Utilizing Morning Assemblies for Effective School Management: A Study of Principals' Daily Operational Practices

Tshabalala Goodness

University of Eswatini Faculty of Education

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the role of morning assemblies in the daily operational practices of school principals, examining how these sessions contribute to effective school management. