rather than viewing them as conflicting practices, there is a compelling argument for integrating them into school leadership development initiatives and organisational practices (Chen, 2020). Integration, more comprehensive and practical leadership, harnesses transformational leadership's inspirational and/or visionary aspects, while leveraging distributed leadership's collaborative and/or decentralised nature (Mohamed et al., 2023).

Educational practitioners should recognise contextual factors role in shaping the effectiveness of transformational leadership practices within diverse educational settings. Organisational culture, autonomy granted to staff, leaders' willingness to relinquish control is crucial considerations in implementing transformational leadership. School leaders and/or policymakers should tailor their approaches based on the specific context of their schools, acknowledging that a one-size-fits-all approach may not be suitable for all educational environments (Karakose et al., 2023).

Implications drawn from the literature synthesis emphasise the need for a nuanced and integrated approach to educational leadership. By recognising the synergies of transformational leadership, educational practitioners can cultivate a dynamic and responsive leadership culture that enhances overall organisational effectiveness and improves outcomes for both educators and students (Rabkin & Frein, 2021).

Implications associate with implementation of transformational leadership

Professional Learning Community (PLC) has been widely recognised as an effective practice for promoting student learning and teacher development. However, existing research on PLC mainly focuses at school level, and less attention has been given to departmental level PLC. Given the complex nature of school structures, departmental PLC may be influenced by multiple leadership factors, including school leaders and Teacher Leadership (TL) (Saleem et al., 2021). TL had a direct effect on teacher self efficacy and had an indirect effect through PLC. Departmental Level (DL) of school leaders indirectly

affects the individual teachers through TL and PLC. The results indicate the complex leadership structure in the school with various levels of leadership exerting distinct influences on teachers and/or departments; highlight the roles of school leader leadership and TL in facilitating PLC and teacher development (Tortia et al., 2022).

First, DL may benefit faculty members, lead to positive organisational outcomes. School leaders collaborate with teacher leaders using a distributed, indirectly enhancing teacher development through TL and/or departmental PLC. Second, effective integration of school leaders and TL can facilitate the teacher development (Sharif & Ghodoosi, 2022). TL is a more significant direct driver of teacher learning than school leaders DL. Teacher leader mediate school leaders' leadership to encourage the teacher participation in professional learning. School leaders may not interact directly with the individual teachers, but they exert influence through teacher leaders or departments. For example, teacher leaders can translate the school mission and goals (Chen & Zhang, 2022), help frontline teachers to understand top-down policies, reform initiatives, make decisions on research topics, activities, and inviting outside experts.

Third, PLC is a critical structure and path for the teacher development. Both school leaders and departmental teacher leaders need to realise the importance of collaborative structure and culture within departments, which may playing basic role in exerting leadership influence (Simms et al., 2023).

Departmental PLC is not only about collective structure but also about culture within groups. School leaders could determine the tone of group because of their positional power. Wise leaders should show power with approach (Smith & Holloway, 2020) to discuss teaching issues with teachers, encourage open discussions and criticism around school issues and model behavior that promotes in-depth and critical dialogues (Tan et al., 2020). This may imply that teachers do not prefer to be led by school leaders for their work loads.

Meta-analysis results have shown that transformational leadership has high and positive relation with the school outcomes, positive effect on teacher motivation, and negative effect on academic achievement thus, developing a leadership theory specific to educational settings (Tarro et al., 2020). Meta-analysis findings assert that leadership is closely related to school outcomes, improving transformational leadership practices will increase teachers' motivation and decrease students' academic success. Transformational leadership practices should be organised for both administrators and teachers. Practitioners should be aware of influences of leadership on school outcomes. They should care about behaviour compatible with positive leadership practices (Ertem, 2021).

Challenges associate with implementation of transformational leadership

Although it is widely believed by parents and policy makers that the quality of school leadership makes a difference to what the students learn at school, testing this hypothesis has proved very complex. Part of the problem is unreliability of many measures of leadership quality. In addition, the field has been dominated until quite recently by abstract theories of leadership which are not closely aligned to specific work of educational leaders. While recent research by economists has confirmed that school leadership makes significant difference to student outcomes, their analyses beg question of how these effects are produced (Zhou et al., 2021).

There are three major reasons for difficulty in researching links between school leadership and student outcomes. The first concerns difficulty of measuring relevant variables. Gaining reliable data on the quality of school leadership based on observations of leadership practices or detailed behavioural interviews is quite expensive whereas cheaper methods, such as the self-assessment ratings, typically produce high scores and limited variance (Buyukgoze et al., 2022). Third-party ratings by teachers may also be subject to various types of perceptual biases such as halo effects (De Mesa et al., 2022). Some researchers have used measures of frequency of certain leadership behaviour such as observations of teaching, on assumption that greater frequency means higher quality leadership, when, in fact, there is little or no correlation between the two (Gabr et al., 2021). All measurement errors reduce chance of finding leadership effects. Qualification rates and results on standardised tests of literacy and math are predominant student outcome measures employed (DeWitt, 2020). These academic outcome measures do not cover full social and emotional outcomes are also valued in most school systems. Many authors have acknowledged paucity of studies linking social, emotional and/or cultural student outcomes to leadership quality as a limitation of the current body of research. Statistical analyses of leadership effects on the student outcomes require separation of effects of leadership from effects of other confounding variables: differences in students' socio-economic background, school composition, and/or prior achievement levels (Grissom et al., 2021).

