Discourse and Communication for Sustainable Education,
vol. 12, no. 1, pp. 42–54, 2021

A Descriptive Analysis of the Leadership Practices of Primary School Principals in Promoting Sustainability Through Motivating Teachers

Shuti Steph Khumalo

University of South Africa, Pretoria, Republic of South Africa

Abstract

Enhancing sustainability in primary schools is apposite because primary schools are the building blocks in any education system. In its examination, the study provides insights on the role of primary school principals in promoting sustainable education through inspiring teachers. Teacher motivation is a very critical focus research area, particularly in the present depressing times and particularly in promoting sustainability. Without ignoring and dismissing other factors that have a bearing on the poor performance of the South African primary schools, teacher discouragement is one of the factors. The purpose of this investigation was to explore the extent in which the leadership practices of primary school principals promote teacher motivation and ultimately achieving sustainable teacher workforce. This study was based on random sampled primary school teachers in South Africa, Waterberg District. Hundred and fifty survey questionnaires were distributed to participating primary schools and only 96 responses were received. The respondents were from a mix of both male and female teachers who responded to the questionnaire. Descriptive statistics was applied to analyse data. Even though the results indicated that there were issues with teacher motivation, to a significant extent, the majority of respondents demonstrated that most primary principals do take efforts in trying to ensure that teachers are motivated. The results of the study deepen the already existing scope of knowledge regarding teacher motivation, particularly in primary schools.

Key words: teacher motivation, primary schools, principals, school leadership practices, sustainability, sustainable development

Introduction

Teachers play a critical role in the education system by ensuring that its citizens are socially, economically and environmentally sustained. Highly inspired teachers contribute towards the promotion of sustainable development goal number four which promotes inclusive and equitable quality education as adopted by different countries. One of the foundations of sustainable development objectives was a call to end poverty and illiteracy.

The legacy of the previous segregation policies and the struggle for freedom had a lasting impact on the South African education system (Maarman & Lamont-Mbawuli, 2017). These negatively affected the country's agenda on pressing on with the sustainable development goals.

Despite two decades after the dawn of democracy and the transformation of the education system, primary schools are still facing exceptional, unequalled and monumental challenge (Van der Berg, Taylor, Gustafsson, Spaull, & Armstrong, 2011). Chisholm (2011) posits that the crisis that bedevil the South African education system is not new and predates the achievement of democratic dispensation. These challenges are multi-layered and range from job dissatisfaction, massive teacher resignations, non-commitment of teachers, nepotism, overcrowded classes, inadequate resources such as personnel, technical, technological and financial. Despite the challenges that face the schools, principals are challenged to continuously promote the culture of teaching and learning in the schools. The promotion of this culture through motivating teachers has the positive bearing on sustainable development of which it is underpinned by a number of principles of which ending illiteracy is one of them. So, when teachers are not inspired to teach, learners do not have the opportunity to developed academically which contributes towards illiteracy.

Despite the challenges, it is important to note that the democratic government kept on trying to mediate and resolve the problems by means of a number of strategic interventions which include resource allocation, the building of schools, libraries, the provision of textbooks, the supply of requisite personnel such as teachers, administrative officers and security personnel, the training and development of requisite personnel. Chisolm (2011) affirmed that "the government and donors have invested substantial resources in understanding what exactly the problem may be" (Chisolm, 2011, p. 50). Without dismissing all the factors that have a bearing on poor performance, in this study, I argue that the absence of teacher motivation is also an attributing factor in the primary schooling systems' dysfunctionality. Scholarship attest to the fact that there is a relationship between employee motivation and commitment (Khumalo, 2009). Confirming the assertions afore-said, Mohsan, Nawaz, Khan, Shaukat and Aslam (2010, p. 225) conceded that "employee motivation and commitment is very important for an organization's success. Motivated and committed employees with high levels of job involvement are considered an important asset to an organization and keeping the employee motivated, commitment and job involvement are always rewarding to a business as motivated and committed employees are more productive and higher productivity usually results in higher profits".

