

SCHOOL MANAGEMENT PRACTICES IN SELECTED PRIVATE AND PUBLIC PRIMARY SCHOOLS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN BOTSWANA

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Abstract

The aim of school management is to create and maintain an environment that supports, promotes, and sustains effective teaching and learning. This is a daunting task which presents many challenges to the school administrators especially during a pandemic. This study explored School Management Team (SMT) practices in private and public primary schools in Gaborone during the pandemic. This was done by determining if SMTs were trained for their roles in the face of Covid-19, the challenges they faced, the steps taken to manage the challenges, and the impact of their management practices on learners' performance. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data from 24 members of the SMTs in two private schools and two public schools. Data was analysed thematically. Although the majority of the participants were not trained before assuming their leadership roles, findings showed that the private school participants engaged in training to enhance their effectiveness during the pandemic. Challenges like absenteeism, lack of consultation, poor performance, and fear, were encountered. Classroom shortage was observed in public schools, while private schools were faced with lack of finance, resistance to change and stigmatization. These challenges were tackled through remote learning, engaging teachers through a government initiative called *Tirelo Sechaba* Programme (TSP), and the use of non-teaching staff for teaching and learning. Private schools showed more concern towards tackling fear by engaging in light physical exercises and workshops involving staff from the Ministry of Health. The adoption of remote learning exposed the inadequacy in the use of technologies in Botswana as they were not accessible by learners. The study therefore underscores the need for improved education technology and human resources in Botswana schools, and the need to remove the dichotomy between private and public schools for improved performance.

Keywords: Covid-19, school management, Botswana, *Tirelo Sechaba*, improved performance.

1.0 Introduction

The obvious place of education in human development has led to massive investment of resources in the education sector. However, making resources available is just one of the

preliminary steps towards the achievement of educational aims and objectives. These resources need to be properly managed to produce human resources of the highest quality that can compete both locally and internationally. No education can be effective without effective management. This is because educational managers, through the practical application of management principles, can organise available resources to attain educational goals (Lynch et al., 2020). Educational management therefore entails carrying out different responsibilities for the proper functioning of systems in educational institutions (Connolly et al., 2017). This is in agreement with the assertion by Lynch et al. (2020) that the purpose of any management system should be to create and maintain an educational environment that supports, promotes and sustains effective and efficient teaching and learning.

Management is a daunting task which presents many challenges to the manager. The ability to handle these challenges has a profound impact on the dynamics and performance of organizations (Ann, 2015). With the emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic, the duties of managers became even more complicated. The Covid-19 virus, which spreads via close contact with an infected person, affected the practices of different organizations leading to abrupt change in work culture (Mustajab et al., 2020). The worldwide lockdown of businesses and industries implemented to curb the spread of the virus generated a wide array of unique and fundamental challenges to both employees and managers across the globe (Kniffin et al., 2020). The education sector was not left out, as educational activities were disrupted globally. This led to numerous changes that altered teaching and learning practices (Harris, 2020), and presented educational managers with numerous challenges. In order to ascertain the effects of the Covid-19 on school management, this study explored SMT practices in public and private schools during the Covid-19 pandemic. The findings of this study could serve as possible guideline for school management in peculiar cases of emergencies.

2.0 Background to the study

The Botswana government recognizes the role that education plays in reinforcing and nurturing the values and ideas of democracy in order to promote national unity (Monyatsi, 2005). This recognition led to the formulation of policies geared towards improving the standards of education in the country. Some of these policies which were made prior to the pandemic were also directed towards proper educational management. In fact, the Ministry of Education and Skills Development has made tremendous efforts to improve school management at all levels (Tsayang, 2011). In the primary level of education for instance, the Primary School Management Development Project (PSMDP) was instituted to promote improved management practices in primary schools in Botswana (Mhozya, 2010). Pansiri (2014) argued that the PSMDP “originated from policy initiatives, resulting in organizational restructuring and hoped to transform from reform to innovation in order to impact on classroom practice” (p. 27). Another major attempt to improve management of primary education was the introduction of a Bachelor's Degree in Primary Education programme and subsequent introduction of the Bachelor of Education in Educational Management Programme at the University of Botswana (Tsayang, 2011). These programmes and policies were aimed at realizing one of the main objectives of national development plan 8 (NDP 8) which centres on

the improvement of quality and effectiveness of primary education (Mhozya, 2010). The programmes and policies intended to achieve the objectives of NDP 8 through holistic management that can stand the test of time. Although Tsayang (2011) highlighted that the PSMDP was able to achieve its mandate, Pansiri (2008a) showed that SMTs in primary education in Botswana lack several important qualities such as lack of creativity and innovativeness for change management.