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A second reason for the difficulty in researching links between leadership and student outcomes is that, unless they are teaching school leaders in very small schools, leaders influence learning indirectly through work of their teachers (Mastura et al., 2021). Role of senior leadership team is to create conditions which enable their teachers to teach in ways that ensure adequate levels of student growth on the important learning outcomes. Currently, there is considerable debate about which conditions are most important and/or about pathways through which they are established (Department of Education, 2022).

A third reason for the difficulty of linking leadership to student outcomes is the time it takes for the effects of leadership decisions to be felt. For example, a school leader's decision to introduce teacher professional learning communities requires major changes in timetabling so that teachers can meet. These organisational changes must then be accompanied by changes in teacher culture, so that meetings in which evidence-based discussion of connections between teaching practice and/or student learning becomes the norm (Mastura et al., 2021). Assuming such interaction is established, teachers must then apply their learning to their own teaching in ways that improve learning of their students, and, only then, will effect of leader's original decision on student outcomes be discernible (Karakose et al., 2023).

In the school where students achieve well above expected levels, leadership looks quite different from leadership in otherwise similar lower performing schools. In the higher performing schools, leadership is much more focused on the business of improving learning, teaching through quality enactment of goal-setting, strategic resourcing of those priority goals and ensuring the quality of teaching (Mohamed et al., 2023). In ensuring such quality, school leaders learn what they and their teachers need to learn to achieve priority goals. Leaders in high performing schools will not only organise and resource teacher professional learning and development but are also more likely to lead it. The dimension of student-centred leadership (ensuring an orderly and safe environment) provides a foundation for all the rest (Kloutsiniotis & Mihail, 2020).

Findings from many studies have alluded to the fact that successful leadership entails the active empowerment of all administrators within school administration in order to achieve acceptable academic outcomes for students (Mastura et al., 2021). School leaders and key administrators generate a larger effect on students' academic performance when they interact with the teaching and learning processes. This approach may be used to devise best leadership practices to be disseminated at schools and educational institutions (Paais & Pattiruhu, 2020).

Several studies have uncovered a few dark spots in the research agenda of leadership effects on the student outcomes. First, there seems a dearth of cross-sectional research linking leadership to students' outcomes across countries. Second, comprehensive search for studies to be included in synthesis alluded to the paucity of investigations in developing world and this call for immediate attention to the roles of leaders in determining students' outcomes in the developing world. This is especially important given significant effect of leaders on falling schools in light with the fact that many schools operating in developing world are located on bottom of the academic performance ladder (Paais & Pattiruhu, 2020).

Transformational leadership and school success

Several studies have indentified five dimensions thought to improve transformational leadership practice that might lead to school success. One of the dimensions includes deciding what goals to set, gaining the commitment of those responsible for achieving them, communicating them to all those with interest in their achievement. Leaders can set goals, but they will remain empty words unless they motivate those whose efforts are required to achieve them. Thus, the quality of goal-setting cannot be separated from the quality of relationships. This dimension of leadership has, on average, a small to moderate effect on the student outcomes (Rabkin & Frein, 2021). It works indirectly, by focusing and/or coordinating the work of teachers around promoting learning and achievement of students. In schools where teachers report strong goal-setting activity by leaders, students will, on average, achieve more than in otherwise similar schools (Saleem et al., 2021). Leaders of higher performing schools give emphasis to communicate goals and/or expectations, informing community of academic accomplishments and recognising the academic achievement than do their counterparts in lower performing schools,. In higher performing schools, there are more consensuses about school goals.

The challenges in this dimension is not just to set goals, for nearly all school leaders are required to set goals as part of their schools strategic and annual planning and for their own professional development planning. Rather, the challenge is to set them in ways that meet conditions required to make the goal-setting works (Ertem, 2021). Goal theory tells us that the goals will increase performance when they are specific, when people are committed to them and when they believe they already have, and will gain the capacity to achieve them (Zhou et al., 2021). The direct and mediate effect of goal-setting practices

on student achievement have shown that while these leadership practices have impacted the teacher empowerment and sense of efficacy, they did not flow through to the student achievement (Sharif & Ghodoosi, 2022). Similarly, a study of a range of leadership practices did not show significant effects of goal-setting on maths achievement (Simms et al., 2023).