"Motivation has been recognized as a dilemma that managers must face, because what motivates one individual may not motivate another" (Zhang, 2014, p. 23). Nuku (2007) notes that motivation is the driving force that causes individuals to engage in positive behaviours. According to Covington (2000), motivation refers to the reasons for individuals to be aroused to action. Dobre (2013) considers motivation a powerful tool that reinforces behavior and triggers the tendency to continue. Without motivation it is difficult for the school to function. The role the principal plays as the motivator is of critical importance. The main purpose of this study was to determine the extent in which primary school principals take efforts in motivating teachers and the promotion of sustainability.

Theorizing Motivation

There is adequate literature that provides insight and understanding on the concept of motivation and its effect on organizational performance. Bennell (2004) notes that the key issues of teacher motivation have been ignored all together for a long time now and there appears to be mounting concerns that unacceptably high proportions of teacher working in public schools are poorly motivated. Motivation has a significant and direct impact on the quality of teaching. The teacher in the classroom is the main instrument for bringing quality improvement in learning. Such quality is maximized where there is an enabling and supportive climate. King (2018) describes “motivation as a force that energizes people to act, directs this action towards goals and sustains effort towards reaching these goals” (p. 2) whereas Lai (2011) refers to motivation as the reasons that underlie behavior that is characterized by willingness and volition. To Guay, Chanal, Ratelle, Marsh, Larose, and Boivin (2010) motivation refers to “the reasons underlying behavior” (p. 712). “Work motivation is the individual drive to pursue job-related goals (Gagne & Deci, 2005). Nuku (2007) is of the view that principals are best positioned to motivate their staff in order to achieve the desired results and grow professionally. Motivation is the inner energy that propels commitment. Principals need to prioritise the importance improving teacher’ motivation. This is precisely because Ramachandran, Pal, Jain, Shekar and Sharma (2005) argue that when teachers get the job they relax and start lacking commitment and motivation.

Motivation is especially valuable for organizations in its autonomous form, when the goals are pursued out of one’s own interest or because the individual attributes importance to it. If the staff members are motivated enough to ensure that organizational goals are achieved, then the goal of achieving a literate society is achieved, which is sustainable development. Motivated staff members improve organizational employee practice. “Motivation determines what employees do, how they do it and how hard they work (Jensen & Bro, 2018, p. 536)”. The present challenges that face schools require motivation from the school leadership particularly principals.

Sustainability Within the Context of Teacher Motivation

The dropout rate in basic education is very high and this create problems because it adds to the burden of uneducated citizens (Carroll, 2018). Teachers play a pivotal role in ensuring that school children are able to solve the problems of the world (Ozsoy & Uslu, 2019; Schmidt-Honing & Probstl, 2020) and this cannot be achieved when they are uninspired and demotivated. No education system can be sustained with a workforce particularly demotivated teacher. A highly motivated teaching staff promote sustainable development. Sustainable development is understood differently and its origin covers three key components namely, society, economy and environment (Salite et al., 2019). Sustainable development simply means the development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (Emas, 2015). Hiller and Reichhart (2017) are of the view that motivation is considered an essential component of teachers’ professional approach besides other constructs like professional knowledge, self-regulatory skills and beliefs.

In this article, sustainability means the leadership practices of primary school principals in motivating teachers who in turn contributes towards sustainable development

through the teaching of learners who will be socially and economically sustained citizens (Salite, 2016). Socially developed and literate citizens implies the citizens who have basic social skills to adapt and survive in a complex society. Klarin (2018) argues that the “concept of sustainable development is based on the concept of development (socio-economic development in line with ecological constraints), the concept of needs (redistribution of resources to ensure the quality of life for all) and the concept of future generations (the possibility of long-term usage of resources to ensure the necessary quality of life for future generations)” (p. 68). Huckle and Wals (2015) note that what is needed is a critical and transformative education that is intended to shape the prospects of more sustainable forms of development. Primary schools through highly skilled and motivated teachers had the propensity to ensure that they produce learners who will be developed, transformed, become critical and self-sustained and be able to participate in societal and economic activities. In addition, sustainable development implies the role primary schools in developing the kind of learners that will be able to be sustained socially and economically (Emas, 2015; Heasly et al., 2020).

