Exploring school principals' leadership practices of serving the learners

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Abstract

There is an emerging interest in applying servant leadership theory in leading the school. Little is known about school principals' practices of Servant leadership to learners. The purpose of this paper is to explore school principals' practices of servant leadership focusing on learners. The information is derived from a large project focused on the practices of servant leadership among school principals. This paper is situated within the interpretive paradigm and employs a qualitative approach to comprehend the leadership practices of school principals in serving learners. Data was generated through interviews with school principals and teachers from two Lesotho high schools. We held individual face-to-face interviews with each of the two principals. One focus group of teachers was interviews from each school. Each focus group was made up of eight teachers. The two school principals were interviewed individually The Findings suggest that school principals served learners in various ways. Findings indicate that learners were served through motivation, cherishing of self-efficacy, development of child friendly school environment, and enhancing high academic performance. We argue that servant leadership necessitates a paradigm shift in the relationship between formal leaders, such as the principal, and learners. School principals must prioritize learners, placing them at the center, where they become more important than the principal as a leader.

Keywords

Cultural historical activity theory, leadership, school principal, servant leadership.

INTRODUCTION

In some schools, there is poor service delivery, authoritarian leadership, and incompetent leadership, poor coordination of school activities, low team spirit, and lack of delegation of duties. Bossy leadership portrayed by school principals repels teachers, learners and other school stakeholders, and harms relationships in the schools [1]. To curb the challenges faced by school principals, servant leadership is a tool that could be used for caring for others and fostering required behavior [2], empowerment [3] and serving others [4].

The literature about the concept of servant leadership spans studies across the globe, and these include countries such as Turkey, United States of America (USA), Canada and Germany [5]–[10].

Being of service to learners requires a paradigm shift in thinking about the principals' leadership practices. To serve learners, the principal is instrumental in creating positive academic performance through motivation [11]. The principal is mandated to serve learners in such a manner positively impacts them and contributes significantly to their life [12].

It is explained in a study that was conducted in India by Sigh and Ryah [2] found that the servant leadership approach has a significant impact on learners. This impact is evident in the improvement of learners' academic performance. In essence servant leaders empower learners [13].

In a study conducted in Arizona, the school principal practices servant leadership by serving learners. This is done by enhancing their morale. Morale of learners increased when school principals concentrated on individual needs of learners, enhanced self-confidence of learners, and advanced sense of ownership among them. This was achieved by engaging attributes of servant leadership like listening, support, patience and praise [14].

Literature has indicated that one way of practicing servant leadership by serving learners is done by motivating them to perform better academically. In the study that was conducted in USA, for instance, learners were motivated by focusing on their personal development, placing their needs as priority number one, offering them ample opportunities to succeed and grow, as well as engaging in a learner-centered approach to teaching [7]. In Hong Kong, China, the motivation of learners was increased by encouragement and support from the school principal [15].

In the study that was conducted in the United Kingdom (UK), school principals increased motivation of learners by enhancing spiritual growth, professional development, and emotional advancement [16]. In Ethiopia, the motivation of learners increased through caring provided by the school principal, developing a collegial relationship, and creating a highly supportive environment within a service-oriented environment [17].

However, literature on servant leadership at school level is an emerging phenomenon and focus. The phenomenon is about the type of leadership that exists in Lesotho that does not respond to the qualities of servant leadership [1], [18], [19]. Hence, this study conceptualized and explored servant leadership from a school context, with the purpose of eliciting insights about possibilities of better performance from all role-players. It is clear from the above discussion that the studies conducted were not of the principals' servant leadership practices. My study focused on school principals' practices of servant leadership, specifically on how school principals, through this approach to leadership, served

different learners at school stakeholders. The school principal, as a leader, has a direct impact on learners, as they are the followers upon whom leadership is exercised.

Theoretical framework
The theoretical framework adopted in this paper consists of theories namely: Servant leadership (SL) and Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT). Servant leadership is used as a guide in interpreting the leadership practices of the school principal and how the school principal serves the learners as a leader. CHAT is used in interpreting the leadership practices in the cultural and historical context of the schools and the country. McMillan and Schumacher [20] observe that the results obtained through the engagement of the theoretical framework are interpreted in light of the theoretical framework engaged.

