Complex Interplay between Democratic, Collegial, Political, Participative and Systemic Challenges

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Abstract

This study explores complex interplay between democratic, collegial, political, and participative leadership and systemic challenges. Data was collected through interview schedule, field notes and open-ended questionnaire. Criterion purposeful sampling technique was used to select 20 educational leaders from 20 schools. Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis, typological analysis, content analysis and Atlas.ti. The findings have established the complex interplay between democratic, collegial, political and participative leadership and systemic challenges, leadership strategies used and complex interplay between them. Educational leaders need to study and learn the application of leadership strategies, apply leadership strategies to optimise success and enhance schools academic performance which results on student academic performance. Educational leaders should integrate elements of democratic, collegial, political and participative leadership and systemic challenges to support staff, enhance job satisfaction, and/or promote the student success. Leadership strategies have complex interplay on schools performance which affects schools, teachers' performance which could results in positive and/or negative student academic performance.

Keywords: leadership strategies, schools performance, democratic, participative leadership

1. Introduction

Leadership strategies emerge as a pivotal factor in improving schools performance, recognised as fundamental for building positive and innovative conducive schools environments to achieve quality education. Leadership strategies are critical in impacting the management of resources, overall organisational culture (Gaol, 2023), help create academic environments where teachers can thrive, and are empowered to deliver quality learning experiences (Pont, 2020).

In an era of global shifts, educational leaders today are tasked with guiding their schools through ever-changing situation by employing innovative strategies that encourage change and resilience (Akbari et al., 2024). Educational leaders need to adopt diverse approaches to address various issues and complexities faced by schools, acknowledge that providing quality education demands effective leadership practices that are both strategic and collaborative. By involving teachers in decision-making and fostering a shared sense of purpose and direction, they can create a more cohesive, engaged team that further enhance schools performance and student outcomes (Kiral, 2020).

At core of educational leaders today is the ability to empower teachers, while recognising their vital role in the educational ecosystem (Safrida et al., 2023). Educational leaders need to support teachers in maximising their impact within and out of schools, thus extending their influence to inspire the community, while bringing favourable change throughout the schools (Suyanto et al., 2022). Empowered teachers are more likely to be engaged, motivated, and satisfied with their roles, which in turn, benefits students learning (Muguna et al., 2022). Teachers should be aware of the importance of their actions, potential impact on the schools and its stakeholders, including students, parents, and the broader community (Fernandez, 2023).

The Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture has consistently strived to ensure that every school is supported by the competent leadership, regardless of its location and/or stage of development. Despite this effort, many educational leaders encounter various obstacles that hinder their ability to manage resources and lead teams (Fajar & Alias, 2020). Common barriers encounter are low levels of organisational commitment, inadequate staff management efficacy, general weaknesses in leadership competencies, which erode educational leaders' confidence and capability to make impactful decisions (Suhaili et al., 2020).

As Namibian educational sector continues to evolve, particularly in response to local and global systemic challenges, understanding, refining leadership strategies is crucial to ensure that schools remain adaptable, capable to meet students' needs (Al-Azad et al., 2024). Effective leadership not only enhances internal performance of schools, but also contributes to the broader objective of educational excellence to support Namibian's ongoing efforts to provide quality education for all students (Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture [MoEAC, 2023]).

Considering the above, this study sees an urgent need to explore the complex interplay between democratic, collegial, political, participative leadership and systemic challenges. The aim of this study was to explore the complex interplay between democratic, collegial, political, participative leadership and systemic challenges in Oshana Region in Namibia.

The overarching primary research questions the study explored were:

What complex interplay which exists between democratic, collegial, political and participative leadership and systemic challenges in Oshana Region?

Which leadership strategies do educational leaders use in Oshana Region?

Which existing leadership strategies that enhance school performance?

What existing school performance which associates with leadership strategies?

What challenges associate with the application of the leadership strategies?

Which support mechanisms used to address identified challenges?

2. Literature review

2.1 Democratic leadership practice

Democratic leadership was introduced by Kurt Lewin in 1939 which posits that leadership need to emphasise collaboration and shared decision-making (Nordin et al., 2020). Educational leaders who adopt democratic leadership often encourage open communication and collective decision-making by actively involving staff which fosters a sense of camaraderie, while balancing praise with constructive criticism. Educational leaders not

only value team member input, but they also increase team members' commitment to organisational goals by reinforcing shared responsibility for outcome (Muguna et al., 2022). Democratic leadership, which encourages inclusive decision-making and shared responsibilities, has been associated with positive student performance. This approach allows for collaboration between school leaders, teachers, other stakeholders, including students, to create supportive learning environment (Azar & Adnan, 2020). In Namibia, schools where democratic leadership is practiced often report higher levels of teacher engagement, which lead to more effective teaching methods that benefit students. Research indicates that democratic leadership tends to improve staff motivation, which can enhance students' academic engagement (Alzoraiki et al., 2023).

Democratic leadership is based on the Theory Y proposed by Douglas McGregor in 1960 which relies on decentralisation and/or delegation, job enlargement and participative in which teachers' higher-level needs of self-esteem and self-actualisation can be best continuously motivated. In democratic leadership practice, there is a significant shift from a principal-teacher relationship to a team relationship and authority is delegated to teachers (Azar & Adnan, 2020).

Democratic leadership is one of the key concepts in education system and is fundamental to the way in which schools are led. In democratic leadership, various stakeholders such as teachers, learners and parents are involved in specific aspects of school leadership. Expertise, talents and interests of teachers, learners and parents are utilised for the benefit of the school, learners and the community (Azar & Adnan, 2020). Team spirit plays a major role in democratic leadership and teachers are allowed to make their own decision. Teachers are directly involved in planning, decision-making and changes in the school. Democratic leadership integrates need, expectancy and reinforcement theory of motivation based on the assumption that teachers have a need to participate in the decision-making affecting their work (Fernandes, 2023). Teacher involvement leads to setting more challenging objectives with greater acceptance and/or commitment to reach the stated objectives. Participation in activities increases teachers' commitment, satisfaction and performance as well as motivation through interpersonal contact and trust (Hidayat et al., 2024). Trust is a fundamental element in a well-functioning school which allows school members to accept and commit to their school goals and discussions. A system of committees and meetings is effective way to ensure a winder input, participation and ownership of school affairs (Hoque & Raya, 2023).

Although democratic leadership is evident in literature, it remain questionable as to whether its impact is evident in practice of educational leaders because time necessary for a leader to build trust, commitment, interdependence and empowerment of teachers is not always available (Siraj et al., 2022). In some contexts, not every educational leader has the ability to convince teachers to make effort to perform at higher level (Alzoraiki et al., 2023). Democratic leadership focuses more on team relationship than on educational work of school management in which the quality of these relationships is not unequivocally predictive of the quality of student outcomes (Adams, 2022). Educational leaders may use the language of democratic decision-making, but it remains questionable as to how they will achieve this with limited time available and/or accountability to authority (Safrida et al., 2023). Educational leaders may use the language of decentralisation, delegation and

devolution of power to delegate administrative work to teachers that will also overburden teachers and take up their teaching times while allowing educational leaders to have more free time, situation that also lead to teachers' frustration and burnout. However, democratic leadership can be applied together with collegial, political and/or participative leadership because these leaderships also emphasise on teacher participation in power sharing in decision-making process (Mokhlis & Abdullah, 2025).

2.2 Collegial leadership practice

Collegiality emphasises that power and/or decision-making should be shared among some or all members of school who are thought to have a shared understanding about the aims of the school. School determine policy and make decision through a process of discussion leading to consensus (Pont, 2020). Teacher conferencing and collaborating are encouraged based on the assumption that something is gained when teachers work together and/or something is lost when they do not. Promoting collegial enabling relationship helps to indentify and manage un-collegial relationship display attitudes-behaviours that foster collegial relationship (Suyatno et al., 2022). Educational leaders delegate work to the groups while keeping track of pressing issues happens in the school. However, educational leaders are mandated to coordinate planning, formulation of policy and the implementation of policy at school level while teachers have expertise in curriculum they teach to implement it properly.

Collegiality is strongly normative in orientation and the advocacy of collegiality is made more on basis of prescription rather than on research-based studies of school practice. Collegiality seems to be appropriate to schools that have significant number of professional teachers who have an authority of knowledge, expertise that contrasts with educational leaders' positional authority (Adams, 2022). Collegiality posits that there are common set of values held by members of school. Collegial leadership implies that all school members should agree on objectives set, that teaching staff should have a common vision on the goals of institution (Gaol, 2023). The size of decision-making groups is important in collegial approach (Kiral, 2020). In Namibia, the size of the decision-making groups determines number of the members which constitute the school board and school management members respectively.

