

Effectiveness of Spiritual and Moral Leadership in the Administration of Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Run Schools in Bulawayo Province, Zimbabwe.

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ABSTRACT

The growing occurrence of moral decline in church-sponsored schools highlights the need for research on its impact on school administration. This study aimed to examine school administrators' views and experiences regarding spiritual and moral leadership and how it influences school management. The research employed a qualitative interpretive approach to investigate school administrators' views concerning spiritual and moral leadership and its impact within a school setting. Data was gathered through semi-structured interviews, transcribed verbatim, translated to English, and analyzed using thematic analysis. The study focused on administrators from Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) schools in Bulawayo Province, with a sample size of twenty (20) selected from four purposively chosen schools. The majority of participants highlighted key qualities of spiritual and moral leadership, including being centered on God, integrity, setting a good example, and serving others. Subsequently, the study identified specific traits associated with effective spiritual and moral leadership practices in schools, such as achieving high-quality outcomes, fostering disciplined learners, ensuring sufficient resources, and maintaining excellent infrastructure. The findings of this study strongly indicate that by adopting the highlighted attributes, educational leaders in SDA-run schools could decrease moral decline. Within the school environment, the impact of spiritual and moral leadership is demonstrated through achieving high-quality outcomes, fostering disciplined learners, ensuring ample resources, and maintaining top-notch infrastructure. These findings were crucial for school administrators and researchers as they heightened awareness about spiritual and moral leadership practices. Additionally, it was expected that these findings would influence the values and practices of future school leaders.

Keywords: Effectiveness, Spiritual Leadership, Moral Leadership, Thematic Analysis, Infrastructure.

INTRODUCTION

The Seventh-day adventist church (SDA) has a global educational system. In Zimbabwe the church operates more than one hundred and nineteen (119) educational institutions including a university. The distinctive features of SDA educational institutions and pedagogy are centered on a bible-based philosophy, euphemistically called "True Education"^[1], which aims to invite all individuals to follow Jesus Christ, to share the eternal gospel as outlined in the three angles of messages (Revelations 14:6–12), and to ready the

world for the imminent return of Christ (Tucker 2011). Based on this foundation, SDA educational institutions prioritize spirituality, strong moral values, and academic excellence within its education systems in preparation for lifelong learning, responsible citizenship, and the holistic and harmonious development of the students by engaging the head (thought processes), the hand (practical aspects) and the heart (spiritual integrity) (Bailey 2018, Plaatjes 2014). Padayachee (2009:56) elaborates on the interconnectedness of spiritual and moral leadership with organizational success. Therefore, it is essential to delve into and examine the attributes of spiritual and moral leadership.

The goals of SDA educational institutions are rooted in Adventist education, a global educational system that focuses on the comprehensive growth of students for a life of service in both the present world and the hereafter (Saturne 2019). Through this mission, the SDA church offers religious education to young people and acts as a connection between the church and the community and consequently the overall socio-economic development of the communities (Mseli and Ilomo 2021). Nonetheless, there is a limited amount of research that delves into the perceptions of school administrators on spiritual and moral leadership and how these principles impact school administration effectiveness (Padayachee 2009). Hence, this study aimed to investigate the perspectives of school administrators on spiritual and moral leadership and their efficacy in school administration. The primary focus of this study was to explore the perceptions, attitudes, and experiences of school administrators regarding spiritual and moral leadership in the administration of SDA-run schools. The insights gained from this research could provide valuable guidance to education practitioners on how to improve spiritual and moral leadership in faith-based schools.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The increasing prevalence of spiritual decline, including immorality among administrators, staff, and students, is becoming more common in faith-based institutions (Trevino et al. 2014). These immoral behaviors serve as indicators of spiritual decline among some administrators in SDA educational institutions in Bulawayo. The decline in spiritual and moral standards within church-sponsored institutions has prompted a need for thorough research into the root causes of this trend. Despite this necessity, there is a lack of studies investigating school administrators' perspectives on spiritual and moral leadership and its impact on school administration effectiveness (Isalano, Dimba, and Shibwabo 2021, O'Brien 2019, Hermawan 2021, Padayachee 2009). The study aimed to evaluate the views, attitudes, and experiences of participants on spiritual and moral leadership and its impact within the school setting in Bulawayo Province, Zimbabwe. The main question guiding this research was: "How do school administrators perceive spiritual and moral leadership and its effectiveness in school administration?" The findings of this study provide valuable insights for school administrators on the steps that they can take to strengthen spiritual and moral leadership in faith-based schools.