By contrast, the quality of goal-setting and its communication have significant positive effect on student attendance, achievement, and/or rates of violence in schools (Smith & Holloway, 2020). This contrary evidence can be explained by examining the extent to which measures of leaders' goal-setting capture qualities that goal theory has identified as central to its effectiveness. That theory, and long history of goal-setting research in social psychology (Tan, et al., 2020), suggesting that school leaders goal-setting will drive improved student outcomes if it creates a motivating discrepancy between current reality and desired future state. For student-centred leaders, most important indicator of current reality is evidence about wellbeing and learning of students. Goals that are clear, specific, and perceived as challenging, but attainable focus attention and effort and motivate persistently goal-relevant behaviour. School-level goals are vertically integrated into goals of subject departments, year-level teams, individual teachers so that disparate contributions of groups and individuals are coordinated in ways which serve goal attainment (Tarro et al., 2020). These are types of qualities that goal theory suggests should be measured in future studies of effect of this leadership dimension on student outcomes.

Once clear goals are established, and then dimension 2, resourcing strategically comes into play. This dimension has a small average effect on student outcomes (Chen & Zhang, 2022). Leaders in high performing schools allocate scarce resources such as money, time on timetable, teaching materials and/or instructional expertise in ways that give priority to key goals. For example, if a school has committed to the goal of improving boys' reading, then this commitment should be reflected in focus of teachers' professional development, the choice of texts and supplementary materials, and criteria for hiring new teacher of English. Staffing, teaching resources and teacher professional development are orchestrated in ways that increase chances of achieving goal. From a leadership point of view the key research question is not how many resources are available, but how they are used (Rabkin & Frein, 2021). Research on use requires investigation of the links between goals and resource acquisition and allocation, and these links are much more difficult to investigate than leaders' access to resources. The differences in leaders' discretion over resource acquisition and allocation further complicate the picture. It is the alignment and coordination of resources with strategic priorities that is a key to understand how leaders drive improvement in student outcomes (Saleem et al., 2021).

Substantially governmental and the union in some countries constraints on the hiring, promotion, remuneration and firing of teachers account for the non significant relationship between school leaders, personnel leadership practices and/or students achievement (Tortia et al., 2022). In contrast, self-managing school system accords school leaders and boards considerable discretion over who they hire, reward and fire, but no research is available on use and consequences of this discretion. Perhaps most important strategic resource to manage is students' time. Establishing a school culture in which students' time is treated as strategic resource is important responsibility of school leadership because achievement is the function of both amount and the quality of time students spends in learning curriculum (Zhou et al., 2021). Without quality, longer school days, summer schools and/or catch-up classes waste students time. Given the adequate quality, however, increasing the time in a subject will lift achievement (Buyukgoze et al., 2022). While goals specify what should be achieved by when and with whom, it is strategic alignment of goals with students, teacher time, and relevant expertise and materials which enable their achievement (Chen & Zhang, 2022). Leaders in high performing schools make tough decisions required to allocate and/or reallocate resources to support goal achievement. They also decline or postpone resources and opportunities, such as external funded initiatives, that distract from their priority goals (Chen, 2020). To be strategic leader is to be clear and consistent about what school organisation is and is not currently pursuing, and to resource accordingly.

In dimension 3, a school has a coherent instructional framework if curriculum, associate teaching strategies, assessments are coordinated within and between year levels. This ensures progression of difficult subject matter and students' access to same content regardless of teacher assignment. Leaders foster coherence by supporting and requiring the use of framework, and by its inclusion in the staffing, resourcing and professional development policies and practices. Students achieve more in schools with more coherent instructional programmes (De Mesa et al., 2023) while teachers develop stronger professional communities when they have a common approach to teaching and learning (DeWitt, 2020). Students learn and remember more when the key ideas are presented in ways which connect with their prior knowledge and experience and when they are given multiple, and varied opportunities to gain in-depth understanding of the new concepts (Chen, 2020). Exposure to multiple representations of the same idea over relatively short period of time, for example a unit of work spanning ten days,

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promotes students' learning (Department of Education, 2022). Learning opportunities meet these conditions are more likely to be found in teaching programmes that are planned around progression of learning objectives and associated informal assessments. Coherent instructional framework means that teachers reinforce the same ideas, use similar vocabulary for communicating those ideas, and/or know how to make links with what has gone before, and/or are guided in their efforts by common assessments. If learning opportunities are integrated and/or cumulative, rather than fragmented and rushed, students are more likely to be engaged and successful.

School leaders and senior leaders are responsible for monitoring progress on school wide goals, and heads of department and team leaders for monitoring social and academic outcomes for their students. The quality of school leaders' engagement in this work has found to be correlated with student achievement in a cross-national study of effect of school leaders' management practices on mathematic achievement (Gabr et al., 2021). For the last two decades, there has been a considerable emphasis on building data management infrastructure and the capability required to support work (Grissom et al., 2021). Task is a complex one involving establishing organisational routines for collecting, storing, analysing, reflecting on assessment and/or exams data so that improvements could be planned and evaluated (Mohamed et al., 2023). Structures and routines, however, are not enough to create evidence-based inquiry, organisational, teacher learning which is required to make best use of data. Leaders need to create a culture in which teachers trust data, and they are willing to open up their practice for critical scrutiny and in which expertise required to improve can be shared and developed (Karakose et al., 2023).

