School Ethos as Influenced by School Categorisation

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Abstract
Several attempts have been made to understand the nature and quality of school education over the two past decades in response to the continuing poor performance of learners in public schools within South Africa. These attempts include a curriculum focus, school leadership and management focus, policy focus, teacher development focus, infrastructure focus and resource focus. Despite interventions in these areas, little improvement has been noted in the learner performance. In this study the researcher brings another perspective to the understanding of school or learner performance, that of the influence of school ethos to school categorisations. School categorisation within our education system seems to be quite ingrained with categorisation in terms of, amongst others funding (quintile rankings); user fees (fee-paying and no-fee paying); geography (rural, urban, township); poverty (feeding scheme); performance (national strategy for learner attainment and non- national strategy for learner attainment). Given this synopsis the question is asked: How does school categorisation influence school ethos and what are the implications of this on leadership, teaching and learning in public schools? This qualitative study, in a form of case study approach was conceptualised through interpretivism lens to explore the perspectives, experiences and practices of school principals and teachers in five schools regarding the ethos and their influence in the school categorisation and the implications on leadership, teaching and learning practices from the selected schools. The methods of generating data which were employed in the study included: semi-structured interviews, observations and document review. Ethical processes were followed.
Keywords: school categorisation, school ethos, school leadership, learner performance

1. Introduction
The Government of National Unity (GNU) introduced laws and policies aimed at transforming the education system to meet the new challenges during transition. Some of these were *Constitution of South Africa Act, 108 of 1996* (Republic of South Africa, 1996 a), the *South African Schools Act, 84 of 1996* (Republic of South Africa, 1996 b) and the *White paper on Education and Training of 1995* (Republic of South Africa, 1995) which laid the foundations for the integration of schools in South Africa. These policies resulted in two types of schools in South Africa, namely independent and public schools. The category of private schools falls under the umbrella term "independent schools", whereas all government schools fall under public schools. School categorisation in South African education system is a well-entrenched practice according to other factors like learner performance, geographical demarcation, quintile rankings, fee and non-fee paying schools, section 21 and section 20 schools, functional and dysfunctional schools, township or urban schools and rural schools. This has resulted in development of particular identities by schools (Armsterdam, Nkomo & Weber, 2012).

The aim of the South African government in desegregating schools (both independent schools as well as public schools) was to bring about integration among learners from different racial backgrounds so as to provide equal education opportunities for all learners (Vandeyar, 2010). The new era and the policies which were enacted by GNU promised, among other things, to transform education system by ensuring that all South African children would have access to a school of their choice. These policies created what Vandeyar (2010) postulates as opportunities for South African learners from diverse cultural backgrounds to attend public schools of their choice. She further states that such policies also resulted in learner migration through which black learners flocked to historically White, Coloured and Indian schools in search of quality education, while Indian learners migrated to former white schools. Vandeyar (2010) holds that the best thermometer of what would influence parental choice of schooling is the special character of a school or the school ethos because every parent wants the best education for his or her child. Echoing a similar sentiment is Hunt (2011) who suggests that schooling context shapes the identities of the learners in different ways. If one analysis how schools have been desegregated when they were categorised one would expect in an integrated school then one would presume that social integration would refer to more than just the number of whites and black learners but would include changing the school as a whole to meet the needs of all learners. This would also mean fostering meaningful interaction amongst learners in the classroom, on the playground, during extra-mural, cultural activities as well as instilling a human rights culture (Amsterdam, et al, 2012).

2. Literature
The term school ethos is credited to the work of Rutter, Maughan and Ouston (1979) who, in their study of school effectiveness found that some schools provided more positive experiences of their learners than might