Brief Context: Moral Leadership in School Settings

Moral values play a crucial role in upholding and overseeing the reputation of educational institutions sponsored by the church (Zheng and Jiang 2022, Prabhu and Mehta 2023, Subhaktiyasa et al 2023). Easley (2007:35) emphasizes that moral leadership is not just a concept but a lifestyle, influencing how leaders and followers communicate and interact with their team members while carrying out their duties. Sharma (2018:718) highlights that key attributes of moral leadership include honesty, reliability, accountability, courage, respect, and forward-thinking, among other qualities. It is important to emphasize that the effectiveness of a school is strongly influenced by the values and leadership style of its school leaders. According to Reid (2011:101), moral values play a significant role in both individual and school success, making a notable impact.

Within Christian religious schools, there exists a significant requirement for spiritual and moral leadership.

Murphy (2002:186) proposes that leaders in educational institutions aiming to influence society should adhere to a comprehensive set of principles and values centered on issues such as justice and environmental stewardship. Moral leadership holds utmost significance in this context, emphasizing the principles, beliefs, and ethical standards of institutional leaders and their followers (Karadag et al 2020, Li et al 2023). The necessary changes in Christian faith-based schools call for spiritual leaders who embody qualities such as equality, fairness, hope, bravery, modesty, honesty, kindness, and a sense of community. Padayachee (2009:56) elaborates on the interconnectedness between spiritual and moral leadership and the success of organizations. Nevertheless, unethical behavior in church-sponsored educational institutions is prevalent worldwide, with immoral leaders tarnishing the organization's reputation, discouraging followers, and eroding trust even in faith-based establishments (Prabhu and Mehta 2023, Subhaktiyasa et al 2023, Trevino et al. 2014). Therefore, it is essential to delve into and deliberate on spiritual and moral leadership and its efficacy in the management of SDA-run schools.

THE RESEARCH PURPOSE

The study aims to investigate the characteristics of spiritual and moral leadership in SDA educational institutions, as there is a current lack of knowledge in the area. The research focused on exploring:

- The attributes associated with spiritual and moral leadership
- School Administrators' comprehension of Spiritual and moral leadership
- The impact and efficacy of spiritual and moral leadership in school administration.

To gain in-depth insights into the perceptions and experiences of school administrators regarding spiritual and moral leadership and its effectiveness, the researchers conducted semi-structured interviews with 16 school administrators. The interviews were aimed at exploring the 'how' and 'why' aspects of spiritual and moral leadership in the school context (Wiesner, 2022). To gain a comprehensive understanding of the issue at hand, researchers decided to conduct semi-structured interviews with 16 school administrators. All interviews were recorded with permission, transcribed, and analyzed for themes. The qualitative data from the interviews followed the six steps of thematic analysis: familiarization, coding, generating initial themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and writing up. (Nowell et al., 2017; Castleberry and Nolen, 2018).

The sample for the study was chosen from Seventh-day Adventist schools in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe for practical reasons. Purposive sampling was used to select the schools that took part in the research. In Bulawayo province, there are seven Adventist schools, with two high schools and five primary schools. The study focused on two primary schools and two high schools, representing 40% and 100% of the total number in each category. These schools were selected based on their proximity, accessibility, similar characteristics, and their ability to provide valuable data for the study. Additionally, participants in these schools showed a willingness to be involved in the research.

