Re-conceptualizing the Importance of Healthy Collaborative Cultures and Commitment within Schools and between Schools and School Communities in Namibia

Nelson Antonio*

Department of Applied Educational Science, University of Namibia, Windhoek, Namibia

Review Article

***For Correspondence :** Nelson Antonio, Department of Applied Educational Science, University of Namibia, Windhoek, Namibia;

Email: anelson@unam.na

ABSTRACT

Quality service delivery in organizations is realized by virtue of healthy collaborative cultures and commitment that enhances teaching and learning. Establishing a healthy collaborative culture and commitments in schools forms the basis of all management tasks, and is the first and most important step of all management actions to be undertaken by school principal. Healthy collaborative cultures and commitments go hand in hand with employee's job happiness and play a crucial role on organizational performance. In educational institutions, school managers, teachers, school board members, school community along with learner representative councils are the most important human resource needed to activate and convert the other more passive resources into need satisfying goods and services. In general, these stake holders are regarded as an unsurpassed vital resource of any organization, thus, the issue of creating a healthy collaborative culture and commitment among these stake holders has become an indispensable part of the human resource strategy. This qualitative hermeneutic phenomenology approach aims to establish the importance of a healthy collaborative culture and commitment in schools and its relevance to the organizational effectiveness and efficiency. This project interviewed various stake holders in the Khomas region in order to acquire in-depth information regarding the impact of a healthy collaborative culture and commitment in schools. This paper reveals that happy employees and other stake holders may demonstrate a good standard of performance and produce work of high quality. Furthermore, this paper posits that executing fair managerial practices and implementing stress management programs may assist stake holders to be more adaptive and receptive to job demands and improve work engagement which has a positive impact on classroom and leadership practice. Furthermore, this paper concludes that since leaders cannot be successful in isolation, a healthy culture of collaborativeness and commitment in schools is essential to the task at hand, hence, by means of motivation, stake holders will be bound to the school, without wanting to quit their roles and the school. Indisputably, this in itself is a driving force that enhances employee's self-efficacy, learning and job happiness that may encourage high work engagement and hard work that leads to a positive impact towards school performance.

Keywords: Quality service; Collaborative cultures; Motivation; Job happiness; Praise and Recognition; Individual talents; Justice

INTRODUCTION

Tian, posits that if educators are a school's greatest asset, their training and development should be viewed as an investment in human capital, and not as just another expense. The world, and consequently schools in Namibia, is rapidly moving towards a knowledge based economy in which the development and application of knowledge replaces raw materials and labor as the main means of production. Furthermore, changing trends in the social, political and educational spheres demand educators to renew their knowledge and skills in order to keep up with the demands of a knowledge economy and global competitiveness [1]. In this regard, schools are now urged to strive for quality service delivery strategies in order to make a difference in the lives of their learners. However, the problems experienced in some schools, such as disputed and disrupted authority relations between principals and school boards, educators and learners, poor attendance by both educators and learners, poor school results, violence in and around schools, and the lack of a strategic vision, pose enormous challenges. This problems significantly affect the quality of teaching and learning in some Namibian schools [2].

Collaboration means laboring together, working jointly with others, especially in an intellectual endeavor. The restoration of the culture of teaching and learning, and management involves the creation of a culture of collaboration and accountability. Accountability in the sense of development of a common purpose among learners, educators, principals, and parents, who espouse mutually agreed and understood responsibilities [3].

However, it is argued that the best principal spends an intense amount of time on developing, improving and investing in collaborative cultures and commitment. Spicer states that healthy collaborative cultures and commitment in the school are afforded when the principal accepts, respects and exalts employees. Meanwhile, sallee reiterates that healthy collaboration and commitments are at the heart of what makes a school extraordinary [4]. Equally important is that collaboration and commitment must be professionally supportive, sincere and consciously developed. Spicer asserts that principals, who can build collaborative cultures with teachers, school board, parents and school community and interact with them, hold the central elements for creating a positive school climate. In this regard, the principal will gain mutual support, achieve mutual understanding, shared purpose and accomplish shared decisions. This new enabling culture must be used by individual and collective effort to achieve positive learner outcome [5].

Research objectives

To establish the importance of a healthy collaborative cultures and commitment within schools and between schools and school community [6].

LITERATURE REVIEW

Establishing healthy collaborative cultures and commitment in schools encompasses three communicative processes: Effective dialogue, mutual trust and non-judgmental, descriptive and co-operative approach to conflict resolution.