Collegiality encourages unity and/or coherence in schools. The teaching force and students may have feeling that they belong to schools. However, collegial leadership tend to be obscured rather than portray reality. Approach to decision-making tend to be slow and cumbersome (Fernandes, 2023). The old mind-sets have not really changed meaning that the degree of democracy has been constrained at local level. Decentralisation and macro education policy are not critically discussed at meetings and in cluster structures. The collegial literature often confuses descriptive and/or normative enterprises because the collegial idea of round table decision-making does not accurately reflect actual processes in most schools (Al-Azad et al., 2024). Collegial leadership focal point that decision is reached by consensus has been criticised because of level of influence by teachers. Decision making may be difficult to sustain because educational leaders remain accountable to external groups. This leadership's effectiveness in part depends on the attitude of teachers and even more on attitude of educational leaders. Problems arise when teachers do not accept and support the attitudes and values held by the leaders.

Collegial leadership dependence on educational leaders' support limits its validity and collegial leadership has to be evaluated in relation to the special features of the school. Collegial leadership all too often provide setting for political leadership (Nambinga & Haufiku, 2024).

2.3 Political leadership practice

Political leadership is focused on distribution of power, influence, bargaining and/or negotiations between the interest groups. Conflict is regarded as an endemic within schools and leadership is geared towards regulation of the political behaviours (Fajar & Alias, 2020). The question is not whether schools will be political but rather what kind of politics they will have. It makes much more sense to understand the political landscape and to develop skills that enable educational leaders to be fully fledged participant in inevitable give and take. Educational leaders should at all times promote and build up public image of their schools and should require that teachers do the same (Akbari et al., 2024). Every educational leader should establish and maintain good and open contact with school parents, community leaders, traditional authorities, local authorities, the inspector of education and the regional office.

Political leadership tends to focus on group activity rather than school as a whole. The so-called "baronial politic" and/or the nature of conflict between the leaders of the groups are emphasised. Conflict between barons is primarily about resources and power (Alzoraiki et al., 2023). Political leadership is concerned with interests and interest groups and stresses the prevalence of conflict in school, goals are viewed unstable, ambiguous and contested. Decisions within political arenas emerge after complex process of bargaining and negotiation (Arias et al., 2023). The concepts of power and control of resources are central to all political theories. Control of the distribution of resources is an important source of power in the schools particularly in the self-managing schools. Political leadership provides rich descriptions and/or persuasive analysis of events and behaviours at schools and this practice recognises interests as a prime motivator for action which is vital (Akbari et al., 2024). Other valid contributions are the recognition of conflict and power because these aspects fit many teachers-educational leaders day-to-day reality in schools which is regarded as a persuasive feature of schools.

At school level, position, personal and coercive powers are exercised. Positional power is legal, legitimate or official, while personal power refers to charismatic and power possessed on verbal skills (Kiral, 2020). Coercive power refers to a system of blocking, interfering and/or to punish staff members, while the authority of expertise refers to, for example, teachers' expert power of the curriculum. Educational leaders have authority and influence, while teachers have personal qualities and expertise which is regarded as a form of counter-balance to educational leaders. Educational leaders do not have absolute power. It is imperative to know who are the key players, what is the interest of each key player and group and how much power do players have in order for educational leaders to understand more on power, position or interest in the school. In the political leadership, the groups form an alliance which demands that policies should reflect certain interests (Alessa, 2021).

Political leadership is focused on division of work, each teaching force is specialised in a certain domain whereas rational leadership is focused on decision-making process. However, political leadership immerse so

strongly in the language of power, conflicts and/or manipulation that this leadership neglect other standard aspects of schools (Alharbi et al., 2021). Political leadership also stresses the influence of interest groups on decision-making and there is too much emphasis on conflict neglecting possibility of professional collaboration leading to the agreed outcomes (Akbari et al., 2024). Less attractive aspects of political leadership perhaps make this leadership unacceptable to many educationists is for an ethical reason of manipulation of the teachers by educational leaders.