Possible Causes of Teacher Demotivation

Scholars agree that the influence of teachers in the classroom on learner performance cannot be compared to any other thing. Their motivation and positive attitudes cannot be substituted by any other thing including remuneration. “Many studies indicate that the impact of teachers on student learning outcomes is 2–3 times that of other school-related factors” (Sustainable Development Goals, 2017). There are a number of issues that can be attributed to demotivation of teachers.

Abusive School Leadership

Liang, Lian, Brown, Ferris, Hanig and Keeping, (2016) note that leadership that is tyrannical and abusive is on the rise in many schools. Abusive leadership is a destructive form of leadership that have a lasting negative influence on the subordinates. Mullen, Fiset and Rheume (2018) argue that empirical evidence suggests that scholars on this topic are concerned about the damaging effect of destructive forms of leadership. Teachers become demotivated when they are abused rather appreciated. “Abusive supervision is defined as “subordinates’ perceptions of the extent to which their supervisors engage in the sustained display of hostile verbal and non-verbal behaviours, excluding physical contact” (Mullen, Fiset, & Rheume, 2018). It is very difficult to operate in an environment which is abusive. Different forms of abuse from school principals include hurling insults, talking one down in the presence of others and ridicule.

Personal and Contextual Factors

A number of personal and contextual factors also does have an impact on the life of employees in the workplace. Khumalo (2018) argues that personal factors such as sickness of the spouse, child, and relatives known to the teacher cause disengagement from teaching activities and thus leads to their discouragement. In such circumstances, teachers tend to be demotivated and withdrawn from teaching activities. The motivating role of principals is key in mediating demotivation.

Teachers' Self Esteem

Self-esteem and self-confidence are critical in the employees' life. They are the enabling factors when it comes to job performance. Scholarship on self-efficacy confirms that employees who demonstrate a high degree of self-efficacy tend to perform better than those who have low self-confidence (Cocca, Cocca, Martínez, Alvarado, & Bulnes, 2018). This view is affirmed by Talsma, Schuz, Schwarzer and Norris (2018) when they contend that "a vast body of research has explained the idea that self-efficacy is the antecedent in the relationship and exerts a positive motivational influence on performance". When individuals highly believe in themselves, they are high performers. "In Bandura's social cognitive theory, self-efficacy beliefs refer to individuals' beliefs about their capabilities to successfully carry out a particular course of action". "In educational settings, research has shown that the teachers' self-efficacy beliefs influence job satisfaction and mediate job stress" (Klassen & Chiu, 2011, p. 115).

Job Related Factors and the Curriculum Changes

There are a number of factors that are job related that discourages teachers. Amongst others, restructuring and the redeployment policies threaten job security and promotion prospects (Le Roux (2002). At the beginning of every year, schools are provided with the new staff allocations. This process is based on the number of learners each school have. If the number of learners had declined, redundant teachers are moved to other schools where there is a shortage. This creates a situation at times where these teachers are moved far from their families and this leads to discouragement. Another factor is the continuous curriculum changes which create uncertainties and demotivation. Since the dawn of democracy, South African curriculum experienced numerous changes from Curriculum 2005, the Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS), the National Curriculum Statement (NCS) and then currently the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS). Despite these changes, training and development of teachers do not match the pace at which these changes occur. These job-related factors also cause teachers stress and results in some leaving the profession because they feel demotivated.

Inadequate Professional Development Opportunities

Insufficient and substandard professional development programs also result in low motivation. Since the introduction of the new curriculum, teacher complain of lack of sufficient training. They are expected to teach according to the prescriptions of the new curriculum, but most of the teachers are still employing the traditional approaches of teaching. Because of this confusion, teachers are demotivated and teach learners with little or no preparation at all. Teachers may be highly committed to the attainment of the school's learning goals, but because they may lack the necessary competencies to teach effectively, which eventually become discouraged and demotivated (Bennell, 2004).

Health Related Issues

The health of employees is fundamental in any organization. Due to the pressures teachers face, they suffer from depression and psychologically related problems. Salary on its own is not enough to increase motivation of the teacher. Firstly, most teachers are emotionally wounded inside because of the impact of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. They are either affected or infected and are not willing to disclose their statuses. The refusal to disclose impedes the process of motivation. The emotionally affected teacher is not as active as those who are not sick. Reports indicate that the rate at which public servants are dying is alarming. According to the United Nations Development Program (2006), HIV/AIDS is claiming the lives of many teachers. No normal person can effectively and efficiently work under such depressing conditions.