Leaders' formal evaluations of teachers should be based, at least in part, on evidence about effect of teachers on students learning and/or wellbeing. Research on teacher evaluation is consistent in showing its negligible effects on practice of evaluated teachers, whether evaluation practices are situated within high stakes accountability policies and/or within more developmentally-oriented (Kloutsiniotis & Mihail, 2020). Rather than improving teaching and/or student outcomes, high stakes accountability policies in which teachers are rewarded and/or sanctioned contingent on student test gains, have damaged teacher morale (Mastura et al., 2021) and narrowed curriculum as teachers focus on examined subjects (Mohamed et al., 2023). Measurement of teaching quality, whether through classroom observations of teaching and/or value-added measures of student growth, is not yet sufficiently valid to justify high stakes decisions about teacher performance (Paais & Pattiruhu, 2020).

While more developmentally-oriented teacher evaluation policies and/or practices avoid some of harms of high stakes approaches, there is also little positive evidence of their effect on quality of teaching and learning (Saleem et al., 2021). One reason is reluctance of leaders to give negative feedback, a reluctance which produces a major mismatch between leaders' private evaluation of proportion of teachers who are unsatisfactory and documented formal evaluations of those same teachers (Rabkin & Frein, 2021). Major reform efforts have invested heavily in new evaluation tools on assumption that a key reason for mismatch is difficulty in providing rigorous evidence of quality of teaching (Saleem et al., 2021). Despite substantial investment in a suite of validated evaluation tools, proportion of teachers receiving less than satisfactory rating have changed little (Chen & Zhang, 2022). Causes of discrepancy between leaders' public and private evaluations of teachers reach far deeper than technical measurement problems.

First, incentive structure of educational personnel policies encourages leaders to stay silent about poor performance rather than to risk considerable time, cost and stress that comes with tackling poor performance. Adult-centric nature of such policies means that leaders who addressing such issues can be sanctioned for acts of commission, that is, for violating regulations about treatment of adults but there is no such sanction for acts of omission for failing to act in the interests of the students by not conscientiously addressing the perceived poor teacher performance (Simms et al., 2023).

Second, there is considerable evidence that many leaders are struggle with communicating and discussing negative feedback even under benign conditions such as in a confidential and/or safe workshop (Smith & Holloway, 2020). They unwittingly treat their feedback as true instead of fallible, and/or as complete instead of partial, and this construction creates a dilemma between pursuing the problems and maintaining relationship (Tan et al., 2020). Unless pressured to do otherwise, most leaders respond to dilemma by protecting relationship and/or avoiding or downplaying the teaching problem. It is this dynamic that partially explains discrepancy between some leaders' private and formal evaluations of their teaching staff. The important research question is not does teacher evaluation improves teaching? But what are the qualities of teacher evaluation which increase its effect on teaching practice and on students of evaluated teachers? Leaders who are accessible and who evaluate teachers as part of an ongoing supervision process (Tarro et al., 2020), who are judged as having relevant

expertise, who have a good relationship with those they evaluate, are more likely to be perceived as having provided useful feedback (Tortia et al., 2022). The involvement of teachers in planning of evaluation also improves its perceived fairness and utility (Zhou et al., 2021). It should be noted, however, that these several studies assess teachers' perceptions of evaluators and/or there is some evidence that their perceptions of feedback accuracy and utility may not match those of third-party experts (De Mesa et al., 2023).

Of the five dimensions of student-centred leadership, the practices grouped under this dimension have the largest average effect size of all five dimensions (Chen, 2020). This finding makes sense because quality of teaching is most powerful school level influence on student outcomes (Department of Education, 2022), and leaders who focus on this dimension are more likely to improve teaching practice and/or student outcomes than those who do not, that likelihood is substantially increased, however, if leaders provide teacher learning opportunities that meet the conditions for effectiveness suggested on the effect of teacher professional learning on student outcomes. The qualities of professional learning are associated with shifts in teaching practice that flow through to improvements in students achievement, well-being or engagement: the professional learning is anchored in evidence of specific learning need of students; it focuses on the relationship between teaching and/or student outcomes, it provides worthwhile content; integrates theory and practice, uses external expertise and provides multiple opportunities to learn (DeWitt, 2020).

The starting point of effective teacher learning is inquiry into evidence about the achievement or experiences of their students. Once the focus of professional learning is determined, leaders need to make wise evidence-based choices about any programme, initiative or intervention that they introduce to their teachers. Leaders can increase chance of getting worthwhile content by asking potential providers for any evaluations of their programmes, and/or by doing their own research on websites which provide robust syntheses of the evidence about the effectiveness of different interventions. Professional development comprises practical tips does not work because it leaves teachers without the knowledge of underlying principles that enables them to develop adaptive expertise and create the conditions in their own classrooms that are the key to improved student learning (Ertem, 2021). Theoretical content which is not linked to practical applications and/or rich illustration is also ineffective. Effective professional development communicates clear theoretical principles and provides ample opportunity for participants to explore how they can be applied in their own contexts (Gabr et al., 2021). The use of external expertise is another feature of effective professional development. In other words, the leadership of the group whether a teacher, school leader, coach, facilitator or researcher, has demonstrated a greater capacity to solve or prevent the relevant teaching problems than the remaining group members. Expecting teachers who share similar difficulties to solve their problems without help of external expertise is unrealistic. When professional learning takes place in an ongoing school or network-based group, external expert needs ability to foster effective ongoing collaboration between participants (Grissom et al., 2021).