2.4 Participative leadership practice

In participative leadership, teachers and educational leaders are empowered to become involved in phases of planning, acting, implementing and reflecting at school level. They have the right to participate actively in the discussions affect their working lives (Mirsultan & Marimuthu, 2021). The empowerment of both teachers and educational leaders involved is a necessary prerequisite. Decision-making process of group is central focus of group and educational leaders are expected to adopt participative leadership (Gaol, 2023). Participative leadership is focused on shared, collaborative, collegial and/or participative leadership. Participative leadership is manifested in collective decision-making and/or allocation of responsibility for the decision-making to specific individuals and groups.

Participative leadership is effective in increasing commitment of teachers and in development of teamwork but the price is an increase in time taken to reach agreement. There may be difficulties for educational leaders who remain accountable for the decisions reached through the collective process (Mohamed & Fook, 2022). Educational leaders are appointed to ensure that school is effective in doing the right things and efficient in doing things right and equitable. Participation perhaps increases school effectiveness and/or justify democratic principle, while leadership is potentially available to any legitimate stakeholders in form of distributed leadership (Mokhlis & Abdullah, 2025).

These four abovementioned leaderships have following major features: they are normative (the administrative boards are granted credit), the teachers have the authority of expertise, entitled to participate in decision-making process and the decisions are made by consensus. Members have common set of educational values and/or objectives. The authority of expertise prevails over the official authority (Fajar & Alias, 2020). These leadership influence and are influenced by the decision-making process and the decisions that were taken. The political leadership characterises decision-making process as being a negotiation and/or understanding process. Stakeholders from the leading coalitions pursue particular objectives. This leadership focuses on the group activities of some chairs and boards not on school as a whole. The individuals pursue a variety of interests: personal/professional. The professional interests focus on certain curriculum, a certain method to group pupils, and a certain method to teach. The personal interests focus on issues such as status, promotions and/or work conditions (Shapaka, 2026). The leaders have their own interests and values they pursue and promote as appropriate exert influence and control over the procedures of committees who make decisions. To develop acceptable results in terms of policies, leaders are both active participants to negotiation process which characterises decision-making process and mediators of groups (Arias et al., 2023).

2.5 Challenges associate with the application of the leadership strategies

Educational leader leadership roles should be inclusive to give recognition to the roles of parents, staff and students (Berkovich & Eyal, 2020). One of the challenges emerge was on leadership relationship between educational leaders and Parent-Teacher Association (PTA). There is an urgent need for educational leaders to restore unity in schools to embrace partnership with parents (Siraj et al., 2022). In Namibia, most secondary schools experience challenges with parental involvement in education. Majority of them resolve to PTA meetings which are held once per term. Parental involvement was considered necessary by the educational leaders but how they could help was perhaps not realised. That was the reason collaboration between parents and schools were limited to parent-teacher meetings only (Shapaka, 2024a). This practice has affected quality education delivery.

Educational leaders are bridges between community and school. However, educational leaders' role in parental participation in education is neglected in most schools. Educational leaders do not play an active role in promoting parental participation (Mirsultan & Marimuthu, 2021). Parental participation means sending their children to schools only. They consider parental involvement in education as interference in school affairs. Educational leaders consider parents ill equipped, lack knowledge and skills to understand education delivery. Parental involvement in education will create more leadership issues for their schools rather than finding solutions to them (Suhaili et al., 2020).

Learner academic achievement depends on the leadership of educational leaders (Pont, 2020). However, studies have shown lack of educational leaders' leadership role on learner academic achievement (Suhaili et al., 2020). Strong leadership is a critical attribute of schools with high learner achievement (Shapaka, 2024a). In practice, it is infrequent to find an educational leader who strikes balance between the administrative work and leadership role of focusing on teaching and/or learning. Most educational leaders choose only one between two, although it is imperative to strike balance between two.

Although educational leaders play pivotal role in improving the student learning and attaining educational outcomes, leaders work under strenuous conditions and are dealing with multifaceted transformational issues (Mokhlis & Abdullah, 2025). Educational leaders have challenges in coping with numerous changes, partly because they are inadequately prepared for leadership position or simply lack necessary skills, knowledge and attitudes to lead and manage schools (Pawar et al., 2020). Studies have discovered that there seems no formal preparation of aspire practising educational leaders who are taking on leadership positions, very few in-service professional development programmes offered (Hidayat et al., 2024). In Namibia, different professional development programmes are practised with different mode of delivery. However, there is no formal policy guideline regulates how programme should be implemented (Shapaka, 2025b).