In a bid to raise management standards in secondary schools in Botswana, the Secondary Schools Management Development Project (SSMDP) was launched by a joint effort of the Ministry of Education and Skills Development and the then British Overseas Development Agency (BODA) (Monyatsi, 2005). Despite the SSMDP, low achievements in schools continue to be traced to school management practices and poor policy environment (Pansiri, 2008b). A study by Mphale (2014) indicates that very few benefitted from professional development initiatives in Botswana schools as such initiatives failed to attain the required development needs. This raises some poignant questions. First, are these policies and programmes suitable for the Botswana context? Are SMTs in both private and public schools compelled to attend these programmes? Are the SMTs properly trained to play their management roles? Are they trained to adapt to changes and challenges in situations such as the pandemic? One of these questions is answered in part by Pansiri (2011) who asserts that the uncritical adoption of Western models of education management may as well be the cause of the poor performance in Botswana schools. This implies that the management programmes may not be well suited for achieving the aims and objectives of Botswana education as indicated in the Revised National Policy on Education (RNPE). This lack of fit of management programmes led Pheko (2008) to suggest that a training policy should be made to guide the training of head teachers in order to improve school effectiveness. This is because “despite the lofty aims of societies’ leaders, and the innumerable efforts of committed teachers”, Botswana education system is “largely incapable of helping most learners develop the skills, knowledge, and competencies needed to successfully confront the social and economic realities of our global times” (Tarrago & Wilson-Daily, 2010, p. 389). Poor management policies and practices could therefore be the major cause of poor performance in the education sector in Botswana (Pansiri, 2011). A similar view is held by Galafa and Luca (2018) who argued that management determines the outcome of many undertakings in the school. It is, therefore, obvious that better school management practices could go a long way in promoting the quality of education in Botswana.

Although Botswana has made tremendous efforts in technological advancement, the country is still far behind when compared to countries with high levels of technology. The corona virus outbreak led to the introduction of several technologies in the teaching and learning process. School managers were compelled to respond to the changing socioeconomic conditions within the society, and the disruption occasioned by the rapid development of digital technologies used as management tools (Lynch et al., 2020). It is left to be seen if school managers in Botswana were able to carry out their management roles effectively in the face of these technologies. In summary, there are policies and programmes in education management

for SMTs in Botswana. However, they are marred by many gaps. First is that they may not be suitable for the Botswana context since most of them are adopted from other systems of education. Second is that these programmes may not have prepared the educational managers for challenges that come with management in a crisis situation such as the Covid-19 pandemic. Against this background, this study was aimed at exploring SMT practices during the Covid-19 pandemic in Botswana. This was done by comparing and contrasting management practices in public and private primary schools during Covid-19, and the effect of these practices on teaching and learning.

3.0 Theoretical framework

This study was underpinned by the scientific management theory postulated by Fredrick Taylor in 1911 (Blake & Moseley, 2010). The theory has four major objectives. According to Conlin (2019), the first objective of the scientific management theory is that each task must be studied so as to determine the most efficient way to carry out a task, thereby disrupting traditional work processes. The second objective is that workers must be aligned to a job that is best suited to their abilities and motivation. The third is that employees must be monitored to ensure they follow best working practices. The fourth is that managers are to spend time training employees and planning for future needs. This implies that management and workers must work together in close interdependence (Olum, 2004).

The different objectives of the scientific management theory were implicated in this study. First is that this study assumed that educational managers should be properly trained before assuming management positions, and they should undergo continuous professional development so as to be able to not just train other employees, but to also plan for future needs. The Covid-19 pandemic was one of such needs that required adequate training so as to be able to adjust to the changes that came with the pandemic. Again, the scientific management theory asserts that the most efficient way of carrying out a task should be followed. The pandemic led to the introduction of new methods of doing things. This study asserts that SMTs should be able to adjust accordingly to these new methods instead of sticking to the 'old-rule-of thumb' method of doing things. The study also asserts that managers should cooperate effectively with their employees so as to ensure that laid down procedures are followed.

4.0 Research questions

The study sought to answer the following questions.

- a) Are SMTs well trained to assume management roles and to manage their schools during a pandemic?
- b) What are the challenges faced by SMTs as a result of the pandemic?
- c) What are the steps taken by SMTs to manage these challenges?
- d) What impact does management practices have on learning outcome during a pandemic?

5.0 Literature review

5.1 Role of training in effective management

The productive resources in every organization (capital, labour, and material) are entrusted to the administrative ability, enterprising initiative and organizing skills of the management (Das & Mishra, 2019). According to Riaz (2016), the management process involves decision making at the different levels in an organization in order to get things done by people. This implies that without management, an organization cannot exist. Different organizations may have different goals, aims and objectives, but one thing all organizations have in common is management and managers (Papertyari, 2018). Using principles of management, managers get things done through others either in groups or individually.

According to Olum (2004), every management practice has three key objectives. The first objective is ensuring that the goals and targets of the organization are met with the least possible cost; the second objective deals with looking after the health, welfare, and safety of staff, while the third is protecting the resources and machinery of the organization. To achieve these objectives of management, a manager must carry out a number of functions. According to Riaz (2016), the four fundamental functions of management are planning, organizing, actuating, and controlling, while for Henri Fayol, management functions involve planning, organizing, commanding, coordinating, and controlling (Bacud, 2020). The most widely accepted functions of management are those proposed by Koontz and O'Donnell, and they include planning, organizing, staffing, directing, and controlling (Riaz, 2016).