A purposive sample of 20 participants was chosen for the study, including four headmasters, four deputy heads, four senior teachers, four chaplains, and four accountants from two primary and two high schools. It was believed that selecting participants from different roles within school administration would provide a comprehensive understanding of spiritual and moral leadership effectiveness in SDA-run schools. The sample size was considered sufficient to reach data saturation, where no new information or themes emerged from the interviews. (Boddy, 2016).

The methodology employed in this study was restricted to examining the SDA church belief system and philosophy of education, limiting the scope of the research. Although there are over one hundred and fifty SDA educational institutions in Zimbabwe, only four schools in Bulawayo province were selected for this study. It is recommended that future studies explore a wider range of provinces and include schools

affiliated with other Christian denominations.

Before conducting the research, the researchers carefully addressed important ethical concerns such as informed consent, anonymity, confidentiality, data management, storage, and record disposal. Approval was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee at the College of Human Sciences at the University of South Africa. Additionally, authorization was granted by the Zimbabwe West Union Conference administration of the SDA Church to proceed with the study on the evaluation of spiritual and moral leadership effectiveness in SDA-run schools.

Table 1. Participants Profile * (For ethical reasons Pseudo names and institutions were utilized in the study)

Participant number	Name of School	Gender	Years in Service	Current Leadership Role	Years/Months in Current Leadership Role	Highest Qualification
P1	Eastview	Male	25 years	Principal	10 months	MA Educational Leadership
P2	Southview	Female	17years	Principal	7 years	BED Degree in Languages
P3	Westview	Female	13years	Principal	1 year	BA Degree in Counselling
P4	West view	Male	25years	Deputy Principal	10 months	Diploma in Education
P5	Southview	Male	13years	Deputy Principal	1 year	Degree in Education
P6	Eastview	Male	6years	Business Manager	1 year	BSC in Accounting
P7	Southview	Male	15years	Business Manager	7 years	MA Degree Finance
P8	Westview	Male	9years	Business Manager	3 years	BSC in Accounting
P9	Westview	Female	19years	Teacher in Charge	11 years	Bed Accounting
P10	Northview	Male	1year	Chaplain	1 year	MA Religious Studies
P11	Southview	Male	3years	Chaplain	3years	BA Theology
P12	Westview	Male	19years	Chaplain	10 years	MA Leadership
P13	Westview	Male	23 years	Deputy Principal	3years	Diploma in Education
P14	Eastview	Female	12years	Teacher in charge	3years	BA Counselling
P15	Northview	Male	7years	Teacher in charge	3years	Diploma in Education

Gender

The population of the study comprised SDA run schools in Bulawayo Province using a sample size of

twenty administrators from four schools that were purposively selected. However, due to Covid-19 pandemic travel restrictions, 1 participant failed to participate in the face-to-face in-depth interviews. The other 4 participants were not interviewed because the researcher had reached data saturation level as well the ninety five percent confidence level was not affected. Out of the fifteen research participants, 4 were females and eleven were men. Of the four females, two served as principals whereas the other two served as senior teachers. This gender distribution mirrors the prevailing practice in the SDA church and its institutions where influential leadership positions are predominantly occupied by men. A study conducted by Ramages (2013:50), indicated that there is a limited number of women occupying key leadership responsibilities even though women constitute a higher percentage in terms of church membership. The research findings are in harmony with the study on the marginalisation of women in religious leadership conducted by Jacobs (2021:90). The study revealed that gender marginalisation existed in many Christian faith churches and that there was a lack of progress in the churches because women were not appreciated and relegated to the periphery. Therefore, it emerged that the church and its educational institutions must adopt an inclusive approach to leadership. In addition, there is need for an intentional initiative for equipping and empowering more women to serve as spiritual and moral leaders in various church run educational institutions.