There are also critical challenges of curriculum implementation, providing teaching and learning resources to meet the teacher training and development needs (Shapaka, 2024a). All these critical challenges are linked to

financial constraints (Shapaka, 2025c). Educational leaders are unlikely to be effective in their instructional role without putting in place sound financial empowerment frameworks in schools (Mirsultan & Marimuthu, 2021).

2.6 Existing support mechanisms used in the application of the leadership strategies

Leadership practice is well-suited for Namibian schools, where leaders tend to be receptive to the views and/or constructive criticisms of their team, thus they are able to leverage the insights of stakeholders to make holistic, informed decisions (Nordin et al., 2020). Leadership practice is well-suited for Namibian schools, where leadership enables school leaders to make decisions that prioritise organisation collective success, rather than focusing on personal success. By involving staff in goal-setting and/or problem-solving, educational leaders have encouraged a collaborative environment where everyone feels invested in achieving shared objectives (Mohamed & Fook, 2022).

Leadership practice is relevant for Namibian schools, where involving staff in decision-making can yield stronger sense of ownership, motivation, and/or engagement. Educational leaders who adopt such leadership can create inclusive culture which makes all stakeholders feel valued and empowered (Safrida et al., 2023). Educational leaders practice such leadership characterise by increased flexibility and responsiveness within their institution, aligns schools goals with schools strengths, and/or community needs, thereby creating a more engaged and collaborative academic environment.

Research suggests that leadership practice tends to positively contribute to organisational culture (Kholil, 2021), improve staff performance by creating an environment where they feel secure, respected, and motivated to excel. Educational leaders who encourage staff to express ideas and concerns freely allow them to contribute to the institutional policies and initiatives (Nambinga & Haufiku, 2024). By providing staff with the autonomy to influence institutional decisions, they promote a sense of belonging and commitment, thus benefiting students and other stakeholders through enhanced teaching quality and innovative practices.

Educational leaders implementing such leadership establish regular, structured feedback sessions which allow staff to voice their ideas and opinions on institutional operations, curricular issues; professional development needs (Shapaka, 2025a). Creating decision-making committees and/or task forces including staff and student representatives will enable them to promote a participative culture. By instituting an open-door policy which makes staff feel comfortable to discuss issues and suggestions without formal protocols, educational leaders reinforce openness and inclusivity characterise a democratic system (Muguna et al., 2020;). By integrating democratic practices, educational leaders strengthen relationship with their teams while creating a more adaptable and supportive educational environment, thus establishing organisational culture which is rooted in collaboration, shared accountability, and continuous improvement.

Leadership practice enables educational leaders to practice participatory leadership and promote the active engagement among staff members in curriculum development, policy implementation, resulting in a more innovative educational practice. For Namibian schools, where the need for inclusivity and/or collaboration is

paramount, such leadership practice aligns well with national aspirations for a more student-centred and community-engaged educational framework (Arias et al., 2023).

Leadership practice has a positive effect on staff morale and job satisfaction (Hoque & Raya, 2023), tends to reduce staff burnout, as it encourages mutual support, which contributes to higher retention rates (Kholil, 2021), enhances motivation and commitment to the schools improvement initiatives as staff believes that their inputs are valued. Schools led by these educational leaders likely promote sense of shared purpose and strengthens relationships among staff (Mohamed & Fook, 2022).

3. Materials and Methods

3.1 Research design

Following an interpretivist paradigm, this study explores complex interplay between democratic, collegial, political, participative leadership and systemic challenges as applied to learning theory in interpretivist notion, represents untruth about ways individual learn (Ling & Ling, 2017). This study utilise case study to describe and clarify phenomenon under study (Dey, 2003). Case study was, therefore, used for in-depth exploration of actual case **(**Creswell & Creswell, 2017**)** and to explore complex interplay between democratic, collegial, political, participative leadership and systemic challenges in Oshana Region in Namibia.

3.2 Participants

Using Oshana directorate of education's latest statistics of 2025, 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), which may lead to poor students academic outcomes.

3.3 Sampling

Criterion purposeful sampling was used, based on the researcher exposure to, engagement of 20 educational 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.

3.4 Data collection

Data was collected through the interview schedule, field notes and open-ended questionnaire to find out the participants' views on the complex interplay between democratic, collegial, political, participative 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 democratic, collegial, political, participative and 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, junior/senior secondary to give another dimension to research, possible

findings and recommendations. For this purpose, open-ended questionnaire was presented 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.

3.5 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.