Although managerial functions can be very challenging, the skills one gains through principles of management (consisting of the functions of planning, organizing, leading, and controlling) will help one to meet these challenges (Carpenter et al., 2010). The management styles and the adopted principles by the manager depend largely on the kind of manager (Bacud, 2020). To be effective, a manager must have technical, human, and conceptual skills. Technical skills deal with things, human skills deal with people, while conceptual skills deal with ideas (Das & Mishra, 2019). No manager is born with these skills (Everard et al., 2004), but rather they acquire them through training and experiences. A similar view is held by Atiase and Botchie (2018) who opined that the delivery of an efficient, accessible, frequent, and content-rich managerial training is very important in developing managerial capabilities. Managerial training is indeed a driver of performance both at the firm and individual level.

Pansiri (2008b) in a study entitled 'Improving commitment to basic education for the minorities in Botswana: A challenge for policy and practice' showed that low achievements in Botswana schools could be traced to school management practices and poor policy environment. With these findings in view, Mphale (2014) investigated the effectiveness of professional development in secondary schools in Botswana. The findings showed that very few benefitted from professional development initiatives, and that such initiatives were far from reaching their development needs. Although the respondents for the study were teachers from secondary schools, the findings showed that professional development was lacking in Botswana schools. The first research question posed in this study therefore explored the level

of training provided for SMTs before they assumed their management roles, and if they were also trained to manage their schools during situations such as the pandemic.

5.2 Challenges of school management

Building a developed society of literates is highly dependent on school management techniques. However, the implementation, formulation, and dissemination of these techniques have become a global challenge especially as there is no universal education system. Some of the challenges of school management include financing, lack of collaboration with relevant stakeholders, lack of pre-service and in-service training for head teachers and other members of staff (Galaf & Lucas, 2018), safety (Bipath, 2017) and conflict (Larasati & Raharja, 2020). These challenges are in line with the challenges of management posited by Mustafa (2013) which include responding to economic pressure, responding to globalization, working in networked organizations, and stimulating innovation and change.

Elias et al. (2014) posited that despite the numerous challenges associated with management, SMTs should be innovative and creative enough to initiate an inviting climate that makes learners to participate and enjoy the teaching and learning process. The authors went further to assert that SMTs are expected to improvise by creating materials needed to ensure that educative activities take place effectively even during emergencies. The challenges of school management highlighted in literature were observed before the pandemic. They therefore failed to take cognizance of the challenges posed by a pandemic on school management. This study fills this gap by unravelling the challenges faced by SMTs as a result of the pandemic.

5.3 Impact of health emergencies on school management

The Covid-19 pandemic led many organizations to change their work culture abruptly (Mustajab et al., 2020). Although the challenges faced by managers are well defined, the worldwide lockdown of businesses and industries implemented to curb the spread of the virus generated a wide array of unique and fundamental challenges to both employees and managers across the globe (Kniffin et al., 2020). In the school system, the challenges faced by SMTs became heightened as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic which disrupted the management process and brought numerous changes in the school system. However, there is no available study that explored the effect of the virus on SMTs practices. Related studies (Duraku & Hoxha, 2020; Onyema et al., 2020) revealed that the Covid-19 pandemic had adverse effects on education with the new circumstances created by the spread of the virus causing a number of concerns among learners, parents and teachers. Omar et al. (2023) studied the impact of Covid-19 on Somali students' education in the United Kingdom. Findings from the study showed that the pandemic led to several challenges from the learners' perspectives such as mental illness, stress, weight gain due to physical inactivity, and emotional difficulties. These available studies on the impact of the pandemic however failed to outline the perspective of members of SMTs on the subject.

The effects of similar disease outbreak on the education process are available in local, regional, and international contexts. In an article that explored the impacts of past infectious disease outbreaks, Scobie, and Whitehead (2020) noted that the 2003 severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) outbreak was found to cause fear and anxiety because of its status as a new and unknown virus. The social impact of past infectious disease outbreaks included absenteeism from work, loss of wages, school closures, and lack of communication. These impacts tended to be transient and often localised to where major outbreaks occurred. It remained to be seen if the impact of this previous disease outbreak on mental health, individual/family economics, job and income loss, and child education is comparable to that which emerged as a result of Covid-19. It also remained to be seen if these challenges are applicable to the SMTs in Botswana.

Oladunjoye and Major (2015) ascertained the impact of Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) on school administration using questionnaires administered to 83 school administrators randomly selected from three regions in Nigeria. The study showed that there was no significant difference in the perception of teachers and school heads in both urban and rural areas on the effect of EVD on attendance and hygiene in schools. Findings from the study also showed that EVD affected school administration positively and negatively. Just as in the case of Covid-19 pandemic, schools were shut by the federal government of Nigeria during the EVD epidemic, and parents were scared to send their children to school. This affected teaching and learning, and school administrators had to make efforts to cover lost ground. Parents in worst hit areas attempted to relocate their children to other states. On a positive note, the EVD helped to improve the practice of hygiene in schools as morning inspections were done to check the neatness of learners. Relating the impact of EVD to Covid-19, Smith (2021) opined that post-Ebola, youth in the poorest households saw the largest increase in school dropout. This evidence is important for minimising the likely post-Covid-19 expansion in inequality. Findings by the author point to the need for sustainable planning that looks beyond the reopening of educational institutions to include comprehensive financial support packages for groups most likely to be affected. This could be an important insight to school managers in the post-Covid-19 era.