Servant leadership is a philosophy and a set of practices aimed at enriching the lives of individuals by creating a more caring work environment, and building a better organizational structure. It is debilitating for those who are feeling trapped and helpless concerning their ability to help others. Thus, the servant leadership approach is an avenue where all altruistic individuals can contribute to building a better society. Principles of behavior, acknowledgement of internal and external influences on ethical leadership, emphasis on integrity and astute decision-making, are pillars of effective servant leadership [8], [21]. In addition, it is a concept of leadership that recognizes the interests of the learners over the leader's personal interests, as it prioritizes serving the followers through a special leadership style that makes an organization harmonious [10].

CHAT is a theoretical framework that provides a lens through which the understanding of human cognition is realized. This is particularly when examining dialectical relationships that exist among people in a community or society, tools they engage with, as well as goals set. These are influenced and fashioned by social culture, social structure and history of the given social [22]. Stetsenko and Arievitch [23] explain that CHAT is an approach that allows the researcher to deal with individual and social dimensions in a non-dichotomizing manner, and offers grounds for progress of conceptual development.

Both servant leadership and CHAT are concerned with collaborating towards a common goal for schools or society, and emphasize cooperation among individuals [7], [22], [24], [25]. This shows that the school stakeholders have different roles to play for the school to accomplish its mission. They all complement each other for the fulfillment of the school mandate [8], [21], [25].

The servant leader tries by all means to build the community by emphasizing the mutual relationship that exists in the community or society. People rely on one another for proper learning to take place [24]. Noland and Richards [7] posit that the school principal is to be acquainted with the notion that the community is independent, and that teachers and learners work hand in glove to benefit the under-privileged community. The school, as a community, should cultivate engaged stakeholders and emphasize the mutual relationships among the school's stakeholders. One person needs others. People are empowered with different skills that benefit others if used well.

RESEARCH METHOD

This paper adopted the qualitative research approach to explore school principals' practices of servant Servant leadership in two Lesotho high schools. The qualitative research approach is explained by McMillan and Schumacher [20] as the gathering of data was done naturally. The generated data is in the form of words (descriptive). The study also used case study design. The cases studied were based on types of leadership that prevail in Lesotho. Case study uses multiple data sources found in social settings to explain the phenomenon [20]. The multiple sources used in this study were focus group interviews and observations.

Case study deals with one phenomenon to get a deeper understanding regardless of the number of persons involved [26]. The case discusses a type of leadership in Lesotho that does not align with the qualities of servant leadership [1], [18], [19]. The cases are the types of leadership in Lesotho.

Sampling

A sample is the set of individuals or participants from whom the data is going to be generated [20]. It can be selected from the large group of participants identified as the population. I

employed purposeful sampling; where McMillan and Schumacher [20] state that the researcher selects particular participants from the population who are informative of the topic under scrutiny. This is based on the researcher's knowledge of the population and who would provide the best information to address the purpose of the research. Sampling is also important for choosing the site and participants. The population for this study included two high schools, each with eight teachers and one school principal. These schools are located in the same center in the Maseru district of Lesotho. Mr. Tsoekere is the school principal of Matlama High School, while Mrs. Letsoai is the school principal of Makaota High School. The names are not real names. Teachers were also included as participants.

Data generation

Meyrick [27] asserts that a good qualitative research needs to contain sufficient content concerning how data will be produced, with much description of the context. This allows transparency to assist readers to make informed decisions. The study employed different methods to generate data [20] as is permissible within case study methodology. Multiple techniques yielded different insights concerning the topic, which increased the credibility of the findings [20]. I used focus group interviews, individual interviews and observations as data generation techniques to ensure triangulation and reviewing of information holistically and comprehensively [28]. The themes that were discussed are enhancing learners' motivation, cherishing self-efficacy in learners, promoting high academic performance of learners and nurturing child-friendly environment.

Data analysis

Data analysis is described as a systematic, dilated examination of relevant contexts of a certain body of materials with the purpose of classifying themes, patterns and biases [26]. The generated data was summarized at the end of each day after being generated. It was then classified into themes that emerged during discussions. The patterns and biases were also considered, while analyzing information.