Academic Qualifications

Of all the fifteen school leaders who participated in the study, only two participants held diplomas as the highest qualifications whilst seven held bachelor's degrees as the highest qualification. Furthermore, only six held master's degrees as the highest qualification. Lastly, only two participants had qualifications in educational leadership and management, and such a scene depicts the downward spiral and the leadership crisis in which most church-run schools have been plunged. A research study conducted in SDA educational institutions in Zambia by Ngandu (2017:20) also revealed that the church's educational institutions have challenges in terms of equipping and empowering future educationist and leaders to guarantee the survival of the entities. In successful organisations, the development of human capital and continued learning are key elements in the effectiveness and survival of the organisation. Parag (2014:16) argues that to avoid professional fossilisation in educational institutions, educators must be kept abreast with new information through continued learning and training. It is against this backdrop that the SDA church in Bulawayo province, Zimbabwe and its educational institutions need to emphasise professional development especially on leadership and management qualifications. In addition, they could have a sustainable bursary funds to be used in upgrading its educational leaders and teachers.

Work Experience

Of all the fifteen school leaders who participated in the study, only three had work experience which exceeded twenty years of service. 7 respondents had work experience of more than a decade, whereas 5 had work experience below ten years. The findings seem to suggest that the church should have in place a deliberate leadership development and succession plan for the survival and effectiveness of its educational entities. Rice (2005:92-95) concluded that leadership is fostered through training, internship, and peer mentorship. In line with the empirical findings, the Christian faith-based educational institutions are to make the professional development of their workforce a priority. Furthermore, succession planning is a crucial element of an effective organisation. A study by Ngandu and Nyakora (2018) indicated that the lack of deliberate leadership development and succession plan may jeopardise the future of an organisation. Therefore, to develop effective spiritual and moral school leadership, an intentional leadership development and succession plan that is grounded on sound biblical values is crucial.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study focused on assessing the effectiveness of spiritual and moral leadership in the management of

SDA-run schools. To address this issue, participants were asked to explain their perspectives on spiritual and moral leadership and how it impacts school administration. Through their responses, four key sub-themes were identified: God-centeredness, integrity, setting an example, and service. These sub-themes will be briefly discussed in the following sections.

Attributes Of Spiritual And Moral Leadership

Being Centered on God

The participants stressed that spiritual and moral leadership is God-centred. Concerning the attribute of God-centeredness the participants said:

“As a spiritual leader, I put God first in all that I do.” (P4)

“Spiritual and moral leadership is about one’s positioning with God and man based on biblical principles.”(P9)

“Spirituality and morality are inseparable if you are spiritually sound, it follows that you may be morally sound.” (P4)

“Spiritual and moral leadership has to do with what God wants to be done in His institution.” (P12)

“We cannot throw godliness away because this is a Christian institution.” (P11)

The researchers from the above evidence noted a connection between a leader’s relationship with God and their leadership behaviors. This aligns with a study by Karen Rezach on spiritual leadership in independent schools. Nyakora (2020:7) also emphasized the importance of spirituality and humility in leadership, suggesting that being God-centered involves a willingness to serve and humility in carrying out tasks others may shy away from.

Integrity

Most participants highlighted that spiritual and moral leadership is characterized by integrity. Concerning integrity the participants said:

“In everything that has to do with leadership there must be strict integrity.” (P3)

“Spiritual and moral leadership is upright and demonstrates unwavering integrity.” (P6)

“A spiritual leader displays a sound behavior which is characterized by ethics, marital fidelity, and financial integrity.” (P15)

In summary, it can be noted that from the above-presented quotations, a leader’s character holds some weight as their skills or abilities. According to Kibble (2004:48), school leaders need to carry out their administrative responsibilities with fairness and integrity. Likewise, De la Rey (2018:61) suggests that honesty should always be reflected in the actions of school leaders. In this regard, spiritual leaders are entrusted with upholding morals and should never stray from their ethical principles while fulfilling their duties.