3.6 Data analysis

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

3.7 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 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.

3.8 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 the participants sign 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 narratives of participants. Participants' names were replaced by pseudonyms to protect participants' identity. Participation was voluntary.

4. Findings

This section presents the findings on complex interplay between democratic, collegial, political, participative and systemic challenges. The section comprises the views of 20 educational leaders who have participated in this study. Some participant responses were summarised and presented in descriptive forms, others were reported verbatim and presented in italics.

4.1 Leadership strategies and systemic challenges

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

"Educational leaders use leadership practice to ensure that effective academic performance take place."

Another educational leader at junior secondary phase said:

"It refers to teaching and learning leadership practice used by educational leaders."

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

"It refers to teaching and learning approach applied at school level."

Moreover, educational leaders said that the complex interplay between leadership practice and systemic challenges affect the teaching and learning process. One educational leader at senior primary phase, when asked on the complex interplay between leadership practice and systemic challenges, said:

"It refers to leadership approach which promotes academic achievement among learners and teaching staff."

One educational leader at junior secondary phase said:

"Educational leaders use leadership to encourage, advocate high academic performance."

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

"Leadership practice can be used to manipulate and control teachers to support vision, and aims of educational leaders."

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

"Leadership practice is used to motivate teachers to do their level best."

4.2 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 educational leaders use in Oshana Region? The responses of the educational leaders indicated that educational leaders use various leadership strategies to monitor school programs. One educational leader at senior secondary phase said:

"They plan school activities and provide guidelines."

Another educational leader at senior primary phase said:

"They respect wishes of school population, reply to requirements and listen."

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

"They give indication and command school population and never dictate to orders."

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

"They networking to school population and make timely contacts."

One educational leader at junior primary phase said:

"They consult with school population and conduct constructive changes."

Another educational leader at senior primary phase said:

"They instruct school population and accept new ideas."

One educational leader at junior secondary phase said:

"They participate in school activities and encourage teamwork"

Another educational leader at junior primary phase said:

"They attract school population and motivate them to learn and teach hard."

One educational leader at senior secondary phase said:

"They lead the school population in right direction and learn from them."

4.3 Leadership strategies which enhance school performance

In order to determine existing leadership strategies that enhance school performance, researcher asked the question: Which existing leadership strategies that enhance school 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 value staff members as partners in school programme and not just as staff members."

Another educational leader at senior secondary phase said:

"They respect and value academic performance of teachers, their morale and job satisfaction."

One educational leader at senior secondary phase said:

"They foster overall well-being and sustained commitment of the teaching workforce."

Moreover, one educational leader at junior primary phase said:

"They establish clear school goals to enhance teacher performance."

Another educational leader at senior secondary phase said:

"They foster collaborative professional learning environment to improve teacher performance."

One educational leader at senior primary phase said:

"Staff members feel positive about the school environment."

Another educational leader at senior secondary phase said:

"They promote cooperation among staff members and assist them to work together towards the common goals."

4.4 School performance which associates with leadership strategies

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

"They use leadership practice to reinforce collaboration among stakeholders"

Another educational leader at senior primary phase said:

"They use leadership practice to align with the fulfilment of the holistic needs of teachers"

Moreover, educational leaders in the study indicated that it depend on situation at school. One educational leader at junior primary phase said:

"They use leadership practice to support innovation at schools"

Another educational leader at senior primary phase said:

"They use leadership practice to create a nurturing environment"

One educational leader at senior secondary phase said:

"They use leadership practice to reinforce a shared responsibility"

4.5 Challenges associate with the application of the leadership strategies

In order to determine challenges associate with application of leadership strategies, researcher asked the question: What challenges associate with the application of the leadership strategies? One educational leader at senior secondary phase said:

"Many teachers are not properly trained or equipped to implement the curriculum."

Another educational leader at junior secondary phase said:

"The curriculum comprises of unfamiliar teaching methods and contents."

One educational leader at senior primary phase said:

"This challenge includes teachers' resistance to change."

Moreover, another educational leader at junior primary phase said:

"It includes inconsistent implementation of the revised curriculum across classrooms."

One educational leader at senior secondary phase said:

"Lack of resources namely updated textbooks, teaching materials, and/or access to technology."

Another educational leader at junior secondary said:

"These challenges include large class sizes and diverse student needs."