Trustworthiness

In qualitative research, the researcher is required to ensure trustworthiness of the study. In qualitative research, trustworthiness and

credibility is achieved and tested through the engagement of multiple methods of data collection [20]. In this study, I used interviews, observations, and focus groups. This was done to assure the trustworthiness and credibility of the data produced. The three instruments that I engaged complemented one another to strengthen the trustworthiness and credibility of the study.

Ethical consideration
Donnelly, Dallat and Fitzmaurice [29] state that, when involving people in conducting research, ethical consideration is of prime importance. When conducting research, the researcher has to adhere to the ethics pertaining to the research [30]. Ethics are the agreed-upon standards that ensure that the researchers have explicitly considered the needs and the consensus of people who are engaged in the study on the basis of trust. The researcher must have the participants' well-being in mind.

I had to explain to participants about the procedures that were to be followed when conducting the research. I asked them to sign consent forms and they were to remain anonymous. I explained to them that they were at liberty to withdraw at any time they felt like, and being involved in the study was free and voluntary. I asked permission to conduct the study from the Lesotho Ministry of Education and Training and also from the school principals of the participants' schools to conduct research at their schools. I also applied for ethical clearance from the university (UFS).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION
This section is organized according to the themes that emerged from the data. The school principal of Matlama High School is referred to as Mr. Tsoekere, while the principal of Makaota High School is denoted as Mrs. Letsoai. These are not real names.

Enhancing the motivating of learners
The issue of motivation is important, and should not be ignored because it is a process of initiating human activities that are directed towards obtaining the set organizational goals. Viewed from that perspective, the education system and the school should motivate learners adequately, aiming at activity effectiveness and the quality education provision, which is the end product of the educational institution [31].

The general discussion of the focus group feels that Mr Tsoekere, School principal of Matlama high school motivates learners to serve them. The commitment he had was a source and pillar for motivation. The participants highlighted that motivation was a driving force that helped the learners to be focused and have positive mental attitudes that drove them to have maximum academic performance of learners. One of the focus group members claimed this during the discussion, and said:

The school principal formed science and debate clubs where learners learn from one another and increase competition among them. The school principal encourages educational drips where learners learn outside the classrooms. This motivates learners even more and performs well academically. They are involved in decision-making. Before making development at school, the school principal has time to ask learners what they would like to be developed at school. The school principal listens to learners in their suggestions. They are also told of what is going to take place at school. This motivates them more.

Mr Tsoekere involved the learners in the decision-making processes. This involvement of learners was empowering for them. Empowering the learners is a sign of Servant leadership practice. Olesia, Namusonge, and Iravo [32] contend that empowerment could be exercised by engaging learners in decision-making and planning.

In the same context of servant leadership practice, specifically in motivating learners, the Manong focus group from Makaota High School reflected that the school principal, Mrs. Letsoai, effectively motivated the learners to excel academically. She rewarded learners when they did well in their studies. The focus group emphasized that motivated learners tended to perform well academically. One member of the focus group declared this during the discussion:

The school principal asks learners about their talents and areas of interest that they would like to develop. This motivates them to perform well even in those challenging learning areas. The school principal is engaging in creativities and designated learning areas. This motivates learners who

are creative to excel in academic performance generally. The school principal facilitates competitions among the classes quarterly. Learners compete among themselves in classes before they could compete with other schools.

In serving the learners, Mrs Letsoai used various ways of motivating them. She challenged them to realize and unleash their potential in improving their academic performance. This is a commitment to developing others, which is in line with the principles of Servant leadership. This principal created the opportunities that challenged learners for academic and personal development [7], [24].

Cherishing self-efficacy in learners
One of the duties of the school principal is to ensure that learners develop skills that will assist them in coping with the challenges they face when learning. Developing learners' self-efficacy is one of the responsibilities and duties of the school principals. The findings from the focus group reflected that the school principals cherished the self-efficacy of learners.

Self-efficacy is described as an individual's own judgment of their capabilities, organized to execute the required actions to achieve the desired performance. It is an individual's judgment concerning own ability to attain educational goals successfully [33]. Learner self-efficacy is the catalyst that influences learner's resistance, enthusiasm, and successful learning behavior, which results in learner's achievements [34].