Research Methodology

In order for the researcher to have an understanding of the leadership practices of primary school principals in promoting teacher motivation, the study was framed within the descriptive research design. This design was deployed to evaluate the perceptions of teachers regarding the role of primary school principals in enhancing their motivation levels. This article draws predominantly on research undertaken in simple randomly sampled primary teachers (N = 150) from Waterberg Education District., in Limpopo Province, South Africa. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2005) maintain that simple random sampling is selecting at random from a list of the population the required number of subjects for the sample. To Welman and Kruger (2001), simple random sampling is a sampling technique in which each member of the population has the same chance of being included in the sample and each sample of a particular size has the same probability of being chosen. The study used a questionnaire to collect data and only 96 responded to it. In designing the questionnaire, I placed particular emphasis on the following processes: initial questionnaire design, question wording, sequencing, physical design and layout (Fowler & Cosenza, 2009). Survey questions were also designed to help achieve objectives of the research and in particular, to answer the research questions. Respondents included only primary school teachers. As alluded, descriptive design was used to construct meaning from the perspectives of the respondents. White (2003) is of the view that employing this research design was to describe that which exists as accurately and clearly as possible. To ensure validity and reliability of the study, before questionnaires were distributed to the units of analysis, they were piloted first. This assisted in correcting errors before a full-scale investigation was conducted and also ensuring that all the questions are not interpreted differently by respondents (White, 2003; Maree, 2003). Involvement in the study was voluntary. Permission to participate in the study was sought from the Department of Basic Education, the principals and the teachers of the participating schools. Details of the objectives of the study were clearly provided to the respondents in the questionnaire. The purpose of this study was to explore the extent at which primary school principals promote teacher motivation.

With regard to demographic data, the table below indicates that there are more teachers aged between forty and 53 years. Further, the table reveals that more female teachers participated in the study than males. Regarding the experience of respondents, the majority of respondents have between them six to ten years' experience. It must also be indicated that a mix of township and rural schools participated in the study.

Table 1

The Profiles of Respondents According to Age, Gender and Experience

Age	Number	Gender	Experience in Years	Number
30–39	23	43-males	3–5	18
40–59	46	53-females	6–10	40
60–65	27		Greater than 10	38
Total	96	96		96

The Results of the Research

Data is presented through the descriptive analysis method which use percentages to describe the phenomenon under investigation. The purpose of the study was to explore the extent at which principals take efforts in promoting teacher motivation in primary schools around Waterberg Education District. Table 2 represents the opinions of teachers in responding to various items which tested whether principals take efforts in trying to motivate teachers. The participants were requested to express their views on the items indicated in the table below. Respondents used the five-point scale and were requested to select only one option, namely **1 = always**, **2 = most of the time**, **3 = sometimes**, **4 = rarely** and **5 = never**. The Table 1 below shows the response trends per item.

Table 2

The Extent to Which Principals Demonstrate Efforts in Motivating Teachers

Items	Response categories (n = 96)										Total
	1		2		3		4		5		
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	
The principal provides opportunities for team effort.	67	70	16	17	12	6	1	1	6	6	96
The principal shows concern regarding our challenging circumstances.	46	48	25	26	16	17	4	4	4	4	96
The principal publicly praises us when we have done good.	42	44	24	25	16	17	6	6	8	8	96
It is easy to confide to my principal when faced with problems.	45	47	23	24	18	19	7	7	3	3	96
The attitude of the principal motivates me.	38	40	25	26	19	20	7	7	7	7	96
The principal treats all teacher equally.	35	37	26	27	13	14	11	12	10	10	95
The principal creates an enabling working environment for teachers.	42	44	26	27	17	18	5	5	6	6	96
The principal provides opportunities for professional development.	50	52	21	22	14	15	5	5	6	6	96

Seventy percent (70 %) of the respondents indicated that principals *always* consider teachers as part of the team. Seventeen percent (17 %) stated that principals execute this responsibility in *most of the time*. The 70 % plus 17 % responses amount to 87 % and this constitutes a clear majority. In responding to the item, the principal shows

concern regarding our challenging circumstances, 48 % indicated that principals *always* do this function. When added to the 26 % who indicated that the principal shows concern in *most of the time*, 74 % of the respondents seem to indicate that principals do show concern to teachers who have personal problems.