In an article by Hallgarten (2020) which provides evidence on efforts to mitigate the negative educational impact of past disease outbreaks, the major impacts of pandemic on school management include school closures, diversion of resources and teachers, lack of educational materials at home, restriction of movement, stigmatization, lack of reliable information on progress of disease, fear and emotional stress, lack of teacher training and lack of school maintenance. These impacts, according to the author, were mitigated by using distance learning materials, screen, and internet-enabled technologies to support alternative education, and remote teacher training to maintain education quality.

A report by the World Health Organization (2020) showed that Botswana was able to contain the spread of Covid-19 through physical-distancing, isolating and quarantining cases, quality clinical care for infected clients, contact tracing and testing, and restricting movement”

(p. 2). According to United Nations Botswana (2020), the country closed its borders on the 24 March 2020 and then reported its first confirmed case on the 30 March which led to a declaration of a state of emergency and imposition of an initial 28-day lockdown in April 2020. These measures affected the school system in the country adversely. Schools were made to shut down and learners had no option than to learn from home. The crisis exposed many inequalities and inadequacies in the education systems, ranging from “access to broadband and computers needed for online education, and the supportive environments needed to focus on learning, up to the misalignment between resources and needs” (Schleicher, 2020, p. 4). There is no doubt that these restrictions impacted the school management adversely. The extent of this effect on SMT remained unknown until the current study that explored management practices in private and public schools in Botswana.

In the Botswana context, there are very limited studies that involved private and public schools in the country. A study by Letsholo and Alimi (2019) was limited to two public and private schools in urban and rural areas in Botswana and showed that private school pupils performed better than their public-school counterparts. A similar view is held by Adeyemi (2014) who opined that pupils in private schools perform better than those in public schools. It was therefore necessary to explore management practices in private and public primary schools in Botswana as a result of the pandemic. This was why the fourth research question posed in this study explored the effect of school management on learners’ performance in both private and public schools.

6.0 Methodology

This study was informed by interpretivist research paradigm which aims to understand the interpretation of individuals about the social phenomena they interact with (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). Since the Covid-19 pandemic was a general human problem, a qualitative research approach was chosen because it aided in examining the way people made sense out of their own concrete real-life experiences in their own minds and in their own words (Cropley, 2019). The study adopted a phenomenological design which focused on defining the concept of intentionality and the meaning of lived experiences from the participants’ points of view (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007). The population for this study was SMTs in primary schools in Gaborone. SMTs were chosen for this study because they were in charge of management in schools, and the study sought to identify how the pandemic had impacted them. Primary schools were chosen because this level of education is usually ignored in education research when compared to other levels of education in Botswana. More so, primary education is the most important stage in Botswana education system as it, among other goals, helps children to be literate, first in Setswana and then in English in state-owned schools (Botswana Federation of Trade Unions, 2007). This is indeed an important task, hence the need to find out how SMTs worked to achieve this aim in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic. The number of primary schools in Botswana has risen from 250 in 1966 to over 770 as at 2006, with a teaching force of over 12,000 (Botswana Federation of Trade Union, 2007). With the large increase in the numbers of staff and pupils in primary schools, it became even more urgent to study SMTs in

these schools so as to discover how they were going about their management duties in the face of the pandemic.

Two private and two public primary schools (4 schools in total) in Gaborone were chosen for this study. Gaborone was chosen because most policies are usually implemented in Gaborone before they get to other regions in the country. The capital city was also the most hit by the Covid-19 pandemic as it was consistently on lockdown unlike other cities and regions (Dube, 2020). The public schools which were selected randomly were tagged A and B, while the private schools were tagged W and X for confidentiality. The members of SMT in primary schools in Botswana included the head teacher, the deputy head teacher, heads of lower, middle and upper classes, and head of subjects. Based on accessibility (Okagbue, 2012), Covid-19 restrictions, and the limited time frame for this study, 15 participants were purposively selected from the two public schools while 8 participants were selected from two private schools. The researchers intended to use equal number of participants from the public and private schools. However, only those that were willing to participate were selected for the study. Creswell and Plano-Clark (2007) opined that purposive sampling is necessary when the researcher deliberately chooses those respondents that are familiar with the phenomenon being investigated and are willing to share useful insight about that phenomenon.

For the purpose of this study aimed at exploring management practices during the pandemic, the researchers used semi-structured interview to collect data from the participants. This is most appropriate when studying an unknown/new phenomenon and the target population may not adequately provide enough information required to answer the research questions without being encouraged by the interviewer (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). It allowed the researchers to learn the views of the participants, to see their world through their eyes and to tell their stories through their voices (Creswell et al., 2010). The researchers recorded the information from the interview by handwritten notes and by audio-taping.