The discussion in the Matlaka focus group of Matlama High School surfaced that the school principal, Mr Tsoekere loved the efficiency of learners in his school. self-efficacy was nourished when Mr Tsoekere brought the teaching aids and other resources, such as textbooks, stationery and equipment, to learners, to mention just a few. The Matlaka focus group also said that self-efficacy is developed through the formation of teamwork advocated and encouraged by the school principal; Mr Tsoekere. The focus group reported that Mr Tsoekere always encourages learners to work in teams and in pairs or groups. One member of the focus group declared this during the discussion:

Mr Tsoekere develops self-efficacy of learners by encouraging them to try new

methods in learning and have different perspectives in tackling the challenge. Self-efficacy is also developed through the formation of discussion groups that encourage teamwork and facilitate interaction among learners. Mr Tsoekere is capitalizing on the interest of individual learner for developing self-efficacy of learners. It is in this peer model that learners make their own choices on how best they could learn. This develops learners' self-efficacy.

Teamwork is one of Mr Tsoekere's servant leadership strategies in developing learners' self-efficacy. For instance, in teamwork, learners discuss and interact with one another and generate ideas and concepts. The notion of teamwork aroused learners' interests, and, consequently, learners developed self-efficacy. Mr Tsoekere developed teamwork among the learners. Learners work as a team learning from one another with much interaction that nurtures self-efficacy.

Sharing the same sentiments, the Manong focus group in Makaota High School noted that the school principal practiced Servant leadership, through the development of the self-efficacy of learners.

Mrs Letsoai was committed to developing learners' self-efficacy. She made them build confidence in learning, which improved self-efficacy. It is explained that learners became more content and able to learn with confidence when they had self-efficacy that the school principal developed. For instance, one group mentioned that self-efficacy improved the academic performance of learners. One of the group members claimed this during the discussion, saying:

Mrs Letsoai as a servant leader is developing the self-efficacy of learners by encouraging them to work together in discussion groups and study together while they are at home during the weekend. She created whatsapp groups that are intended to facilitate the discussions. Learners have ample time to engage in discussion groups where various topics are discussed. These platforms develop learners' self-efficacy. She also listens to learners when they have concerns.

What can be deduced from the extract above is that Mrs Letsoai focused more on developing teamwork to enhance self-efficacy of learners. As a Servant leader, she needs to assist the learners to cherish self-efficacy and achieve their full potential through acknowledgement of characteristics and interest of the learners [35]. Mrs Letsoai developed a teamwork spirit that enhanced self-efficacy. Working together as a team helped learners to learn from one another and that assisted them develop to his or her full potential, which culminated in self efficacy. Learning from one another constitutes a spectrum of activity, which is one quality of CHAT, which is one of the two theories that provide a theoretical framework of this study [36].

Self-efficacy allows learners to be more engaged in their duties. They become more productive, enjoying their work to the maximum and are more efficient and involved in their work [37]. This is in line with the findings that self-efficacy assisted learners in learning the required behavior. The end result is the improved academic performance of learners.

Promoting high academic performance of learners

Andriani, Kusumawati, and Kristiawan [38] posit that the academic performance is best described as the level of achievement that results in the implementation of the given task in order to achieve the school's goals. Promoting the high academic performance of the learners is regarded as important in achieving the school's goals. This is because all school stakeholders surely had goals that aimed to achieve set targets or goals.

The school principal has much to do in leading the school. (S)he has many responsibilities and duties. One of the duties is to ensure that learners perform so well academically. This is achieved by providing the resources to learners as in textbooks, learning materials and infrastructure. Therefore, serving the learners had to do with ensuring that their learning environment was made supportive of their learning.

The discussion of the participants in Matlaka focus group of Matlama High School focus group revealed that the school principal, Mr Tsoekere was putting much effort into improving the school's academic performance. The school was historically renowned for under-performance. Findings indicated that the academic performance was low before the arrival of the

current school principal, Mr Tsoekere. He worked tirelessly to improve the academic performance of the learners. It further explained that he provided learners with resources that make learning easy. One member of the focus group claimed:

The school principal, Mr Tsoekere is always encouraging teachers to set learning objectives of lesson plans to be learnt by the learners to be aligned with the target and the standards for academic performance that are set by Ecol, and have study schedules and guides for learners. He is always preaching to us that we are to be in class on time, because this improves the academic performance of learners.