Highly skilled facilitation is needed in which leaders can challenge assumptions and/or present teachers with new possibilities, challenging the social norms by which collegial groups operate wherever these norms constrain professional learning and keep the focus on students and their learning (Ertem, 2021). Like students, teachers need multiple opportunities to learn, including trying things out in their own classrooms, inquiring into their effects, modifying their approach and/or repeating this cycle until improvement is evident. Since many of professional learning now takes place in ongoing school or cluster-based professional learning communities, important challenges for researchers on professional learning is to identify leadership practices which not only build collegiality but build type of collegiality that remains focused on effect of teaching on student learning (Karakose et al., 2023).

In dimension 5, the focus is creating a physical and social environment that makes it possible for teachers to teach and students to focus on, enjoy and/or succeed in their learning. The work of creating a safe and orderly school is fundamentally about increasing the physical, emotional and cognitive engagement of students by meeting their needs for caring relationships, and for control over and/or success in their learning (Mohamed et al., 2023). Students' engagement with school, particularly attendance, is strongly affected by whether they judge it to be physically and psychologically safe and whether they feel that most of their teachers care about them (Mastura et al., 2021). It is affected by strength of parent-school ties (Paais & Pattiruhu, 2020). Leadership of higher performing schools is distinguished by high social expectations incorporated within clear, fair, consistently enforced discipline routines and by high levels of trust between students, teachers, leaders and parent community (Kloutsiniotis & Mihail, 2020).

Although average effect of this leadership dimension is small (Sharif & Ghodoosi, 2022), it provides a foundation for all the rest. In the absence of a school climate conducive to learning, educational improvement is unlikely (Rabkin & Frein, 2021). If student management policies and procedures are disconnected from quality of curriculum and instruction, result is likely to be increase using external incentives and sanctions to get the students to engage in alienating activities. If leaders understand how students experience their classes, how trust develops between teachers and the students, and/or how good teaching fosters students' engagement and/or success, then student management policies and/or processes are more likely to serve educational values. Schools with clear, consistent routines foster the student learning by increasing students' opportunities to learn (Saleem et al., 2021). Students' opportunities to learn are reduced by absence from school or class, by losing time at start and end of lessons, and by student misbehaviour. They are increased by quality and/or consistency of routines used to foster attendance, prompt starts to lessons, and on-task classroom behaviour, as well as by features of teaching and/or curriculum that were outlined under Dimensions 3 and 4 (Sharif & Ghodoosi, 2022).

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research design

Emanates from a constructivist, this study explores complex interplay between transformational leadership, teacher performance and systemic challenges as applied to the learning theory in the interpretivist notion, represents untruth about ways individual learn (Ling & Ling, 2017). This study utilise case study to describe and clarify the complex interplay between transformational leadership, teacher performance and systemic challenges (Dey, 2003). Case study was, therefore, used for in-depth exploration of an actual case (Creswell & Creswell, 2017) and to explore the complex interplay between transformational leadership, teacher performance, and/or systemic challenges in Oshana Region in Namibia.

Participants

Using Oshana directorate of education's latest statistics of 2025, a population of 20 educational leaders from 20 schools in junior/senior primary, junior and senior secondary schools in Oshana Region utilised. Based on Oshana regional directorate, many schools are poorly underperformed (Shapaka, 2024b; United Nations Children's Fund [UNICEF] 2015) leading to poor school performance. Educational leaders were chosen for this study because they are the main pillars of school optimisation who are directly involved in organising, managing, and leading schools, they are mostly held responsible for spearheading schools. They appear to play integral and pivotal role in influencing delivery of quality education.

Sampling

Criterion purposeful sampling was used, based on the researcher exposure to, engagement of 20 leaders from 20 schools in Oshana Region. According to Oshana directorate of education's latest statistics of 2025, there are five Circuits in Oshana Region; they are Eheke, Oluno, Ompundja, Onamutai and Oshakati circuits. The researcher selected four educational leaders per Circuit.

Data collection

Data was collected through the interview schedule, field notes and open-ended questionnaire to find out participants' views on complex interplay between transformational leadership, teacher performance and systemic challenges in Oshana Region in Namibia. Data was collected using interview schedule in which the same interview schedule was used to find participants' views on complex interplay between transformational leadership, teacher performance, and/or systemic challenges in Oshana Region in Namibia. The study used interview schedule with written list of questions which were covered during the interview sessions and administered to participants. The same interview schedule was used for participants; however indication showed whether answers were given by participants in junior/senior primary, and junior/senior secondary to give another dimension to research, possible findings and recommendations. For this purpose, open-ended questionnaire was utilised in this regard. The more open-ended question, the better, as researcher listened carefully to what participants said or did in their life settings (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Field notes were taken during interview sessions.