Interviews were done face-to-face by adhering strictly to Covid-19 protocols such as social distancing, use of face masks, and following the interview protocol described by Creswell (2009) which entailed probing the research participants on a particular line of argument to obtain more information; giving certain amount of space between questions to enhance proper recording; and issuing a statement of appreciation to each participant for the time spent during the interview. Data was analysed thematically, and steps such as checking the transcripts to ensure that they did not contain obvious mistakes made during transcription, making sure that there was no drift in the definition of codes or a shift in the meaning of the codes during the process of coding, and inter-coder agreement (Creswell, 2009) were applied to ensure validity. Three classes of ethical issues in research involving humans considered in this study were protection from harm, informed consent, permissions, and right to privacy (Okagbue, 2012).

7.0 Results and discussion

7.1 Training as a hindrance to school management

The findings from the first research question showed that there is a loophole in the training of SMTs in both private and public schools. It was noticed that only some of the SMTs were compulsorily trained before assuming their management positions while other members of the management only participated in induction ceremony. Exactly 57% and 56% opined that they did not receive any form of training before assuming their management positions in public and private schools respectively. It was also observed that training was mostly provided for some members of the SMT while some others were left untrained. This is reflected in the following views:

I became a member of the management team about 10 or so years ago. I grew through the ranks to become one of the members and so I didn't necessarily receive any training before assuming my management position...and yes, I believe such training is necessary as it would have made me a better manager...but then I have passed through good, bad and ugly school managers and I think I have learnt over the years through experience...but trainings are very important I must say.

The participants in the public schools asserted that they did not receive any form of training during the pandemic. They also submitted that most of the teaching and learning done in their schools during the lockdown was through WhatsApp communication platform which involved sending learning materials to a WhatsApp group where all the learners were added. One of the private school participants had the following to say:

No, there was no such training. The pandemic really came as a shock to everyone. There was also no training on the use of modern technologies. The technology we mostly used was during the lockdown period. We communicated with the teachers through our WhatsApp platform and teachers also communicated with parents of the children through the same WhatsApp. We used the platform to send notes and other learning material across. I don't think this requires any training. *Akere* almost everyone has a smart phone?

In the case of the private school participants, it was observed that the majority engaged in some form of training which helped them to perform better during the pandemic especially when a lockdown was imposed in the whole nation. Their views are captured in the following thoughts:

Of course, we engaged in massive training for the entire staff and management. The curriculum at school has always put emphasis on blended learning which was an ongoing activity even before the pandemic. The pupils, parents and teachers worked through an online educational platform which helped a lot in three-way communications. Hence, online teaching and learning was not a challenge. We were doing this even before the pandemic. The only additional App we introduced was zoom.

The fact that only some of the SMTs were compulsorily trained before assuming their management positions is unacceptable and against the scientific management theory which prescribes that managers are to spend time training employees and planning for future needs (Conlin, 2019). Without adequate training, SMTs will have challenges working as a team due to the fact that they will not know what their roles entail. This causes disunity and conflict, thereby impacting management effectiveness negatively (Maja, 2016). Although management can be challenging, gaining appropriate managerial skills through training on the principles of management, consisting of the functions of planning, organizing, leading, and controlling, will help a manager to meet these challenges (Carpenter et al., 2010). The delivery of an efficient, accessible, frequent, and content-rich managerial training is very important in developing managerial capabilities (Atiase & Botchie, 2018).

The answers to the first research question also showed that professional development programmes are not totally implemented especially in public schools. It was evident that more members of the SMTs in private schools were engaged in professional development exercise, either in their schools or personally via online platforms, than their public counterparts. The private schools also invited external professionals once in a while to take care of their training needs. Furthermore, the SMTs in the private schools went through numerous trainings in order to prepare themselves for management, teaching and learning in the face of the pandemic. It was however noticed that none of such trainings took place in the public schools studied.

Among the challenges facing school management, lack of pre-service and in-service training has remained top on the list (Galafa & Lucas, 2018). The findings from the public primary schools are in line with the assertions by Mphale (2014) that very few benefitted from professional development initiatives in Botswana, and that such initiatives are far from reaching their development needs. When SMTs are not trained, this will also affect other teachers negatively since policy implementation in schools is one of the roles, responsibilities, and core duties of different members of the SMT (Kgadima, 2006). One may wonder how the SMTs will be able to spearhead the implementation of policies if they themselves are not brought up to speed on those policies.

The efforts of the private schools towards the training of their staff to be highly effective during the pandemic is quite encouraging and worthy of emulation. The action is a response to the call by Elias et al. (2014) that despite numerous challenges, SMTs should be innovative and creative enough to initiate an inviting climate that makes learners to participate and enjoy the teaching and learning process. SMTs are therefore expected to improvise by creating materials needed to ensure that the educative activity takes place effectively even in this time of the global pandemic (Elias et al., 2014). The prompt action by SMTs in private schools showed their readiness and motivation to advance their knowledge and skills with the sole aim of advancing the quality of education (Duraku & Hoxha, 2020). No manager is born with management skills, but rather they acquire them through training and experiences (Everard et al., 2004).