otherwise have been expected. When Rutter, et al. (1979) were unable to link the phenomenon of school effectiveness to the usual factors such as: the social organisation of the school, characteristics of the learners, behaviour of learners and interactions between the school and its environment they introduced the notion of school ethos. School ethos is associated with concepts such as school culture, school climate and school atmosphere and embrace some aspects of school environment and relationships between those within it (Manchester & Bragg, 2013; Glover & Coleman, 2005). Many scholars have also linked the terms school culture, school climate or organisational culture to school effectiveness or school improvement with the aim of finding out the performance of learners in their school setting (Deal & Peterson, 2009; Schoen & Teddlie, 2008; Muijs, Harris, Chapman, Stoll & Russ, 2004). According to Hargreaves (2001), school effectiveness is concerned with the school's structure and culture and how these are expressed in its policies and practices and specifically how they relate to and promote the overall goals of the school as well as the teacher effectiveness at classroom level. Striepe, Clarke and O'Donoghue (2014) conducted a study at three faith-based schools in Australia and found that school ethos was characterised by the following features: respect, trust, continuous empowerment, serving others, collegiality, shared values, caring and teamwork. In England, the Department of Education (2011) states that a positive school ethos is paramount in obtaining a successful learning environment. In the same vein, South Africa has moved along the road of enhancing school effectiveness and improvement by implementing the whole-school approach to effectiveness and improvement (Department of Education, 2001). Schools as formal organisations are purposeful and have a vested interest in achieving educational goals (Van der Westhuizen, 2013). However, the latter broadens the discourse by contextualising school effectiveness within the schools' organisational culture and concludes that schools and their effectiveness lie in the effectiveness of parents, learners and teachers. School ethos speaks to the manner in which the school is organised and it is critical to its effectiveness and furthermore the school that sets realistic educational goals is likely to be effective. Such schools have aims that are enshrined in their vision and mission statements within the context of highly organised educational settings.

Brown et al. (2011) study also shows that there is a strong relationship between all members of the school community because of the open dialogue and role play that involved all stakeholders of the school. This is reflected in a form of learners involved in shaping the school policies through school council, parents are kept informed and they are regularly invited to evening school meetings through newsletter, direct communications and consent forms. Mager and Nowak (2012) claim that listening to learners, encourage them to participate and giving them more responsibilities is an important way to create a better functioning school. Likewise, Koross, Peter, Ngware, Sang and Anthony (2009); Ishabangu (2012) indicate that parental participation has a positive impact on school culture and on the teaching and learning process when there is an active and frequent contacts between parents and school administration in improving schools' financial accountability. This is in line with Kumar and Khadir (2012); Dykstra and Kucita (2008); Caldwell (2005) who highlight that decentralisation gives schools more power in decision making and has proven to impact positively in improving school effectiveness and performance thus resulting in positive school culture.

School categorisation in South African education system appears to be entrenched with categorisations in terms of, amongst other issues learner performance (National Strategy for Learner Attainment and non-National Strategy for Learner Attainment), geographical demarcation (rural, urban, township and peri-urban schools), quintile rankings (1-5), fee paying and non-fee paying schools, section 21 and section 20 schools, functional and dysfunctional schools. Bergman, Bergman and Gravett (2011) found that schools are dysfunctional because of rule breaking to school norms namely: chronic absenteeism and unpunctuality of learners or teachers, favouritism in promotion and hiring practices due to romantic interest, teachers fabricating learners' marks; cultural and etiquette norms: parents verbally abusing teachers and principals, learners' lack of respect and discipline; infringe of laws: drugs dealing, gambling, prostitution on school premises, rape of learners by teachers, counterfeiting and fraud of cheques by deputy principal. According to a study by Mestry (2014), the evidence of such disparities in South African policies is witnessed in township schools, rural schools, former Model C schools and private schools with disproportionate resources which impact heavily on learner performance and teacher quality.

3. Theoretical lens

The theoretical lenses played an important role in building an understanding to identify the manner in which different individuals with different personalities socialise in an institution such as the school. When putting a label on particular type of group such a country and try to define the essence of that group, it is difficult to resist the feeling that group as a natural social reality hence social identity and self-categorisation theory were found to be the most appropriate to couch this study. Social identity theory has its origin in Tajfel's (1970) early work on social and categorisation perception and his quest for social psychological understanding of the causes of intergroup relations in general, social conflict and prejudice (Hogg & Abrams, 1999). Social identity theory was developed to account for the result of the minimal group paradigm (Tajfel, 1970). Tajfel and Turner (1979) argue

that peoples' psychological processes are transformed in group settings. These scholars advise that the basis peoples' self-definition changes in groups in that personal identity gives way to social identity and how group norms may impact on individual behaviour. Basically, this theory provided a reasoning account for how individuals relate to identity groups.