EXEMPLARY LEADERSHIP

The participants indicated that spiritual and moral leaders are exemplary in all aspects of life. Concerning

exemplary leadership the participants said:

“I believed in being exemplary, that there are so many people I have an influence upon and that in all aspects of my life I should be exemplary.” (P10)

“Leaders must be exemplary in terms of conduct and practice.” (P1)

“Through example, the leaders inspire others to follow.” (P2)

“As leaders, we must set the spiritual and moral tone of the school and to do so we must be exemplary in all respects.” (P13)

“Leadership is modeling; when you are leading you must be a role model.” (P11)

Based on these responses, the researcher observed that there is a correlation between exemplary leadership and effective leadership practices. The findings from the research concur with Annicchiarico (2013:47) who asserts that “leadership is demonstrated after one of the chief teachers who ever lived and that is Jesus Christ. He was a leader who led through modeling.” More recent studies also emphasize that the moral compass of leaders is the biblical standard of leadership that Christian followers strive to emulate (Ayandoun 2021, Hermans 2020).

Service

The participants also stated that spiritual and moral leadership is characterized by the spirit of service. Regarding service, the participants said:

“When you are a leader you are not there to be praised but to serve.” (P1)

“I am here not to boss people but to serve by making the environment conducive for the people I am leading. Therefore, I must be a servant.” (P12)

The evidence presented above concurs with the findings documented by Robert Greenleaf (1977) who argued that first and foremost a leader must be a servant. It is also in harmony with the study on servant leadership by Auxier (2013:23) who concluded that the thrust on equipping personnel and being of service to others is what servanthood entails. Similarly, Annicchiarico (2013:48) adds that a spirit of service is vital to the calling of the school leader and that servant leaders are called to leadership and respond to the call to be of service to others and not serve themselves. Therefore, spiritual, and moral leaders will demonstrate willingness to serve their followers and members of the community. Recent scholarly works also note that SDA educational institutions prepare their students for responsible citizenship that involves providing service to others (Bailey 2018, Plaatjes 2014).

The effectiveness of Spiritual and moral leadership practices in the school setting

During the interview process, the participants were requested to outline the results that are observable in an educational institution that is administered by spiritual and moral leadership. The following emerged as characteristics of effective spiritual and moral leadership practices in the school, namely: quality student results, disciplined learners, adequate resources, and excellent infrastructure.

Obtaining quality results

Most participants indicated that academic excellence is one of the essential characteristics of effective

spiritual and moral leadership. Concerning quality results, the participants said:

“A successful school should excel academically.” (P1)

“Definitely a successful school produces good academic results.” (P8)

“The school must produce excellent results because God wants us to be the head and not the tail.” (P3)

“If a school produces quality results, then the school will be able to market itself.” (P10)

“The success of a school is multi-dimensional; there is the academic success and spiritual success.” (P12).

From the feedback obtained from the participants, it was evident that a successful school has an excellent pass rate. The results of the study were in harmony with the research which was done by Kobola (2020:129) which established that a successful educational institution delivers excellent academic results and that the attainment of positive outcomes necessitates the need for effective leadership and administration. It must be observed that the obtaining of quality results is a by-product of a team effort from the learners, parents, and the school staff and that the school leadership which claims to uphold the tenets of spiritual and moral leadership should create, maintain, and foster a school environment and culture which is conducive for effective pedagogy and learning. The role and effect of community participation in the delivery of excellent results have also been emphasized in other studies (Sadomba et al 2015).

disciplined learners

Pertaining to the effectiveness of spiritual and moral school leadership, the participants highlighted that a successful school is characterized by disciplined students. Regarding the issue of disciplined learners, the participants said:

“A successful school is evidenced by disciplined students.” P7 expressed that, *“in a successful school there is good learner behavior.”* (P1)

“In terms of student behavior, the community members want to identify with a school that exerts a positive influence in the society.” (P8)

Based on the research findings presented above, it emerged that good learner behavior is important to academic success. Furthermore, based on the above findings and discussion, it may be concluded that there is a mutual relationship between student behavior and academic excellence and that effective instruction and knowledge acquisition may not be realized in a disordered atmosphere. As such, spiritual and moral leadership is evidenced by modeling and instilling discipline among learners. A study on school effectiveness by Kobola (2020:128), agrees with the above findings, that discipline and morals bring about success in all areas of life, and dedication to ethics acts as a pivotal part of discipline and the success of the educational institution.