7.2 Challenges of school management during the pandemic

Findings from this study showed that SMTs in private and public schools were faced with numerous challenges including absenteeism by both teachers and pupils, lack of consultation, combining management with teaching, daily screening of learners, poor performance, fear, lack of supervision, limited time for learning and increased working hours. The numerous challenges faced by the participants are in line with the assertions by Kniffin et al. (2020) that the worldwide lockdown of businesses and industries implemented to curb the spread of the virus generated a wide array of unique and fundamental challenges to both employees and managers across the globe.

Absenteeism from school is a major source of concern for not just SMTs but to every stakeholder in the education sector. According to Erik Erickson's Stages of Personality Development, each stage of development comes with a psychosocial crisis which will have either a positive or negative outcome for personality development depending on how the crisis is resolved (McLeod, 2018). The school is a major agent for resolving such conflicts and the process will indeed be hindered when learners are absent from school. Lack of collaboration between stakeholders in the education sector has remained a major challenge in school management even in pre-Covid-19 era (Galafa & Lucas, 2018). From the findings in this study, it is seen that this challenge became heightened as teachers could no longer collaborate effectively with their fellow teachers and with parents. The school management also found it difficult to organize meetings and morning assemblies which were perfect avenues for collaboration. More time was spent in screening the learners that came to school each day as stipulated in the Covid-19 protocol. The challenge of fear faced by the respondents was majorly due to the fact that they felt they were not safe. This fear was engendered by those who had suffered one or more irreparable losses due to the deadly virus which can be transmitted from person to person through close contact. The issue of safety as a challenge in management did not just start in the pandemic era. This is shown by Bipath (2017) who revealed that safety is a major concern for SMTs since learners are known to be very fragile.

Management generally is the process of decision making and control over the action of human beings for the express purpose of attaining pre-determined goals (Riaz, 2016). A manager's role involves planning, organizing, activating, and controlling others so as to determine and accomplish the objectives of an organization. The fact that the participants argued that combining management with teaching was one of the challenges they faced, is not surprising. This is because they were made to shift from their management duties to other roles that were not expected of a school manager. They were not supposed to be directly involved in the teaching process, but they should have rather played some supervisory roles to ensure that the process was value adding.

While shortage in structures (classrooms) was a challenge to SMTs in public schools only, SMTs in private schools suffered from lack of finance, difficulty in online learning, resistance to change and stigmatization. Finance is a major challenge in education the education sector (Galafa & Lucas, 2018). Private schools are not funded by the government; rather, they

rely on the fees paid by parents and private individuals to run their schools (Hendajany, 2016; Writer, 2017). The fact that most parents lost their job due to the pandemic made it difficult for them to pay their children's fees. This in turn affected the management process in private schools since fund is very necessary for day-to-day running of an institution. This is captured in the words of one of the private participants who mentioned that the teachers in their school received a pay cut during the lockdown period; but they were refunded much later.

Some teachers left, our pay was reduced....we were later refunded though. Things were really tough financially for me at that time.

As opined by Terry (cited in Riaz, 2016), management is a distinct process through which objectives are accomplished using people and resources. Without abundant resources as seen in the private schools, management will indeed be a challenging process. Despite the scarce resources, managers should be able to integrate available resources in the pursuit of their goals, be the agents of effective change, and always maintain and develop their resources using means within their reach (Everard et al., 2004).

The online learning introduced by the private schools suffered from resistance to change as most parents among other factors were unable to guide their kids through the process. These challenges are in agreement with the assertions by Mustafa (2013) that management is faced by challenges including economic pressure, responding to globalization, working in networked environment and resistance to innovation and change. The online learning was hindered by poor infrastructures ranging from network, power, and inaccessibility to unavailability issues and poor digital skills (Onyema et al., 2020). The pandemic therefore exposed many inequalities and inadequacies in our education systems, such as access to online education and misalignment of resources (Schleicher, 2020). Despite the numerous challenges, it is the role of the SMTs to find creative and innovative ways to address the numerous challenges they face in order to ensure that teaching and learning processes are not disrupted (Elias et al., 2014). The next section presents the findings on how SMTs tackled the challenges they faced in their schools as a result of the pandemic.

7.3 Tackling the challenges of school management during the pandemic

7.3.1 Remote learning as major solution to school closures

The findings from the third research question showed the numerous steps taken by the SMTs in public and private schools to tackle the challenges faced as a result of the pandemic. SMTs resorted to the use of online learning to cover up for absenteeism of both learners and pupils. This is similar to the methods of teaching employed during the EVD (Hallgarten, 2020). While public schools used mostly WhatsApp platform, private schools used CK12 education platform which was more interactive, but not accessible to all pupils through their parents.