Effective dialogue: Language is the vehicle for the expression of mindsets. Accordingly, effective dialogue is concerned with open communication (discussion or conversation), in which educators exhibit trust, honesty, integrity, openness, humility and a desire to improve their practices. Ament affirms that effective dialogue is a critical component in the development of trust. Honingh, Hooge and O'Hara acknowledge that school authority should establish a strong communication structure to inform and engage both internal and external stakeholders in setting and achieving school goals. Steyn and Van Niekerk emphasize that effective dialogue needs to be simple, but is an amazingly powerful tool that gives principals an edge and allows them to win the war of words every time. Thus, principals must employ suitable words and nonverbal signs (smiling, tone of voice, eye contact) which fit into the receiver's frame of reference in order for dialogue to be effective [7].

Mutual trust: Trust is an important element needed to establish a healthy collaborative cultures and commitment in schools. Taking time to build trust is imperative for school authority to adapt the mission, vision and core beliefs of the school in order for learners to learn at a high standard and with clear expectations. The principal must establish and maintain trust within the school. Equally, trust is earned and not gained automatically by virtue of the position or personal status. Trust is the glue that can bind people together as a team to work as one unit in order to open the opportunities for informal network collaboration and collaborative innovation. Whitehead, Boschee and Decker reiterate that, when teachers and principals are cooperative and trust efforts are strong, learners experience greater academic challenges and a greater sense of well-being.

Non-judgmental, descriptive and co-operative approach to conflict resolution: Van der westhuizen states that conflict in the sense of an honest difference of opinion, where a choice must be made between two alternative methods, is unavoidable and can be a valuable exercise. Co-operative approach to conflict resolution ensures that all the possibilities are carefully considered and that future planning is done, based on the consequences offered by the particular alternative. Boucher reiterates that principals consider co-operative approach to conflict resolution as an important skill that enhances a positive school climate that contributes to a healthy collaborative culture and

commitment within the school.

METHODOLOGY

Research design
A hermeneutic phenomenology research design approach was employed using interviews to establish the importance of a healthy collaborative cultures and commitment between principals, school boards, teachers, learner representative councils, and parents. In this study, qualitative interview methods were employed to help establish the experiences of principals, School Board Members (SBMs) teachers, Learner Representative Councils (LRCs), parents and school communities [8].

Sample of the study
The sample in this study consisted of a total of forty participants, this included five principals, ten teachers, ten school boards, ten community members and five learner representative councils from primary, combined and senior secondary schools in the Khomas region [9].

Data analysis
The study employed a Qualitative Data Analysis (QDA) to analyze the data based on an "interpretative philosophy that is aimed at examining meaningful and symbolic content of meaning of a specific phenomenon by analyzing their perceptions, attitudes, understanding, knowledge, values, feelings and experiences in an attempt to approximate their construction of the phenomenon". QDA was the best suited method to establish the importance of a healthy collaborative culture and commitment between principals, teachers, SBMs, LRCs and community members in the Khomas region. Finally the researcher critically analyzed the transcripts of interviews that were conducted [10].

Findings
The importance of healthy collaborative cultures and commitment within schools and between schools and school communities.
The findings that emerged from this study reveal that healthy collaborative cultures and commitment bears the following effective practices in schools as perceived by principals, SBMs, teachers, LRCs and School community, and these perceptions has a positive impact on the school and school community [11].

- It is easy to achieve staff commitment and smooth management relations.
- It ensures staff involvement and influence.
- It ensures the absence of undue job stress.
- It ensures a pleasant working environment.
- It ensures respect for individuals and good relations with supervisor.
- It ensures a positive work group relations.
- It is easy to maintain discipline among learners.
- It enhances good academic results for learners.
- It promotes good relationships.
- It ensures transparency.
- It ensures learners satisfaction.
- It ensures school development.
- It ensures the recognition of parents and restores trust in the school authority.
- It fosters unity and trust.
- It ensures the achievement of goals and objectives.
- It ensures the established of trust between school authority and school community.
- It enables free consultations of the school community with the school.
- It enables effective and smooth running of the school.
- It enables the school community to utilize school facilities.
- It ensures a democratic and participatory decisions at the school.
- It ensures the time to time invitation of experienced and knowledgeable individuals within the community to talk about local history, geography, culture and religious practices.
- It ensures the donation of land for school buildings and a farm by the community under the leadership of the local chief.
- It ensures that the community may, through voluntary contributions in the form of funds and materials and by providing labor, assist the school in constructing and maintaining teaching facilities such as classrooms, laboratories, workshops and teachers houses.
- It ensures that a school committee may help to design the school curriculum, at least in respect of local

studies which are built into and around the national core curriculum. Such studies might include contributions by technical experts and professionals, such as commercial farmers, doctors, accountants and businessmen.