When schools were categorised in South Africa a lot of African learners migrated to former white schools. When these African learners enrolled in these former white schools they had to adjust and adapt to the norms and behaviours of those schools. However, those schools did not make means to adjust so as to accommodate those newly admitted African learners. Self-categorisation theory framework was developed by Turner (1991) as an expansion of social identity theory. By using a process called self-categorisation an individual's depersonalise themselves by conforming to in-group prototypes which then leads to normative in-group behaviour and thereafter begin to view all members of a particular group as interchangeable (Turner,1991). Putting it in simply terms, they view every group member as having the same values and therefore complying with group norms. Thus, Turner (1991) suggests that self-categorisation theory clarifies how group norms may impact on individual behaviour. The primary goal of self-categorisation theory in relation to social identity theory is to provide a reasoning account for how individuals relate to identity groups.

4. Research Design and Methodology

For this study a case study design was adopted that consisted of five schools. According to Yin (2009), a case study is an empirical inquiry in its real world context bounded system (bound by place or time) which can be a single or multiple cases using a variety of data generation methods over a period of time. Case study design was chosen because the researcher wanted to understand the indepth of research sites and their entire uniqueness (Rule & John, 2011). This study aims at capturing the reality of the participants' lived experiences in their natural settings, thoughts and perceptions concerning the school ethos as influenced by school categorisations (Cohen, et al., 2011). Case studies are traditionally qualitative and are regarded as a multi-method in focus involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). The qualitative approach emphasises the lived experiences of the participants within their cultural contexts in natural setting (Nieuwenhuis, 2007). Furthermore qualitative approach is mainly for exploring and understanding the meanings groups or individuals ascribe to a social or human problem (Creswell, 2014; Punch & Oancea, 2014; Babbie, 2013; Silverman, 2013; Yin, 2011). In qualitative approach the research questions are addressed more appropriately and focus on individuals and how they interact in their social settings, and how they see themselves in their environment (Silverman, 2013). Qualitative approach endeavours to reveal not only what happens but how it happens and most importantly why it happens the way it does (Yin, 2011). Five schools were selected using purposive and convenience sampling strategies. Purposive sampling was used because it allowed the researcher to choose schools that were geographically easily accessible. Convenience sampling was also employed because the researcher wanted to choose the nearest schools (Cohen, et al. 2011). These schools were selected based on their categorisation as well as on their quintile rankings as determined by the Department of Basic Education. Data was generated through the use of semi-structured interviews with five school principals and three teachers from each school. Semi-structured interviews were deemed appropriate because they provide flexibility in posing questions, in-depth discussions follow-ups and probes to clarify the responses (Cohen, et al., 2011). In addition, document analysis was used because it provides tangible written textual information. Moreover, observations were conducted because they allow systematic recording and noting of events, behaviours and routines in the social setting (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Using three data generation methods was for the purpose of triangulation to test the findings which eventually strengthens the trustworthiness of the study (Yin, 2011).

The duration of each interview was forty minutes. Interviews were audio-recoded with the permission of the participants. Using the audio recorder ensured the way of capturing of the actual words of the participants thus enabling the richness of the data to be captured. For this study content analysis was employed to analyse the meaning that was obtained from the documents reviewed. Some of the documents that the researcher reviewed includes the school vision, mission and value statement, teaching time tables, time book, learner registers, agenda of meetings, minutes of staff meeting, letters and notices to parents, sport extra- curricular fixtures. Data was organised employing inductive data analysis, which assisted the researcher to identify multiple realities presented in the data (Maree, 2007). Marshall and Rossman (2011) describe the process of inductive analysis as discovery of patterns, themes and categories in one's data. Content analysis was utilised to analyse the data that was obtained from the document review. Responding to ethical issues, ethical clearance from the University of KwaZulu-Natal Ethics Committee to conduct this study was obtained. Furthermore, permission to conduct this study from KwaZulu-Natal, Department of Education as well from the five schools was obtained. Informed consent was given and explained to all participants before conducting interviews. Participants were informed that their participation was voluntary and that there would be no benefits and that there were free to withdraw should they wish to do so. To ensure anonymity and confidentiality, participants were informed that pseudonyms were

used in all reports when generating data. Participants were informed that information provided was solely for this study.

5. Findings and discussion

In this study data were presented and analysed in themes which were consistent with research question. Hence, the following findings are presented.