Procedure

After all the required permission were sought and granted, all instruments were pilot tested and re-adjusted. Participants were interviewed individually because they have come from different schools, and every participant is different.

Data analysis

In this study, data were analysed using thematic analysis, typological analysis, content analysis utilising Atlas.ti (Leedy & Ormrod, 2023). Categories pertaining to complex interplay between transformational leadership, teacher performance and/or systemic challenges in Oshana Region were used to create patterned and thematic meaning from qualitative data. Major themes were derived from questions of the study, and a description of each theme was done, analysed and interpreted critically and objectively.

Trustworthiness

Researcher used member checking to determine accuracy of qualitative findings through taking the themes back to participants and determining whether participants felt that they were accurate. This study was interpretive, the researcher was self-effective about his role in research, how he interpreted findings and how his background has shaped the interpretation of data (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Researcher triangulated different data sources of information from interview schedule, open-ended questionnaire and field notes to strengthen the depth of its findings as data from one source supported by data from another source. Researcher examined each information source and found evidence to support themes, ensured that study was accurate. The researcher checked transcripts to ensure they did not contain apparent mistakes made during transcriptions, compared data with codes as well as wrote memos about codes and their definitions.

Ethical consideration

After all the required permission were sought and granted, researcher sent a letter to participants informing them about the information concerning the study. This process was done to avoid the reality and/or the appearance of coercion. Confidentiality was maintained and participants were informed of the rationale, recording, transcriptions and/or safekeeping of audio-taped interviews. Ethical measures were done through making sure that participants have signed informed consent, ensuring privacy in subsequent interviews, guarding against manipulating the participants during data collection, reporting processes. Anonymity, confidentiality was observed when reporting on utterances, and/or narratives of participants. Participants' names were replaced by pseudonyms to protect participants' identity. Participation was voluntary.

Findings

This section presents findings on complex interplay between transformational leadership, teacher performance and/or systemic challenges. The section comprises views of 20 educational leaders who participated in this study. Some participant responses were summarised and/or presented in descriptive forms, others were reported verbatim and presented in italics.

Leadership strategies and teacher performance

The theme presented in this section is derived from the thematically analysed data obtained from the interviews, open-ended questionnaires and field notes, with 20 selected educational leaders from Oshana Region. The theme is on complex interplay between transformational leadership, teacher performance and/or systemic challenges. It is worth-noting that the theme relates to the manner in which the interplay between transformational leadership and measures of teacher performance could be constructed and developed to find interplay between them. In this study, researcher has to determine whether educational leaders understand interplay between them. This was done to respond to the question: What complex interplay exists between transformational leadership, teacher performance and systemic challenges in Oshana Region? Responses showed that educational leaders play critical roles in leadership of schools. For example one educational leader at senior secondary phase said:

"School leaders share vision, mission and purpose with all stakeholders."

Another educational leader at junior secondary phase said:

"School leaders engage in collaborative discussions, redefining compelling vision."

One educational leader at senior primary phase, when asked on the complex interplay between leadership practice and teacher performance, said:

"Educational leaders share decision-making process with all stakeholders."

Moreover, educational leaders said that the complex interplay between leadership practice and teacher performance affect the teaching and learning process. One educational leader at senior secondary phase said:

"School leaders define roles, responsibilities, distribute across multiple levels of organisation."

One educational leader at junior secondary phase said:

"Educational leaders foster and promote collaborative learning."

Another educational leader at senior primary phase, when asked on complex interplay between leadership practice and teacher performance, said:

"School leaders distribute roles and responsibilities to professional learning communities."

One educational leader at senior secondary phase expressed this view as follows:

"School leaders Invest in continuous professional development for staff members."

Another educational leader at junior primary phase said:

"School leadership acknowledge and celebrate contributions from stakeholders."

One educational leader at senior secondary phase said:

"Educational leaders encourage experimentation, learning from failures, adjustment."

Another educational leader at senior primary phase said:

Educational leaders play role in determining students' academic performance

One educational leader at junior secondary phase said:

Educational leaders create conducive environments for teaching and learning

Another educational leader at senior primary phase, when asked on complex interplay between leadership practice and teacher performance, said:

They share responsibilities across ranks, support inclusive school community

Moreover, educational leaders said that the complex interplay between leadership practice and teacher performance affect the teaching and learning process. One educational leader at senior secondary phase said:

They motivate educators and students to do better

Another educational leader at junior secondary phase said:

They focus more on instructions to improve teaching, learning and curriculum delivery

One educational leader at junior primary phase said:

Leadership roles and responsibilities are spread across school members

Leadership strategies used by educational leaders in Oshana Region

In order to determine leadership strategies used by educational leaders, the researcher asked the question: Which leadership strategies do school leaders use in Oshana Region? The responses of educational leaders indicated that educational leaders use various leadership strategies to monitor school programs. One educational leader at senior secondary phase said:

"They are used to foster a culture of open communication."

Moreover, educational leaders said that educational leaders use leadership strategies to monitor teachers to implement curriculum. One educational leader at junior primary phase said:

"They are used to allocate additional resources, establish communication channels."