- It ensures that a local skilled craftsmen be invited to give demonstrations and training in practical production activities in the school, for example, in furniture making, car maintenance, pottery, weaving and building.

DISCUSSION

In this section, the researcher discusses the findings regarding the importance of a healthy collaborative culture and commitment within schools and between schools and school communities in the Khomas region, Namibia [12].

The findings from interviews revealed that the importance of a healthy collaborative culture and commitment was that staff commitment and smooth management relations were achieved by means of unity and trust. It was also noted that some parents and members of the community did not embrace the leadership of the school due to the fact they were not recognized as SBMs and as important assets of the school, and since they were not trusted, their inputs were not taken into account during school board meetings. Participating SBMs indicated that it is very important to include them in the decision making process and school affairs, because they would feel recognized and trusted by the school authority, and at the same time avoid undue job stress. The finding is in agreement with ament, who argues that taking time to build trust is imperative for SBMs to adapt the mission, vision and core beliefs of the school in order for learners to progress with high standards and clear expectations. It is important to note that trust is something that the principal must establish and maintain within the school. Spicer acknowledges that principals who can build relationships with SBMs and interact with them, hold the central elements for creating a positive school climate. In order to create a positive school climate, principals must be consummate in building cultures of collaboration and commitment in schools, especially with SBMs who represents the parent component [13]. When principals lead by example and work to build healthy collaborative cultures and commitment by virtue trust, shared values, shared vision, shared responsibility and shared purpose, working relationships improve and SBMs along with the community are happier with their roles. In this way, experienced and knowledgeable individuals within the community may be invited from time to time to talk about local history, geography, culture and religious practices. The findings from interviews revealed that the majority of participating principals, parents, teachers and SBMs affirmed that, good discipline go hand in hand with a healthy culture of collaboration and commitment in schools. Participating principals and SBMs seemed to be working together in maintaining discipline at the school and such a role is similar to the role, responsibilities of SBMs as outlined by the ministry of basic education, sport and culture that principals and SBMs should be able to exercise discipline at the school. The findings from interviews also revealed that principals and SBMs were important partners for the smooth running of the school. Participating principals and some SBMs agreed that the importance of a healthy culture of collaboration and commitment between stakeholders was to oversee the smooth running of the school. This can be realized when the principal, teachers and SBMs are working together and support the mechanism of believing that staff involvement and influence is of cardinal importance to ensure that quality teaching and learning takes place at the school. The finding is also in line with observations made by Onderi and Makori, namely that the role of SBMs is to facilitate the smooth operation of teaching and learning in schools through the provision of teaching and learning materials. Similar observations are made by the ministry of education, arts and culture, namely that the principal is morally and legally obliged to cooperate with the school board in the best interest of the school. The findings from interviews further revealed that there were consultations between principals and SBMs on matters regarding school development. Findings further support the fact that due to healthy cultures of collaboration within the school and between the school and community, the community has, through voluntary contributions in the form of funds and materials and by providing labor, assisted the school in constructing and maintaining teaching facilities such as classrooms, laboratories, workshops and teachers houses. This is also in line with the roles and responsibilities of SBMs as stated by the ministry of basic education, sport and culture, namely that a school board needs to work together with the school community to help the development of the school's infrastructure. Findings are also in harmony with the fact that school board can organize the community members under the leadership of a local chief to carry out building projects, such as building a school library, a school hall and a farm. Participating principals, teachers, SBMs, parents and school community members reaffirm that this enabling culture of collaboration and commitment made it possible to invite local skilled craftsmen to give demonstrations and training in practical production activities in the school, for example, in furniture making, car maintenance, pottery, weaving and building [14].

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to establish and create awareness of the importance of a healthy collaborative culture and commitment in enhancing learning in the schools of Khomas region, Namibia. The researcher confirms that the restoration of a culture of teaching, learning, and management involves the creation of a culture of collaboration and accountability. Everyone who is involved in the education of the young in this country will agree that fundamental mind-shifts in existing cultures in some schools are essential. In order to create more collaborative cultures and renew the work commitment, educators must see the acquisition of knowledge and skills as an investment in

tomorrow. It is the task of any modern educational leader to create a commonly accepted culture of collaboration that enables everyone in the school to flourish by virtue of dialogue, reflection and inquiry.

Conflict of interest
The author declares no conflict of interest.

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