My dear, it is not easy to resolve these challenges as long as the pandemic is still around. Which challenge have we even resolved? Ok... absence of learners. We make use of social media... that is WhatsApp... but I don't even think it's helping out much. Once

the parents of the kids are not knowledgeable enough to guide them through the notes we send, no learning will occur. I have noticed that even after sending the notes, I will still have remedial classes for those that missed school because they couldn't perform to the expected standard [Public school participant].

We were properly prepared on the use of CK12 platform, and this helped us to teach effectively. We started online teaching because we could not interact with learners, but other parents could not access the platforms that we were using because of internet and other constraints. We had to engage learners on interactive learning from Monday to Thursday usually between 7:45 to 15:00hours and Friday from 7:45 to 13:15 hours. Slow learners were further engaged in remedial programs [Private school participant].

The views above exposed the inadequacies in our education systems such as access to broadband and computers needed for online education, and the supportive environments needed to focus on learning (Schleicher, 2020). Again, the fact that most parents could not guide their kids through the online learning process also points to the need to bring them up to speed in this regard. This is in agreement with the assertion by Onyema et al. (2020) that many students and educators relied on technology for learning, and this led to learning disruptions and decreased access to both education and research facilities. However, the efforts of the SMTs to adopt online learning is a response to an assertion by Elias et al. (2014) that SMTs are expected to improvise by creating materials needed to ensure that the educative activity takes place effectively. This is in line with the first objective of the scientific management theory which asserts that each task must be studied so as to determine the most efficient way to carry out a task, thereby disrupting traditional work processes (Conlin, 2019). The online learning indeed affected the traditional method of teaching and learning. Nevertheless, educational managers must respond to changing socioeconomic conditions within a society, and the disruption occasioned by the rapid development of digital technologies used as management tools (Lynch et al., 2020).

7.3.2 Role of TSP teachers in cushioning absenteeism in public schools

For absenteeism of teachers, the public schools sought for external help through the TSP while the private schools depended on their internal non-teaching staff. Internal staff in this context were those that were not directly involved in teaching prior to the pandemic. The use of internal staff by the private schools was because the TSP was run by government, and their staff could only be engaged in public schools which are government owned.

Some [challenges] were resolved. For instance, temporary teachers were hired, and we are now working for 6 hours a day unlike before. Others beyond our control are still not resolved. We use *Tirelo Sechaba* participants which has been very helpful. Even if they can't teach effectively, they always stay with learners in a class where the main teacher is absent and at least give them work to do. TSPs also help by marking and correcting as well as writing notes for learners [Public participant].

When some teachers are not available because of one reason or the other and the teachers on ground cannot cover up, we started using non-academic teachers and assistant teachers just to make sure the pupils are not whiling away. We get a teacher to stand in by covering the lessons internally. It depends on the subject though. We usually find someone who is knowledgeable in that field to a large extent [Private participant].

The availability of TSPs to only public schools coupled with the higher number of pupils in public schools exposed the dichotomy between private and public schools. Most importantly, staffing is a major function of management without which an organization cannot achieve their set goals (Maih, 2015). In a school system, the teaching and learning process will be non-existent or ineffective if qualified teachers are not available. It is not just enough to employ staff in a school; extra steps must be taken to ensure that the teachers engaged are knowledgeable enough to play their roles. This is pointed out by Engel and Finch (2014) who stated that it is important to make correct decisions during the staffing process in schools. Although staffing is inevitable because of the dynamism of organizations, and educational institutions particularly (Lawrent & Ndibalema, 2012), there is need to do this efficiently. Eyebrows may be raised over the decision of public schools to engage persons from TSP as teachers, and that of private schools to engage non-teaching staff in the teaching and learning process. The private schools were also forced to engage teachers in areas that are not their specialty which could in turn affect productivity. This is against the second objective of the scientific management theory which asserts that workers must be aligned to a job that is best suited to their abilities and motivation (Conlin, 2019).

Looking after the health, welfare and safety of their subjects is also a major function of managers (Olum, 2004). To tackle fear and panic, private schools engaged in workshops involving the ministry of health while the public schools resorted to self-counselling. Addressing the emotional and psychological needs of teachers and learners was crucial during the pandemic as teachers had lost their colleagues at an alarming rate. Learners had equally lost their teachers and parents at an unusual rate and circumstances. Furthermore, the Covid-19 virus came with immense stigma against people who are infected or had a family member who was diagnosed with the virus. These had negative effect on the psychological state of teachers and learners. The workshop and light physical exercise organized by SMTs in the private schools showed their willingness to ensure the psychological wellbeing and safety of their subjects since safety is a major challenge in schools (Bipath, 2017).