Another educational leader at junior secondary phase, when asked on the prevailing leadership strategies, said:

"They are used to establish mechanisms for feedback and evaluation."

One educational leader at senior primary phase said:

"They are used to offer continuous leadership development opportunities."

Another educational leader at junior primary phase said:

"They are used to foster collaboration, communication, and adaptive skills."

One educational leader at senior secondary phase said:

"They are used to devise best leadership practices."

Another educational leader at junior primary phase said:

"They are used to direct curriculum development, teaching quality and student outcomes."

One educational leader at junior secondary phase said:

"They are used to prioritise development of curriculum, continuous assessment."

Another educational leader at senior primary phase said:

They are used to promote professional development for teachers

Leadership strategies which enhance teacher performance

In order to determine existing leadership strategies that enhance teacher performance, researcher asked the question: Which existing leadership strategies that enhance teacher performance? The responses from educational leaders indicated that educational leaders use varieties of leadership strategies to monitor teaching and learning process and to ensure learners academic performance are taking care off. One educational leader at junior primary phase said:

"They are used to leverage collective expertise of stakeholders."

Another educational leader at senior secondary phase said:

"They are used to empower teachers and recognise their agency."

Moreover, one educational leader at senior primary phase said:

"They are used to leverage multiple educators' collaborative approach."

Another educational leader at senior secondary phase said:

"They are used to involve various stakeholders in decision-making process."

One educational leader at senior primary phase said:

"They are used to foster a culture of continuous improvement and innovation."

Another educational leader at junior secondary phase said:

"They are used to adapt curriculum standards, educational policies."

One educational leader at senior secondary phase said:

"They create a sense of shared responsibility and ownership over educational outcomes."

Moreover, one educational leader at junior primary phase said:

"They foster a collaborative environment, enhance professional development of teachers."

Another educational leader at senior secondary phase said:

"They leverage technology, integrate leadership development into teacher training."

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Moreover, one educational leader at junior primary phase said:

"They empower teachers and staff to take on leadership roles."

One educational leader at senior secondary phase said:

"They promote greater collaboration and shared responsibility."

Another educational leader at junior primary phase, when asked on prevail leadership strategies, said:

They give teachers autonomy to be involved in decision-making processes

One educational leader at senior primary phase said:

They empower teachers to commit to their roles

Teacher performance which associates with leadership strategies

In order to establish existing teacher performance which associates with leadership strategies, the researcher asked question: What existing teacher performance which associates with leadership strategies? One educational leader at junior primary phase said:

"A shared leadership lead to high level of ownership amongst educators."

Another educational leader at senior secondary phase said:

"Autonomy extends beyond classroom to curriculum development."

One educational leader at junior primary phase said:

"Shared vision serves as a compass, directing efforts of various stakeholders."

Another educational leader at senior primary phase said:

 "Teacher autonomy, collective responsibility, and shared vision lead to excellence."

Moreover, one educational leader at junior secondary phase said:

 "Valuable insights lead to student learning, engagement, and overall well-being."

One educational leader at senior primary phase said:

 "Positive leadership effect is linked to teacher efficacy and student achievement."

Another educational leader at senior secondary phase said:

"Inspired teachers fosters environment for collaboration and collective success."

One educational leader at junior primary phase said:

"Compelling vision motivates staff through individualised consideration."

Another educational leader at senior secondary phase said:

"Innovative teaching practices create positive school climate."

Moreover, one educational leader at junior primary phase said:

"Teacher professional growths enhance and strengthen teaching quality."

One educational leader at junior secondary phase said:

"Managing job demands, providing adequate resources foster teaching quality."

Another educational leader at senior primary phase said:

"Positive organisational climate enhance employees' performance and well-being."

One educational leader at senior secondary phase said:

High-performance work systems enhance employees' commitment and performance

One educational leader at junior primary phase said:

Positive school culture create supportive environment that enhances both teacher motivation and student learning

3. DISCUSSION

This section discusses findings on the complex interplay between transformational leadership, teacher performance and/or systemic challenges. Discussion is based on views of 20 educational leaders participated in this study.

Leadership strategies and teacher performance

This study explored complex interplay between transformational leadership, teacher performance and/or systemic challenges in Oshana Region in Namibia. The main question answered by study was: What complex interplay exists between transformational leadership, teacher performance and systemic challenges in Oshana Region? The paramount issues which emanated from findings were that there is a complex interplay between transformational leadership, teacher performance and systemic challenges that have direct effects on schools performance, teachers' performance which results in positive or negative student academic performance. Researchers have found that use of leadership strategies allow learning-focused process which foster improvement in learning and teaching (Ertem, 2021). Studies have found that leadership role of educational leaders is very crucial in advancing student academic achievement (Simms et al., 2023).

Another crucial issue which emanated from findings were that leadership strategies promote and enhance teaching and learning. Studies have found that while some teachers enjoy teaching and learning process, others are frustrated due to insufficient preparation and/or training workshops, unclear procedures, poor academic literacy skills, lack of commitment shown by some students (Buyukgoze et al., 2022; Chen, 2020). All four leadership practices are associated with academic performance: defining school mission, managing of school instructional program, promoting a positive learning climate, advancing teachers' interests (Smith & Holloway, 2020).