In order to operationalize the national objective in a manner that promotes academic performance, Mr Tsoekere had to work hand in hand with the teachers. Hence, he encouraged them to set the learning objectives to respond to the national objectives. This is one of servant Servant leadership's qualities, which puts others' interest before the leader's own. In the context of this school, an effective teaching and learning environment served the learners' interests. Therefore, turning the school's fortunes around, can be regarded as practicing Servant leadership; at least, that is what the participants in this study believed.

In sharing the same sentiment, Matlaka teachers' focus group suggested that the school principal, Mrs Letsoali was promoting high academic performance of learners. The participants had dissimilar views on how she promoted academic performance of learners. it is argued that she had meetings annually with teachers and learners as well as parents/caregivers to discuss the performance of learners, as well as coming up with the solution to assist the learners who were under performing. Findings indicated that learners were encouraged by the principals to work collaboratively to improve their academic performance. One member of the focus group declares:

The school principal, Mrs Letsoai communicates effectively to promote the spirit of high academic performance of learners. She convinces learners, even the slow ones teenage in activities that improves the academic performance by being there for

them when they need her. She is a mother in principle. She improves the school infrastructure for learners.

In serving the learners, the principal of Matlaka high school motivated and inspired the learners to invest in academic work. She used persuasive language that convinced her audience. She communicated effectively with the learners; that is why she was able to implement her planned activities. For instance, minimizing the activities per learners per hour was a sign of taking care of the learners; she was serving the interests of the learners. It is worth noting that serving learners' interests is one of the principles of Servant leadership, which is the main focus of the current study. She used motherly love and care to make things happen.

The findings from the teachers' focus group revealed that the improvement of school infrastructure played a significant role in enhancing the academic performance of learners. This became clear after Mrs Letsoai had developed the infrastructure of the school. The finding suggests that the school principal that develops the school's infrastructure contributes towards improving learners' academic performance. The computer laboratory that had been built had played a significant role in improving the academic performance. Learners have a place where they could source information on the particular topic of interest.

Nurturing a child-friendly school environment
It is the responsibility of the school principal to create an environment in the school that is child-friendly, thus serving the learners' interest. This can be done by ensuring that all what concerns the learners is taken care of. It is recorded that nurturing the child-friendly environment is one of the responsibilities of the school principal in taking care of the learners and serving the learners' interest.

Cobanoglu and Sevim [39] argue that a child-friendly school promotes the rights of learners to education, development, protection from all forms of abuse and to participate in education activities.

It surfaced from Manong focus group discussion that the school principal nurtures a child-friendly school environment. Findings indicated that Mrs Letsoai created an environment that has much focus on learners' wellbeing. The learners' needs were met,

particularly in terms of the provision of teaching and learning aids and resources such as text books. It is voiced that learners were being developed holistically. This says the spiritual, emotional, mental and physical aspects of life were catered for in the process of children's development. This is what is always advocated by the principal. This acts as serving the interests of learners from different angles. One member of the focus group claimed this along the discussion

The school principal places more focus on learners than any other person in the school. She is always telling us that the main reason why the school exists is because of learners. She is advocating that learners are to be priority number one and need to be given choices.

It is depicted from the quotation that Mrs Letsoai served the interests of the learners when she paid special focus on learners than any other person. Serving learners' interests is one of the principles of Servant leadership. The school principal served the learners and aspired to ensure that the learners' needs were met before the leader's needs could be realized. There is emphasis on putting the school principal's needs aside and focusing more on the learners' needs. The school principal was at liberty to serve learners [40], [41]. Mrs Sethole served the learners' interests by nurturing the child-friendly school.

In Matlaka's teachers' focus group, we found that the school principal as a Servant leader promoted a child-friendly environment. The principal was focusing on the learners' needs more than any other school stakeholder. The findings indicated that he (Mr Tsoekere) put more emphasis on personal development and empowerment of learners. This was done when developing a child-friendly environment at school and thus fulfilled the needs of learners. One participant from the focus group declared this during the discussion:

The school principal, Mr Tsoekere places a positive enforcement. When a learner has misbehaved, the principal keeps them after school to serve the punishment, assigning extra classwork for completion. The learner is also required to attend Saturday studies. He is always honest and telling the truth to learners.

Mr Tsoekere used positive enforcement in nurturing a child-friendly environment. That positive enforcement developed and empowered learners, and can be regarded as nurturing a child-friendly school environment. It is worth noting that empowering learners and serving their interests are servant Servant leadership principles, which also serve as a theoretical framework that direct my study.