On the issue of lack of physical exercise, it was noticed that SMTs in private schools found a way to engage their pupils in light exercise which was indeed productive for learning. This was possible because they had limited numbers of pupils that were easily managed. To address the issue of panic and fear, the private schools held workshops to counsel their staff and learners in collaboration with the Ministry of Health and Wellness. This is reflected in the words below:

We still managed to engage learners in light physical exercises to stretch once in a while. This was done class by class and the number of pupils in each class is such that social distancing is maintained. The school holds workshops to help teachers and learners cope psychologically. In these workshops, we are taught about the Covid protocol and how we can follow them. The workshop helps us to get over the loss of our relatives and to move on. It has also taken care of stigmatization suffered by those who recovered from the virus...People no longer fear them like before. Fear and panic have greatly decreased. When the pandemic started, you will hear a lot of things that will make you feel you are about dying. Today we have adjusted to the new normal, thanks to this workshop that usually involves staff from ministry of Health.

In summary, no matter the challenges facing the SMTs, they should be able to creatively solve school problems, manage school programs, help teachers, students, and other customers of the school, and set a road map for school activities (Farah, 2013). The next section presents the effect of the Covid-19 pandemic on the performance of learners.

7.4 Impact of school management on learning outcome

The SMTs in the selected public schools stated that the performance of their pupils had depreciated due to absenteeism, ineffectiveness of online learning, trauma, and less contact with the learners. These are reflected in the views below:

Partly I think the pupils [performance] are somehow affected. Teaching online will never match the teaching of pupils in classroom set up. The one-on-one explanation that is given to an individual in the classroom is not fully done online. Pupils miss some concepts, and we even have to do remedial classes when they come to school physically...I mean you can't move to new concepts when they have not learnt the previous concepts.

The majority of the participants in private schools argued that the performance of their pupils was not greatly affected because of the highly interactive remote learning, active remedial classes and more time being allotted to teaching and learning. These are reflected in the words below:

Like I said, we engaged in online interactive learning during lockdown. The online learning was detailed, and we did not even really need make up time. The issues we have are those that cannot access the online classes. We arranged remedial classes for such pupils. Some were really shaken by the pandemic. It was the first-time experience to be on a lockdown. Nevertheless, as a school we introduced the Covid-19 lesson on our timetables where we discuss all things about Covid-19, and it is through this lesson that pupils started to understand more about the virus. Once they did, they felt more relaxed, and lessons continued as usual.

The views above show that measures taken due to the pandemic affected teaching and learning, hence pupils' performance. This was mostly observed in public schools since private schools took more productive steps. The use of WhatsApp by public schools was not effective as some learners required teaching professionals to be physically available to guide them for easy understanding of the subject matter. This change of teaching environment and style is alien to many learners. However, the online learning used by the private schools seemed to yield more result even though it was marred by the fact that not all pupils could access it. This calls for an improved technology in the teaching and learning process especially as seen in other parts of the world where remote learning has proven to be equally effective (Duraku & Hoxha, 2020; Gonzalez et al., 2020).

The better performance seen in private schools further showed why the society generally tends to place private schools on a higher pedestal than public schools (Scheper, 2013). This supports the argument raised by Shabbir et al. (2014), Letsholo and Alimi (2019) that private schools generally perform better than public schools in maximum measures of performance. Parents believe that private schools offer an environment conducive for learning, better policies and practices, and a better education as a whole (OECD, 2012). This goes against the argument raised by Hendajany (2016) that graduates of public schools have higher scores in national exit exams than those in private schools. Another cause of lower performance in public schools could be that they had more pupils to teach, and the Covid-19 restrictions allowed for only a limited number of pupils in a classroom. This was why they resorted to double-shift system thereby limiting available time for teaching and learning.

8.0 Implications of the findings

There is need for policy makers to improve the quality and consistency of trainings/professional development provided for SMTs in both private and public schools. A sub-committee should be formed by the Department of Basic Education of the Botswana Ministry of Education and Skills Development to organize and monitor the training exercises. Training should also be made compulsory for all members of SMT. TSP should be used as a backup for teachers in both private and public schools, and, to ensure they are effective, the Ministry of Education and Skills Development should permanently employ and train them. The Department of ICT and Media Services should also ensure the regular application of remote learning so that it will become a part of the system in case of future tragedy that may require the explicit use of this method of teaching.

Finally, the Ministry of Education and Skills Development should get involved in the running of private schools so that they will become cheaper for learners. This will help to reduce the incident of classroom shortages experienced in public schools. The recommendation for government to get involved in private schools is informed by the fact that teachers in the TSP programme only helped in teaching in public schools, and private school managers struggled with finances unlike their public-school counterparts. Further research involving SMTs in other regions, especially rural areas, should be conducted to ascertain how the pandemic affected their practices.

9.0 Conclusion

This study evaluated the impact of Covid-19 pandemic on SMTs using selected public and private primary schools in Gaborone. Findings from the study showed that in addition to lack of training, especially in public schools, SMTs were faced with numerous challenges during the pandemic. While public schools were faced with the challenge of insufficient classrooms, private schools were faced with lack of finance, difficulty during online learning/resistance to change, and stigmatization. SMTs took various measures to tackle these challenges with some of the measures exposing the dichotomy between private and public schools. This study showed that the Covid-19 pandemic had several impacts on learners' performance, with those in private schools performing better due to better measures taken by their managers.

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