Leadership strategies used by educational leaders in Oshana Region

In this study, the primary issue encompassing these findings is that this complex interplay is attributed to how leadership strategies are used to monitor the school programs, thus confirming similar findings of previous research study such as Buyukgoze et al. (2022). The sample of this study has revealed that educational leaders use leadership strategies to give command to school population. That said, it should be noted that concern in this study was on the complex interplay between transformational leadership, teacher performance and systemic challenges not vise-versa (cf. Methodology Section). However, a possible interpretation for this finding could be that there are arrangements on ministerial mission, vision statement within educational setting (Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture [MoEAC], 2023). As a result of top-down cascades of ministerial mission, vision, and policies, many educational leaders may have difficulty to adapt or change status quo. However, anomalies like these should be addressed by involving various stakeholders in planning, implementation, and evaluation and reflection process.

Leadership strategies which enhance teacher performance

Another profound issue noteworthy from the study is that educational leaders use leadership strategies to monitor teaching and learning and to ensure that learner academic performance is taking care off. This finding is consistent with previous studies which assessed the usefulness of leadership which empower teachers, promote well-being, provide lifelong learning opportunities and improve quality of students' learning (Tan et al., 2020). Findings point that leadership foster a collaborative learning and/or continuous improvement. This finding correlates with study by Tarro et al. (2020) on the importance of effective communication, cooperation and/or trust within group.

Teacher performance which associates with leadership strategies

Most obvious findings emerge from study is that this complex interplay is attributed to factors that determine choice of the leadership strategies. Studies indicate that educational leaders' roles play important roles on school performance and organisational environment (Tortia et al. 2022). Leadership strategies positively correlate with welcome environments and

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culture of continuous improvement (Karakose et al., 2023). Several studies have found positive relationship between transformational, student performance and/or teaching and learning practices (Chen & Zhang, 2022).

This section discusses interplay between transformational leadership, teacher performance and systemic challenges, gives insights into issues faced by educational leaders and/or seek potential solutions that could scaffold them in overcoming them. These leadership strategies tend to shape institutional culture, faculty morale and student outcomes, with context-specific implications on performance of schools in Oshana Region in Namibia.

In Namibian educational context, leadership strategies such as transformational leadership affect staff, and student performance, fosters educational environment which encourages collaboration, innovation, and/or shared responsibility, empower staff, support sense of community, and lead to positive outcomes in terms of student engagement and/or learning. Thus, school leaders should integrate elements of transformational leadership to support staff, enhance job satisfaction and promote the student success. A more effective leadership practice should not be limited to one strategy, but rather combination of strategy components which leverages strengths of each (Zhou et al., 2021). In Namibia, integrative leadership approach encompasses compassion of inclusivity of transformational leadership, could best address current and emerging issues faced by schools. These eclectic approaches align with the nation's aspiration for a progressive, inclusive, and/or adaptable educational landscape which might thrive amidst rapid societal and digital changes (MoEAC, 2023).

4. CONCLUSION

Based on analysis of findings, and design used in this study, it can be concluded that leadership has effect on academic performance of teachers that affect the schools and teachers' performance which result in positive and negative student academic outcomes. It was evident from this study that educational leaders should take teachers academic performance very seriously.

In view of the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made for practice: First, educational leaders should use leadership practice to improve and enhance performance, teacher academic performance and/or learner academic performance. Second, educational leaders should use leadership practice to strike the balance between leadership practices and avoid manipulation of one construct against other one. This in turn will help them to strike balance between authority of teacher expertise of curriculum and positional authority of educational leaders. Last, the study recommends an urgent need for educational leaders to study and learn application of leadership practices; apply them to optimise success and/or enhance teaching and learning which result on student academic outcomes.

This study has several limitations which should be taken into consideration. Only 20 educational leaders were selected for interview sessions and open-ended questionnaire in which the complex interplay between transformational leadership, and teachers' performance was feature of interest. Researcher utilised criterion purposeful sampling technique and/or only educational leaders with seven years of experience and/or above in principalship were selected. This selection may have influenced response. Researcher attempts to explore complex interplay between transformational leadership, and teacher performance in which educational leaders were influential individuals in schools. Responses might be affected by this. The sample size includes public school educational leaders volunteered to participate in the study with exclusion of private educational leaders. Therefore, question of generalisability to private educational leaders is a limit. Its scope is confined to Oshana Region in Namibia which narrows generalisability of its findings thus limits broader applicability of its findings. However, the study applied multi method in which more than one data collection techniques and/or corresponding data analysis procedure utilised to strengthen analysis and possibly to enhance robustness of the findings. Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made for future research: First, future research should be undertaken to establish correlation between leadership practices and/or student performance since this was beyond scope of this study. Second, future research should conduct longitudinal comparative studies across different regions and exploring the complex interplay between transformational leadership, and student performance.

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