Adequate resources

The participants also highlighted that effective spiritual and moral leadership is successful in the mobilization of adequate resources for the smooth running of school activities. Concerning the provision of adequate resources the participants said:

“In an effective school that are adequate resources for both learners and members of staff.” (P5)

“The financial soundness of a school is of crucial importance.”(P7)

“The financial soundness of the school is largely dependent on the level of support which the school receives from the parent body.” (P13)

“For the schools to be financially sound there must be income generating projects rather than depending on tuition.” (P11)

“With limited resources, the school is likely not to excel in all aspects of school life.” (P13)

The empirical findings from the research suggest that entrepreneurship is a key element in harnessing and ensuring the financial soundness of the school. The schools may run income-generating projects such as tuck-shops, and poultry farming among others. Therefore, it is the responsibility of spiritual and moral school leadership to ensure that the school has multiple streams of income or adequate resources. We also observed that in most cases in Zimbabwe, educational institutions operate their activities with limited resources, but they are expected to excel in all aspects respects. As such, school leaders are required to devise innovative strategies to enhance the financial viability of the school such as finding sponsors to fund different projects (Sadomba et al 2015). Concerning the issue of finding potential donors to support school activities, De la Rey (2018:65) argues that it is difficult to establish and retain a relationship with a donor because donors want to identify with excellence and success, and successful schools will always get financial resources from different donors.

Excellent infrastructure

Pertaining to the effectiveness of spiritual and moral school leadership, the participants pointed out that schools led by spiritual and moral leadership are characterized by excellent infrastructure. Several participants said;

“The outside of the school must be appealing; a clean school environment produces clean minds.” (P5)

“The school must have attractive infrastructure and surroundings.” (P12)

“There must be a culture of excellence... you see that the school bus is telling something.” (P13)

It must be noted that the school administration has to ensure that the school infrastructure is in excellent condition. The Ministry of Education (2009:70) states that school leaders are answerable and responsible for the institution’s infrastructure and its recreational grounds. They should ensure that is preserved in excellent condition and kept as good-looking as possible. A study by Bipath and Moyo (2016:179) indicated that school leaders of successful schools devote their time, energy, and resources to the outlook of the school buildings and grounds. Furthermore, the school administrators make it a point that aesthetic basics such as lawns, flowers, and trees decorate the school. In addition, a study on characteristics of effective schools by Kobola (2020:128-129) revealed that a successful educational institution has an atmosphere that is favorable to instruction and schooling and a clean setting with excellent structures and adequate amenities for meaningful instruction and learning.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it can be noted that this study analyzed the effectiveness of spiritual and moral leadership in the administration of school context in Bulawayo Province, Zimbabwe. Most participants noted the key

qualities of spiritual and moral leadership, including being centered on God, integrity, setting a good example, and serving others. Subsequently, the study identified specific traits associated with effective spiritual and moral leadership practices in schools, such as achieving high-quality outcomes, fostering disciplined learners, ensuring sufficient resources, and maintaining excellent infrastructure. The findings of this study strongly indicate that by adopting the highlighted attributes, educational leaders in SDA-run schools could decrease moral decline. Within the school environment, the impact of spiritual and moral leadership is demonstrated through achieving high-quality outcomes, fostering disciplined learners, ensuring ample resources, and maintaining top-notch infrastructure. These findings were crucial for school administrators, policymakers, and researchers as they heightened awareness about spiritual and moral leadership practices.

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FOOTNOTES

[1] The True Education concept an educational thought that was framed by Ellen G White within the great controversy between Christ and Satan and the contestation for the hearts and minds of the young people. The epicentre of the struggle is the control of the schooling system