With regard to the item, the principal publicly praises us when we have done good, 44 % stated that principals *always* thank them when they have done well. In addition to that, 25 % stated that this responsibility is done in *most of the time*. Together, 69 % of the respondents are of the opinion that principals appreciate and recognise the good job they are doing at school. In determining the accessibility and availability of the principal in assisting teachers with problems, respondents were requested to respond to the item: It is easy to confide to my principal when faced with problems. Forty-seven percent (47 %) stated that it is *always* easy to confide to the principal and 24 % indicated that it is in *most of the time* easy to do that. Combined, 71 % of the respondents indicated that it is easy for teachers to confide to principals when faced with problems.

The perceptions of the participants to the item “the attitude of the principal encourages me” indicates that 40 % of the respondents indicated that the attitudes of the principals *always* encourage them. Twenty-six percent (26 %) showed that they are in *most of the time* encouraged by the principals’ attitudes. Earlier on, in this section, 70 % of these respondents indicated that it is easy to confide to the principal when faced with problems. This indicates the consistency of the respondents in responding to this issue of relationships. When the principal-teacher relationship is cordial, interaction becomes easy between these two parties. Based on the combined views of the respondents who indicated that principals’ attitudes encourage them (66 %), it seems that the majority of primary school principals are relating well with their subordinates.

The views of respondents on the item: The principal treats all teacher equally show that 37 % of the respondents indicated that principals *always* treat all teachers equal whereas 27 % believe that principals, in *most of the time* treat teacher equally. The combined percentage is 64 %. Principals who relate with their teachers by treating them differently create problems not only for themselves, but also for the school. Treating other teacher unfairly creates an atmosphere of discouragement. The 64 % views of the respondents in the sample is a clear indication that the majority of primary school principals consider all teachers equal at their schools. Fourteen percent of respondents indicated that principals *sometimes* treat teacher equally and 12 % stated that principals *rarely* do the same thing. Ten percent of the respondents indicated that principals *never* treat teacher equally. Combined, all these percentages (14 % for *most of the time*, 12 % for *sometimes* and 10 % for *never*) constitute 36 %. Even though 64 % of the respondents suggested that principals treat teacher equally, the views of 36 % respondents who selected keys 3, 4 and 5 seem to indicate that the issue of treatment of teacher is not without problems. When teachers are treated the same, they are motivated to perform.

Responding to the item: The principal creates an enabling working environment for teachers, data from the table show that 44 % indicated that principals *always* create an enabling working environment for teachers. Twenty-seven percent 27 % of the respondents believe that principals do this *most of the time*. When adding 44 % and 27 %, this implies that 71 % of these respondents suggest that the majority of primary school principals create environments that are conducive for teacher to work in. With regard to the item: On the item, the principals provide opportunities for professional development, data in Table 1 indicate that 52 % of the respondents indicated that the principals *always*

offer teachers such opportunities whereas 22 % believe that principals in *most of the time* do afford teachers professional development chances. Jointly, these respondents constitute 74 %, and according to their views, it is clear that the majority of primary school principals do ensure teachers are up to date with the requirements of their profession.

Analysis and Discussion of the Research Results

The section above focused on the presentation of the findings through the views of the respondents and descriptive statistics was used to analyse the findings. The section that follows provides an in-depth discussion of the views of the respondents. This discussion is presented under the following thematic strands:

Collaborative Opportunities for Teamwork

Teaching is a career that is based on team approach. It is impossible for teachers to work in silos and expect good results. Teamwork is the name of the game in teaching. It is therefore imperative for principals to encourage teamwork through knowledge sharing, exchanging learner teacher support materials and also to prepare together. The views of the respondents overwhelmingly agreed that their principals provide opportunities for teamwork and this promote teacher motivation. This confirms the assertion of Boru (2018) that effective teamwork does contribute towards teacher motivation.