Nurturing a child-friendly environment was also raised during the interview with Mr Tsoekere. He is actually taking an initiative in ensuring the school is becoming child-friendly. He initiated the process of turning the environment to be child-friendly. Mr Tsoekere claimed this along the interview and said:

> *I advocate for children's right in all aspects and angles. My duty is to develop and instill to teachers and parents that the children's rights are observed. I make sure that the environment in my school is doing away with health hazards and it is hospitable. I try as much as possible to stop violence in my school by inviting the police to discuss the issues that are associated with violence and their consequences.*

Children whose rights are protected and adhered are able to learn freely in a conducive environment. Mr Tsoekere is also aware of the health hazards that contribute to the disturbance of the child-friendly environment, and that is why he ensured that they were kept at a minimum.

Mrs Letsoai, the principal of Makaota High school, was also described as nurturing a child-friendly environment. She was doing all she could to sensitize and ensure that a child-friendly environment was developed in her school. She declared this during the interview:

> *In making sure that the child-friendly environment is materializing in my school. I buy teaching materials and aids, enough books for teachers and learners, but the main focus is on learners. I involve parents/caregivers in all the dealings of which they become assets in developing a child-friendly environment. The teachers are trained and are well-equipped to continue teaching learners.*

The explanation given is that the school principal nurtured a child-friendly environment by recruiting enough teachers who were properly trained for the job. The textbooks and other teaching aids were contributing factors in nurturing a child-friendly environment. Parents/caregivers formed part and parcel of the school. They were included when the school was transformed to a child friendly.

Motivating learners to excel academically

In responding to the main research question and secondary question—namely, what are the school principals' practices of servant leadership in the selected schools? And how do the teachers understand and describe the school principals' practices of servant leadership? It is suggested that one of the practices of servant leadership is enhancing the morale of learners through motivation. School principals served learners through motivation.

The findings reflected that the motivation is done by rewarding them when they are done so well academically, tutoring, having educational trips, having entertainment, offering different methods of tackling challenges. According to Sahawneh and Benuto [42], servant leadership's principles emphasize the empowerment of learners, their growth and personal development. The school principal, as a servant leader, empowers the learners to accept challenges and excel.

The focus in this practice is to serve learners' best interests. The serving is pointed to learners. The main focus here is by serving learners as recipients. Servant leadership is a follower focused in the sense. It is very much interested in followers, which in this case are learners. It is not about serving goals, or targets that are reached, rather making sure that learners' interests are served. This is the heart of servant leadership. The findings revealed that school principals from participating schools accomplished serving the interests of learners through motivation. Everything is done in the interest of learners; hence, the motivation of learners becomes a practice of servant leadership in response to both the main question and secondary question. This is based on the assumption that the leader has a profound understanding that they are a leader, consequently, they are obliged to serve [40].

Agitating learners' academic performance

The findings from teachers and school principals from the participating schools reflected that one way of increasing the morale of learners is through agitating learners' academic performance. This is in response to the main research question which read as what are the school principals' practices of servant leadership in the selected schools? And a secondary question which reads as how can the school principals' practices of servant leadership be explained.

The finding indicated that school principals wanted learners to succeed academically. It is proposed that school principals are obsessed that when results of external learners are released all learners who sit for final examinations are to pass all of them. The centre of attention is placed on learners' interests. Study schedule, mentorship, tutoring on weekends, study groups are strategies used to agitate academic performance of learners. What makes it a servant leadership practice is when placing focus on learners' success, learners must do well academically. Serving learners becomes of prime importance in empowering principals to achieve their full potential [43].

This is empowering, one principle of servant leadership. The act of empowering learners helps them to realize their full potential [43], [44].

In this particular case, school principals are not so much interested in the tribe of the school for good performance of school but rather more interested in learners, making sure that learners do well academically, as well as personal being, not even to raise the flag of the school. School principals are interested in learning as an individual. This is a servant practice. A servant leader acts as a servant to the learners, and empowers them to experience success through doing things the right way [6].