5.1 Conceptualisation of school categorisation and school ethos

It is worth noting that when participants were asked about their understandings of school categorisation only principals were able to respond to the first part of the question pertaining to school categorisation. They understood it to refer to classification, clustering, grouping and demarcation of schools for the purpose of funding. Also there was no tangible evidence to support or to refute the information supplied by the principals concerning their understanding of school categorisation. The majority of the principals and teachers understood the term "school ethos" to be the culture, the spirit and the climate that exists within the school. The principals were vigorous and passionate when responding to this question about school ethos. Mr Zukwa, the principal of Lokishi Secondary School had the following to say:

> School categorisation is the mechanism the department of education employed to classify schools for funding purposes. School ethos is the characteristic of a culture era as manifested in its attitudes and aspiration in its spirit that pervades in the school culture.

Likewise, Mr Bell, the principal of Mshini Secondary School said when speaking about the school ethos he has the definition of his understanding and that embodies all other definitions and ones that he favours most when he echoed that:

> School categorisation in my understanding is the way schools have been catalogued for allocation purposes. School ethos is the soul, spirit and climate of the school.

Similarly, Mrs Nodlula, the principal of Toyi Primary School felt she has a lot in her understanding of school ethos which she said it mirrors how her school functions as a well-oiled machine and stated that:

> School categorisation is the way schools have been crusted for funding. School ethos is what makes us who we are, how we do things in the school looking at our character, our fundamental values, our culture, the climate and spirit that exist in the school under which we function.

Coming from another perspective Ms Maviyo, the principal of Ngoyi Primary School sad the following:

> School categorisation is the system used by the department of education to group schools so as to inject finances to the poorer schools. School ethos to me is about discipline in terms of school responsibilities that need to be performed.

Likewise, Mrs Sibonga, the principal of Hloba Primary School stated:

> School categorisation is the structure of providing funding to schools according to their needs. I think school ethos is the moral ideas and attitudes that belong to the school.

Apart from the similar views voiced by the principals, some teachers from the study schools understood the term "school ethos" to be: the vision, respect and trust, partnership, distinctive character, morals, values and beliefs. Mrs Nkala, a post level 1 teacher from Mshini Secondary School when asked about her understanding of the term "school ethos" she had the following to say:

> School ethos is the vision the school has within its overall environment.

Answering along the lines of her principal views, Mrs Phakela, the post level 1 teacher from Toyi primary school mentioned that:

> It is about fundamental values embodied in climate of respect and trust based upon the shared values across the school.

Following the same line of thoughts as the principal of Hloba Primary School is Mrs Sewrum, the post level 1 teacher from Ngoyi Primary School when she stated that:

> School ethos to me refers to the moral values and beliefs that guide the school.

Mrs Bhekala, another post level 1 teacher from Hloba Primary School in her understanding of the term "school ethos" explained that:

> School ethos is the distinctive character of the school.

Although the responses of the majority of the participants were similar, there were participants who understood the term "school ethos" differently meaning from the rest of other participants. Amongst them was Mr Madala, a post level 1 teacher from Lokishini Secondary School who stated:

> School ethos is only a cooperation of learners, teachers and the principal within the school.

This suggests that even if people are in the same institution, they understand and see things differently as it was the case with Mr Madala and Mr Zukwa from Lokishini Secondary School. His views are in line with Stoll, Bolam, McMahon, Wallace and Thomas (2006) who stated that in an organisation one of the key things is collaboration which is the key to school ethos. During a visit to the study schools the majority of the schools

displayed an atmosphere that was conducive to learning in the school as they promoted respect, as well as healthy productive attitudes towards learning. For example, I visited Mshini Secondary School for two days I was so impressed by the neat appearance of the learners.

Probing Mr Bell, the principal of Mshini Secondary School further he said:

> *What I am proud of is, my predecessor said that we should get the uniform right first. He went about listening to all of us and I think down the line I inherited that with the staff and we have come to realise that he was right as this has built the our school ethos.*

As mentioned above, at all the five schools visited there was no evidence to corroborate or to refute what the principals explained when asked about their understanding of school categorisation. Nonetheless, as this study focused on school ethos as influenced by school categorisation the literature concerning school categorisation showed that the grouping of schools within the same geographical location for economic, administrative, pedagogical and political purposes is known as school clusters and has arisen as one of the possible solution to achieve in education system within the framework of financial austerity which is the similar system the South African government post-apartheid adopted when categorising schools (Bray, 1987). Furthermore, according to the South African Schools Act, 84 of 1996, the state is required to fund all public schools and provide a quintile ranking mechanism to address equity in schools by disseminating progressive funding by classifying public schools into wealth quintiles where schools serving poorer communities should receive more funding than schools serving better-off communities (Mestry, 2014).