Recognizing the Contribution of Teachers

It is critical that principals as leaders acknowledge the positive contribution that staff members make in the organization that they work. Research proves that high performing organisations are characterised by leaders who show gratitude towards employees who add value to the organization in which they work. For example, if teachers attend extra-curricular activities on Saturday, they need to be acknowledged for the work done. This is because during weekends, they need to spent time with their loved ones and also rest. Kadalie (2006) mentions that leaders motivate subordinates when they show recognition for the work well done. These positive attitudes of principals are critical and help in creating a culture of motivation and as such teachers remain committed in the work environment. The views of Kadalie corroborates the assertions of Mampuru (2001) who argued that motivation includes all the efforts on the part of the principal to encourage his staff to perform at their best voluntarily in order to ensure successful educative teaching.

Sympathy and Empathy

It is very critical that school principals show concern for the teachers in their schools. Teachers like societal members also face different challenges such as abuse by their partners, having to deal with troublesome children, indebtedness, sickness, loss of the loved ones, and so on. In such trying times, principals need to be showing sympathy and empathy with teachers. There are instances where reports indicate that some principals are very harsh to teachers who face serious challenges. It has been indicated that Kadalie (2006) believes that leadership should show concern for the personal needs of

their subordinates, even if sacrificing time for them. Table 1 indicates that to a significant degree, teachers are of the strong view that their principals show sympathy and empathy. This is demonstrated by their voices on the categories 1, 2 and 3 which show 81 % of the total number of responses proving that principals are sympathetic. These views are against only 19 who lamented that principals do not show empathy and sympathy.

One of the factors that was discussed during literature analysis which cause teacher discouragement is leadership that does not care but is abusive. Data from the study to a significant extent indicate that the majority of participants believe that the majority of primary school principals do sympathize with teachers who are sick, who have lost their lost ones and face different life challenges. Bennell (2004) observed that apart from the obvious impact of teachers who are living with HIV/AIDS, working with colleagues who are sick and who may eventually die is also demoralizing. Therefore, the sympathetic attitudes of principals is encouraging and inspiring for teachers who are facing challenges.

Accessible and Hospitable

There is a tendency of leadership in different organisations to have favourites wherein certain staff members enjoy access to the leader. This is also true with principals. This practice is unacceptable and creates a situation in which teachers who are isolated feel aggrieved. It is the duty of the principal to ensure all staff members are treated the same and have access to the principal. Shields (2006) maintain that the type of interaction indicates that some staff members are treated as objects and others as fully human. This promotes good interpersonal relationships. The school as an organization is like the family and when teachers are confronted with challenges from within and outside the school situation, they should feel comfortable to share with the principal. When the relationship between the superordinate and subordinates is cordial and conducive, the employees will be motivated. Shields (2006) notes that leadership must model, encourage and demonstrate the importance of relationships and positive interactions. Such an approach will have a positive impact on the school's effectiveness and efficiency. *OECS Education Reform Unit* (2000) further indicates that positive work-related interaction among teacher is important because it reduces the extreme isolation felt by many teachers and provides opportunities to exchange support and assistance. Treating other teacher unfairly creates an atmosphere of discouragement. When teachers are treated the same, they are motivated to perform.

Empowering Environment and Opportunities

Engaging teachers and providing them with opportunities to raise their concerns in different platforms such as meetings contributes towards healthy environments. Principals should not behave like bosses where teachers are treated as robots. Like for example, principals should create opportunities where teachers take part in critical school decision making processes. This practice will go a long way in ensuring that teachers feel that they are valued and are shareholders in the organisation. This will help them embrace the vision and mission of the school. Because teachers spend most of their time during the day at school, it is therefore important that principals create the environment that is conducive to work in. When the relationship amongst teachers at school is empowering and uplifting, performance also will improve.

The intentions of this study was to determine the extent at which the leadership practices of primary school principals promote teacher motivation. The analysis and the discussion of the findings of the study have been classified into a number of themes and to a significant extent, the majority of respondents in the study demonstrated that primary school principals do motivate teachers.

Conclusion

The school cannot achieve its objectives when its teachers are discouraged. The principal as the leader is charged with the responsibility of ensuring that his or her teachers perform to the best of their abilities. The performance of teachers largely depends on the level of motivation of staff members particularly the teachers. Demotivation is a cancer that destroys the education phenomenon and if left unchecked, schools will not be able to contribute towards sustainable development.