Moreover, one educational leader at senior primary phase said:

"*This includes lack of professional development for educational leaders and teachers alike."*

Another educational leader at junior primary phase said:

"It includes time constraints versus limited instructional hours for both educational leaders and teachers alike."

Moreover, one educational leader at senior secondary phase said:

"Assessment alignment can be an issue."

Another educational leader at senior primary phase expressed this view as follows:

"Traditional testing methods versus required new forms of assessment can be another concern."

4.6 Existing support mechanisms used to address identified challenges

In order to determine support mechanisms used to address identified challenges, the researcher asked question: Which support mechanisms used to address identified challenges? Responses from educational leaders indicated that educational leaders use varieties of support mechanisms to address these challenges. One educational leader at junior primary phase said:

"They build relationships and model, and use distributed form of leadership."

Another educational leader at senior secondary phase said:

"They use research data to support resources allocation."

One educational leader at senior secondary phase said:

"They use scholarships and fellowships initiatives to boost teachers' professional development and continuous growth"

Another educational leader at junior secondary phase said:

"They collaborate to improve student achievement, create positive learning environments."

Moreover, one educational leader at junior primary phase said:

"They develop a continuous professional development curriculum for teachers."

One educational leader at senior secondary phase said:

"They shape structures, cultures in response to the realities of the school community."

Another educational leader at senior primary phase said:

"They deal with emergent issues, ensuring stakeholder input, develop a comprehensive strategic plan, they delegate, and use devolution of power."

Another educational leader at senior secondary phase said:

"They cultivate effective leadership programs and their supporting systems."

One educational leader at senior primary phase said:

They involve parents and teachers' positive attitudes and monitoring from schools stakeholders

5. Discussion

This section discusses findings on the complex interplay between democratic, collegial, political, participative leadership and the systemic challenges. The discussion is based on the views of 20 educational leaders who participated in this study.

5.1 Leadership strategies and systemic challenges

This study explored complex interplay between democratic, collegial, political and participative leadership and systemic challenges in Oshana Region in Namibia. The main question answered by study was: What complex interplay which exists between democratic, collegial, political and participative leadership and systemic

challenges in Oshana Region? The paramount issues that emanated from the findings were that there is a complex interplay between democratic, collegial, political and participative leadership and systemic challenges that have direct effects on schools performance, teachers' performance which could 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 (Alessa, 2021). Studies have found that the leadership role of the educational leaders is very crucial in advancing student academic achievement (Kholil, 2021).

Another crucial issue which emanated from findings were that leadership strategies promote and enhance teaching and learning. Studies found that while some teachers enjoy the teaching and learning process, others are frustrated due to insufficient preparation and/or training workshops, unclear procedures, coupled with poor academic literacy skills and lack of commitment shown by some students (Hidayat et al., 2024). All four leadership practices are associated with academic performance, and they are defining school mission, managing of school instructional program, promoting a positive learning climate, advancing teachers' interests (David & Naparan, 2024; Pawar et al., 2020).

5.2 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 earlier research study such as Hidayat et al. (2024). The sample of this study revealed that educational leaders use leadership strategies to give command to school population. That said, it should be noted that the concern in this study was on the complex interplay between democratic, collegial, political, participative leadership and systemic challenges not vise-versa (cf. Methodology Section). However, a possible interpretation for this finding could be that there are arrangements on implication of ministerial mission and vision statement within educational setting (MoEAC, 2023). As a result of the top-down cascades of ministerial mission, vision, and policies, many educational leaders might have difficulty to adapt or change status quo. However anomalies like these need to be addressed through involving various stakeholders in planning, implementation, and evaluation and reflection process.

5.3 Leadership strategies which enhance school 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 the quality of the students' learning (David & Naparan, 2024). Findings point that leadership foster a collaborative learning and/or continuous improvement. This finding correlates with study by Nordin et al. (2020) on the importance of effective communication, cooperation and trust within group.

5.4 School 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 an important part on the school performance and the organisational environment (Mustam & Najam, 2020). Leadership strategies positively correlate with the welcome environments and a culture of continuous improvement in schools (Setiawan & Irwanto, 2020). Studies have found positive relationship between democratic, collegial, political and/or participative leadership and systemic challenges and teaching and learning practices (Mirsultan & Marimuthu, 2021).