Referring to the second part of the question pertaining school ethos, Mshini Secondary School has a welcome sign at the entrance of the school, every learner (girls and boys) in the school was in full school uniform. Every learner I met from the school gate to the corridors greeted me. During the lesson change-over by the ringing of the second bell all learners were in class learning. To me this resonates with what Mr Bell said very passionately when he said school ethos is about the soul, spirit and climate of the school as well as what he learnt from his predecessor. Mshini Secondary School was the only study school that did not start a day with a morning assembly, they only conduct their assembly before break time. All five schools were conducting their assembly three days a week. Other four schools were starting their day with an assembly in the morning before commencing with the lessons. I am not comparing the schools I visited but I must say when the principal of Ngoyi Primary School responded when asked about her understanding of school ethos she mentioned discipline. During my visit all learners and teachers during the assembly and after the assembly leading to their classrooms for lessons were well- behaved.

At Hloba Primary School, the opposite of what I had observed at Ngoyi Primary School, was obtained. There was only one teacher at the morning assembly who was struggling by herself to maintain order or trying to let learners sing whilst waiting for the principal to conduct the assembly. Responding to the question about her understanding of the term "school ethos" the principal, of Hloba Primary School, Mrs Sibonga mentioned that it is about moral ideas that people have and display in the school. During assembly I did not witness dignity from the staff of Hloba Primary School as I expected to see a dignified gathering that should be teaching learners good ethical behaviours. What I witnessed was the teachers who were seating in their cars eating others going to their classrooms caring cups of tea. The moral ideas and attitudes understood by the principal, Mrs Sibonga were not displayed by the teachers. In the sense that the two teachers were administering corporal punishment to learners for not doing the homework. When perusing the documents, school homework policy did not give any room for corporal punishment to be administered instead it states that the learner would receive a warning or a letter will be sent to the parent and lastly the parent will be called in if the misdemeanour persisted. The actions by the two teachers contravened the South African Schools Act 84 of 1996 which forbids the use of corporal punishment in schools. Deal and Peterson (2009) describe this type of behaviour as what arise when ineffective practices become typical within a school. In support of the latter Tajfel and Turner (1979) argue that within the social identity theory, peoples' psychological processes are bound to function with a particular attitude, behaviour and dislikes within the organisation. As much as the principal of the school understand the term "school ethos" as morals at the school, I did not witnessed such ethics. This suggest that Mrs Sibonga, the principal of Hloba Primary School understanding of school ethos is the opposite to what is being practiced by the teachers and learners in her school.

Rutter, Maughan and Ouston's (1979) study of school effectiveness in London found that, amongst other factors, the social organisation of the school, behaviour of learners and characteristics of learners introduce the idea of school ethos that provided a more positive behaviour of learners in their interactions between the school and its environment. When the principal of Lokishini Secondary School responded regarding his understanding of the term "school ethos" he mentioned amongst other things the characteristics spirit of culture, era or community. During my two days' observation at this school, what I witnessed was not pleasing from the learners coming to the school gate, the way they dressed, their hair styles to the way some of the teachers were dressed. It was like both parties (teachers and learners) were going for shopping and not coming to school. Reading the Learner Code of Conduct of the school, it outlines clearly how learners should dress, but such was not evident in

some of the learners. Furthermore, I found the school has a Code of Conduct for Teachers which also stipulate that clothing of teachers should at all times display professionalism at school and during sport events. This suggests that the school has policies which outline clearly what is expected but such is not followed. This seems to suggest that the way the school is being led and managed is questionable. Supporting the issue on uniform is Grant, Jasson and Lawrence (2010) who assert that schools that practice a sense of pride in neatness, discipline and in their uniform succeed in achieving their core responsibilities of teaching and learning. Despite the fact that the motto at the entrance of Lokishini Secondary School as well as in school letter head read *Ora et Labora* (pray and work) an ethos that was congruent with the school's ethos was not evident at this school during the two assemblies I observed. In my own view an assembly where people gather to worship God should be treated with outmost respect and in a dignified manner.