Principals should employ various motivation strategies that will keep the teachers going. This study explored the views of teachers in trying to determine the extent at which primary school principals motivate teachers. An in-depth extant literature survey was conducted and empirically, the survey was administered and 96 participants responded to the questionnaires. Through descriptive analysis, the participants' perceptions were categorised into four themes namely considerate leadership, accessible and hospitable, fairness and non-judgemental and empowering environment.

As indicated in the discussion, to a large extent, the majority of respondents confirmed that primary school principals do motivate teachers in their leadership practices. Based on these findings, it can be concluded that through teachers who are motivated, the sustainable goal of eliminating illiteracy is achieved.

References

- Bennell, P. (2004). Teacher motivation and incentives in Sub-Saharan Africa and Asia. <http://www.eldis.org/fulltext/dfidtea.pdf>
- Boru, N. (2018). The factors affecting teacher motivation. *International Journal of Instruction*, 11(4), 761–776.
- Chisolm, L. (2011). *Review: The challenge of South African schooling: dimensions, targets and initiatives Linda Chisholm*. <http://transformationaudit.org/blog/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/Review-The-challenge-of-South-African-schooling.pdf>
- Carroll, J. (2018). How drop-out rates are diminishing education as a human right. *News*, 24, 21 March.
- Cocca, M., Cocca, A., Martínez, A., Alvarado, E., & Rodríguez Bulnes, M. G. (2018). Correlation between self-efficacy perception and teaching performance: The case of Mexican preschool and primary school teachers. *Arab World English Journal*, 9(1), 56–70.
- Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2005). *Research methods in education*, 5th Edition. New York: Routledge Farmer.
- Covington, M. V. (2000). Intrinsic versus extrinsic motivation in schools: A reconciliation. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 9(1), 22–25.
- Dobre, O. I. (2013). Employee motivation and organizational performance. *Review of Applied Socio-Economic Research*, 5(1), 53–60.

- Fowler Jr, F. J., & Cosenza, C. (2009). Design and evaluation of survey questions. *The SAGE handbook of applied social research methods*, 375–412.
- Gagne, M., & Deci, E. L. (2005). Self-determination theory and work motivation. *Journal of Organizational Behaviour*, 26, 331–362.
- Guay, F., Chanal, J., Ratelle, C. F., Marsh, H. W., Larose, S., & Boivin, M. (2010). Intrinsic, identified, and controlled types of motivation for school subjects in young elementary school children. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 80(4), 711–735.
- Heasly, B., Lindner, J., Iliško, D., & Salite, I. (2020). From initiatives, to insights, to implementation of the sustainability and securitability agenda for 2030. *Discourse and Communication for Sustainable Education*, 11(1), 1–4.
- Hiller, K., & Reichhart, B. (2017). Motivation of civic education teachers-in-training in the field of education for sustainable development. *Discourse and Communication for Sustainable Education*, 8(1), 81–89.
- Johnson, R. E., Chang, C. H., & Yang, L. Q. (2010). Commitment and motivation at work: The relevance of employee identity and regulatory focus. *Academy of management review*, 35(2), 226–245.
- Kadalie, D. (2006). *Leader's resource kit. Tools and techniques to develop your leadership*. Nairobi: Evangel Publishing House.
- King, D. (2018). *Examining the roles of motivation and parental support in division III College sports: Understanding leadership emergence*. CMC Senior Thesis. https://scholarship.claremont.edu/cmc_theses/195
- Khumalo, S. S. (2009). *The role of transformational school leadership in meeting the challenges facing primary schools in Limpopo (Doctoral thesis)*. University of South Africa, Pretoria.
- Khumalo, S. S. (2018). Cost of poor-quality management on organizational performance in educational settings. In *Cases on Quality Initiatives for Organizational Longevity* (pp. 297–323). IGI Global.
- Klassen, R. M., & Chiu, M. M. (2011). The occupational commitment and intention to quit of practicing and pre-service teachers: Influence of self-efficacy, job stress, and teaching context. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 36(2), 114–129.
- Lai, E. R. (2011). Motivation: A literature review, research report, Pearson. https://images.pearsonassessments.com/images/tmrs/Motivation_Review_final.pdf
- Le Roux, A. S. (2002). *Human resource management in education: theory and practice*. Pretoria: Ithuthuko Investment.
- Liang, L. H., Lian, H., Brown, D. J., Ferris, D. L., Hanig, S., & Keeping, L. M. (2016). Why are abusive supervisors abusive? A dual-system self-control model. *Academy of Management Journal*, 59(4), 1385–1406.
- Maree, G. J. (2003). Introduction to quantitative research. Pretoria: University of Pretoria.
- Maarman, G. J., & Lamont-Mbawuli, K. 2017. A review of challenges in South African education and possible ways to improve educational outcome as suggested by decades of research. *Africa Education Review*, 14, 3–4, 263–289.
- Mampuru, R. C. (2001). *Educational management V: Human resource management*. Pretoria: Technikon Pretoria.
- Mohsan, F., Nawaz, M. M., Khan, M. S., Shaukat, Z., & Aslam, N. (2011). Are employee motivation, commitment and job involvement inter-related: Evidence from banking sector of Pakistan? *International Journal of Business and Social Science*, 2(17), 226–233.