Cherishing learners' self efficacy

The findings from the participating schools indicated that school principals increased the morale of learners by developing their self-efficacy. Developing learners' self-efficacy is one of the practices of servant leadership. Findings from participating schools reflected that Self-efficacy is more on building confidence, resilience of learners. The focal point is around developing learners holistically, learners with self-efficacy are able to handle challenges well, not shy away from them. He/she is well equipped to face whatever is facing. Cherishing learners' self-efficacy is empowering them. When learners are empowered, they become wiser, healthier and more willing to accept the given responsibilities [41], [45]. Empowerment is one tenant of servant leadership.

In responding to secondary research question, how can the school principals' practices of servant leadership be explained? School principals developed self-efficacy by purchasing relevant text books, buying teaching materials and developing the school's infrastructure. It is noted that all these actions/practices are done for the betterment of learners. All what is done by the school principals are directed towards making learners better people. This is the act of being a servant to learners.

The findings also suggested that self-efficacy involves empowering learners to believe in themselves and fostering attitudes that enable them to exhibit the required behavior. This is an act of being a servant practice in the manner that it is more personal. The act is directly linked with assisting learners for inner perspective. What makes servant leadership unique is that it focuses on the needs and desires of the learners [42]. Mahembe and Engelbrich [35] observe that servant leadership brings out the best in learners.

By nurturing learners' self-efficacy, the school principal is exercising servanthood by actively putting more effort into serving learners. This is an act of servanthood—a practice undertaken by a school principal who is wholly dedicated to serving the interests of learners. Serving the interests of learners is a fundamental principle of servant leadership. The school principal, as a servant leader, possesses a deep-rooted desire to make a positive impact on the lives of those they lead [45]. The focus is not on a school or group but on individual learners. The practice is directed specifically towards learners who have the potential for development. The second question concerns the understanding and explanation of practices of servant leadership, and this is addressed by nurturing learners' self-efficacy. This also responds to the main research question, which is about the school principals' practices of servant leadership in the selected schools?

Nurturing child friendly school environment

The findings indicated that school principals from participating schools increased the morale of learners by nurturing a child-friendly school environment. This is a servant leadership practice that is done to learners. Child friendly

environment/school surfaced in the finding when the participants were responding to the main research question which is about what are the school principals' practices of servant leadership in the selected schools? And secondary questions that read as how do the school principals understand and practice servant leadership in the selected schools?

The findings suggested that a child-friendly school/environment is achieved by creating a supportive environment conducive to teaching and learning, ensuring the availability of teaching and learning materials, having qualified teachers with relevant skills, maintaining proper infrastructure, and minimizing health hazards in schools. Servant leadership creates an environment that respects children's rights. The teaching and learning processes are organized and centered according to the interests of the learners. There are protective measures such as health and safety, taken to protect the children, even against gender-based discrimination [39].

The practice of being a servant in a child friendly environment is the result of action being done for learners. The school principals are not developing the school/environment for themselves, rather having learners at the center for development. The resources and energy are directed towards improvement for learners. A school principal, as a servant leader, should put the good of those they lead over their own interests [40], [46]. This is seen when the school principals develop child-friendly schools in this study.

CONCLUSION

As a leader, the school principal is involved in numerous activities related to administering the school. She/ he is serving different stakeholders in different way. One of the stakeholders that are served is learners. the finding indicated that school principals served learners through nurturing child-friendly school, cherishing self-efficacy of learners, agitating high academic performance, motivation and some of the practices of servant leadership, such as child-friendly school, as well as decentralization of structures and devolution of decision-making powers are affected by documents, policies and guidelines from education officers or MOET (Ministry of Education and Training). The Ministry of Education provides resources the policies emanate from. I therefore, recommend that a study be conducted that involves policy makers and government officials in the MOET as participants. That should be a national study that has a possibility of influencing policy changes. In this study, the participants were teachers and school principals. Policy makers were not included as participants. As part of the recommendation I have made above, I also recommend that more studies be conducted on policy makers. This will help school principals and teachers to be empowered more by the policies that are more focused on servant leadership. The policy makers will put more focus by practicing servant leadership.

This study was a case study of two schools only. The findings indicated that only two schools were selected as case study. I recommend that large scale studies be conducted in Lesotho in order to broaden the scope and make fair generalization of the findings. I recommend that teachers be included and be the focus of the study as a way of empowering them to be servant leaders, or equipping them through servant leadership. The scope of the current study did not cover all principles on servant leadership.

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