In their responses both the principal and post level one teacher at Toyi Primary School when asked about their understanding of the term "school ethos" they understood it to refer to the fundamental values which are trust and shared values. During my visit at the school I witnessed the way the learners and teachers conduct themselves. I witnessed some learners going to assist some teachers carrying the books out of their cars to the school without hearing the teachers calling them to assist them. That willingness to help without being told to do so suggests the ethos of the school that the two participants (Mrs Nodlula and Mrs Phakela) spoke about.

5.2 Practice of school ethos

The majority of the participants articulated that they encouraged and practiced school ethos through having moral/ spiritual talks during the assembly and also holding staff meetings to discuss matters pertaining to the school so that the school ethos did not escape the system. Ms Maviyo, the principal of Ngoyi Primary School had the following to say:

> We usually have staff meetings (with the staff) to plan the way we should do things and at the end of the term we do introspection to see how we have performed and look at areas where we did not do well and come up with strategies to improve.

Furthermore, Ms Maviyo stated that matters should not be discussed at the board- room and end there as they are not serving the walls of the board room. Some of the things need to be communicated to learners as they are the ones that they serve and the important stakeholders but also ensure that they also practice the school ethos. She commented:

> During the assembly we conduct lessons as well as activities to ensure that our school ethos is maintained.

Likewise, Mrs Sibonga, the principal of Hloba Primary School asserted that:

> Every Monday morning it is my duty to conduct the assembly. I make sure that I motivate learners and teachers as well as to how we should do things as a school so that we can be disciplined ambassadors of Hloba primary school. I also highlight that when we have meetings with the staff.

When asked how the school encourages and practises school ethos the post level 1 teacher, Mr Mbomvu (Hloba Primary School) gave the contradicting response to what his principal had said when he stated:

> I cannot pin point things that we do as a school that I can say they encourage or we practice as our school ethos. Even meetings we only have it at the beginning of the year and that's it.

A morning assembly is viewed by the participants as the core to practice of school ethos where more values can be imparted to learners including to read some texts from the Bible so as to start the day. Furthermore, school ethos is encouraged around the full complement of the school. Mr Zukwa the principal of Lokishini Secondary School explained:

> Throughout the year we dedicate time for our morning devotions whereby we read the Bible, we explain the scriptural text and we do that interchangeably on voluntary basis, it swings like pendulum from teachers to learners and to parents. During assembly we encourage the culture of intrinsic motivation to a point where learners demonstrate self-discipline.

Similarly, Mrs Sewrum, the post level 1 teacher of Ngoyi Primary School had the following to say:

> During assembly we communicate good values and morals and teach things that would influence all of us to have good attitudes towards the school ethos.

Likewise, Mrs Khuleka, the post level 1 teacher from Toyi Primary School mentioned what they practice as a school and asserted the following:

> Every morning we start our day with an assembly before going to class, we read the verses from the Bible, we pray as one, we speak to our learners instilling good morals. And during our meetings we share ideas and look at things that can make us grow collectively.

The emphasis of using the assembly gathering as a good podium to encourage and practise what the school stands for is also mentioned by Mrs Panday the post level 1 teacher from Mshini Secondary School. Mrs Panday had the following to say:

> In our school the vision and mission statement is always part of our daily business in anything that we

do. During the assembly we always take a particular point from general announcement related to our vision and mission statement and project it through power point presentation and music clips that our learners can be able to identify.

Likewise, Mrs Nodlula, the principal of Toyi Primary School shares the same sentiments as the above participant when she mentioned the following:

We always believe in our motto which says "we share one vision" that assist us in all what we do.

Responding to the question of how the school encouraged and practised school ethos Mr Bell, the principal of Mshini Secondary School stated that it all starts with him for the school climate to prevail. Mr Bell explained:

Its starts with my leadership style where I create a climate where learners want and are keen to learn as well as teachers want and enjoy teaching in this school. On daily basis in leading the school I nurture the sense of love and caring and make this school a happy school by listening to learners and staff. Our vision and mission is something that we always work at and it encourages us as a school. Also the code of conduct for learners and teachers is what we always follow.