- Mullen, J., Fiset, J., & Rheaume, J. (2018). Destructive forms of leadership: The effects of abusive supervision and incivility on employee health and safety. *Leadership & Organization Development Journal*, 39(8), 946–96. <https://doi.org/10.1108/LODJ-06-2018-0203>
- Özsoy, E., & Uslu, O. (2019). Examining the effects of sustainable organizational culture on academic achievement. *Discourse and Communication for Sustainable Education*, 10(1), 37–46.
- Nuku, A. S. 2007. The management tasks of principals in promoting professionalism amongst educators in the Eastern Cape Province (Doctoral thesis) University of South Africa, Pretoria.
- Ramachandran, V., Pal, M., Jain, S., Shekar, S., & Sharma, J. (2005). Teacher motivation in India. Brighton: Educational Resource Unit.
- Salite, I. (2016). Searching for sustainability in teacher education and educational research: Experiences from the Baltic and Black Sea Circle Consortium for educational research. *Discourse and Communication for Sustainable Education*, 6(1), 21–29.
- Salite, I., Fjodorova, I., Meihami, H., Ivanova, O., Iliško, Dz., & Gholami, J. (2019). JTES approaches to sustainability: Current practices and new perspectives for a more sustainable world. *Journal of Teacher Education for Sustainability*, 21(2), 1–4.
- Schmidt-Hönig, K., & Pröbstl, G. (2020). The world in children's minds – or sustainable entrepreneurship education as empowerment to shape a desirable future. *Discourse and Communication for Sustainable Education*, 11(2), 33–44.
- Sustainable Development Goals. (2017). Supporting teachers with mobile technology Lessons drawn from UNESCO projects in Mexico, Nigeria, Pakistan and Senega. <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0025/002515/251511e.pdf>
- Talsma, K., Schütz, B., Schwarzer, R., & Norris, K. (2018). I believe therefore, I achieve (and vice versa): A meta-analytic cross-lagged panel analysis of self-efficacy and academic performance. *Learning and Individual Differences*, 61, 136–150.
- Taylor, E. S., & Tyler, J. H. (2012). The effect of evaluation on teacher performance. *American Economic Review*, 102(7), 3628–51.
- United Nations Development Programme. (2006). Halting the spread of HIV/AIDS. <http://www.undp.org/publication/annual-report>
- Van der Berg, S., Taylor, S., Gustafsson, M., Spaull, N., & Armstrong, P. (2011). Improving education quality in South Africa, report for the national planning commission. <http://resep.sun.ac.za/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/2011-Report-for-NPC.pdf>
- White, C. J. (2003). Research methods and techniques. Pretoria: Technikon Pretoria.
- Zhang, X. (2014). Factors that motivate academic staff to conduct research and influence research productivity in Chinese Project 211 universities (Doctoral thesis). University of Canberra.

Correspondence concerning this paper should be addressed to Shuti Steph Khumalo, University of South Africa, Preller Street, Muckleneuk, Pretoria, 0002, South Africa. Email: ekhumass@unisa.ac.za