5.5 Challenges associate with the application of the leadership strategies

In this study, many challenges associate with application of leadership strategies. Of particular noticeable includes panic in curriculum implementation, lack of modern media in teaching, poor infrastructure, inequality education and the need of teachers to review these implications (David & Naparan, 2024). Other critical and yet contextual factor includes curriculum implementation process (Nambinga & Haufiku, 2024). Curriculum components influence the implementation of the curriculum (Azar et al., 2020). Topping the list include teachers' attitudes toward facilitating the teaching program, teachers' beliefs, changing the attitudes and roles of administrators (Pawar et al., 2020). Potential pitfalls includes top-down approach, digital literacy initiatives in resource-constrained environments, interact with the broader systemic issues, and holistic view faced by teachers (Mokhlis & Abdullah, 2025). These anomalies might lead to instances where strategies might fail and/or have unintended consequences which might have negative outcomes on student performance as well (David & Naparan, 2024).

5.6 Existing support mechanisms used to address identified challenges

Finally, many existing support mechanisms used to address identified challenges. Establishing a clear school goals emerge as foundational, revealing consistent positive correlation between the visionary leadership and enhanced teachers performance. A collaborative professional learning environment emerges as catalyst for improving teachers' performance. Offering opportunities for collaborative learning, knowledge sharing and the ongoing personal development contribute to positive school culture and/or shared responsibility for student success (Pont, 2020). In this regard, focus is placed on broader implications of school leadership on academic performance of teachers, their morale and job satisfaction, demonstrating its pivotal role not only in enhancing performance outcomes but also in fostering overall well-being and sustained commitment of a teaching workforce (Mohamed & Fook, 2022). Educational leaders need to be tactful, skilled and flexible in supporting teachers they lead, as they are the ones who have to improve educational standards.

Stakeholders monitor and/or support educational leaders on regular basis, creating experiences, sharing programs on good practices, providing relevant continuous trainings on core dimensions of leadership practices in collaboration with the nearby colleges and universities (Mokhlis & Abdullah, 2025; Muguna et al., 2020).

Framework of growth mindset pedagogy is used as educational approach to school leadership, attention is given to their mindset and their views on teaching and learning, which may have a strong impact on whole school community (Siraj et al., 2022). Ongoing training to educational leaders is given to overcome leadership gaps in

knowledge, skills; communication channels are created to overcome communication problems (Suyatno et al., 2022).

Monitoring is applied through educational leaders' involvement in visiting classrooms, observing teachers and provides feedback while dialogue is applied by creating opportunities for teachers to talk to colleagues and educational leaders about teaching and learning (Setiawan et al., 2020).

This section discusses the interplay between four leadership strategies on performance of schools namely democratic, collegial, political, and participative leadership, gives insights into systemic challenges faced by educational leaders and seek potential solutions that could scaffold them in overcoming systemic challenges. These leadership strategies tend to shape institutional culture, faculty morale; student outcomes, with context-specific implications on performance of schools in Oshana Region in Namibia.

In Namibian educational context, leadership strategies such as democratic, collegial, political, and participative leadership affect staff, 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 learning. Thus, educational leaders should integrate various elements of democratic, collegial, political, and/or participative leadership to support staff, enhance job satisfaction, and promote student success. A more effective leadership practice should not be limited to one strategy, but rather a combination of strategy components that leverages strengths of each (Al-Azad et al., 2024). In Namibia, an integrative leadership approach which encompasses the compassion of inclusivity of democratic, collegial, political, participative leadership, could best address current and emerging challenges faced by the schools. These eclectic approaches align with nation's aspiration for a progressive, inclusive, and adaptable educational landscape that can thrive amidst rapid societal and digital changes (MoEAC, 2023).

6. 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 or negative academic student 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 particular construct against other one. This in turn will help them to strike the balance between authority of teacher expertise of the 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 democratic, collegial, political, and participative and the systemic challenges 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 attempted to explore complex interplay between democratic, collegial, political, and participative and the systemic challenges in which educational leaders were influential individuals in schools. Their responses might be affected by this. The sample size includes public school educational leaders who 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 the Oshana Region in Namibia which narrows generalisability of its findings thus limits the broader applicability of its findings. However, the study applied multi method in which more than one data collection techniques and corresponding data analysis procedure utilised to strengthen the 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 school performance since this was beyond the scope of this study. Second, future research should conduct comparative studies across different regions and exploring complex interplay between democratic, collegial, political, and participative and the systemic challenges. Third, future study should explore the specific mechanisms through which these challenges impact school performance.

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