When Mr Bell, the principal of Mshini Secondary School mentioned that it all begins with his leadership style, during my visit at the school I observed that as much as the school function so effectively, he goes out of his way to ensure that there is teaching and learning in class. Perusing at the schedule of teachers who have produced excellent results in the school he was on the top of the list. Such leadership style is highlighted by Southworth (2008) when he states that the principal as an instructional leader uses a number of strategies to improve the quality of teaching and learning in school. Amongst the three leadership behavioural strategies expected of a leader as mentions by Southworth (2008) are: modelling, monitoring and professional dialogue, where the principal uses teaching as an example to model how to do things. Given what the principal of Mshini Secondary School exercises it can be deduced that the style he mentioned to encourage and practice school ethos is in line with instructional leadership style. Looking at Southworth (2008) model, it implies that the principal should be in the centre of school by understanding, viewing, practicing and enhancing the open interactions within the stakeholders (learners and teachers) so as to promote the positive climate. This simply means the principal needs to influence the pulse of the school ethos for the school to be effective.

Although I did not attend the staff meeting at Ngoyi Primary School but perusing through the documents, the minutes of the staff meeting dated 22 July 2015, there was a discussion about how the learners have gone about learning the culture of greeting teachers, other learners and visitors coming to the school. Also in the same minutes of the staff meeting at Ngoyi Primary School teachers were highlighting their reflection on what works for the school in terms of teaching values to learners. Furthermore, during my visit at the school I attended the assembly and there were six learners comprising of three boys and girls who came to the podium to read the books about the values of women in the country. This is congruent with what the participants alluded to when they mentioned good values, human rights and morals were conveyed during the assembly.

The divergent response of Mr Mbomvu, the post level 1 teacher of Hloba Primary School to his principal was confirmed when I perused the school documents further. There were no minutes of any staff meeting that I could review as the principal had mentioned that she conducted the staff meeting. Given the contradicting views they presented, this means that this school does not encourage nor practice the school ethos. The fact that there were no records or minutes of staff meeting to corroborate what Mr Mbomvu, the post level 1 teacher of Hloba Primary School, alluded to during our discussion was a clear evidence that not all was okay at the school

Mr Zukwa, the principal of Lokishini Secondary School mentioned that assembly sessions were a place where learners demonstrated self-discipline through the culture of intrinsic/extrinsic motivation. During my visit to the school and attending the assembly at this school such could not be displayed by both the teachers and learners. The majority of learners were showing no respect to the proceedings of the assembly. Some of the teachers also were not paying any attention to the assembly. Learners were busy having their conversations, others busy playing with cell phones and some teachers were reading the newspapers and having their own discussions. This suggests that the school is somehow losing control over learners and some teachers to pay respect to the school proceedings. My observation at Lokishini Secondary School seems to suggest that the way some of the things are done by some learners and some teachers in the school does not show respect and consistency.

Deducing from the findings so far, the majority of the participants believed that the only way to encourage and practice school ethos is through the use of the gatherings such as the morning assembly where all stakeholders (learners and teachers) were present. Some participants mentioned that they believed in practising the school ethos by always referring to their vision and mission statement which was the cornerstone of the school. Thus the vision and mission statement serves to enlightening values, state the school purpose, gives direction and focus, convey its identity and reason for school being (Deal & Peterson, 2009; Robison, Lloyd & Rowe, 2008). The findings of this study, viewed from social identity theory, suggest that an individual's identity can be shaped and influenced by social gathering in a social space (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). This suggests that when schools are using morning assemblies to congregate, they enhance positive influence in terms of moral

behaviours of learners. This is supported by Van Dijk (1999) who postulates that group identity also involves routine practices which its members identify with and have a meaning to the organisation.

6. Conclusion

Generally, the findings suggest that the participants know what school ethos means but the practice was incompatible with that knowledge. In my own view the above findings are not sufficient if people understand school ethos as something that must be on paper but fail to practice and nurture it in an organisation as a school. If ethos is practiced it then agrees with the literature which states that culture is the way people do things around where there are and the way of life of a particular group (Bush & Anderson, 2003; Fink, 2000). In addition, schools do encourage and practice school ethos and the dominating platform they use is the morning assembly in a collective manner. Furthermore, the participants suggested that they reinforce what have been communicated in an assembly through staff meetings. There is a need to conduct a large scale study to ascertain cohesion in schools so as to equip school leadership in managing different cultures.

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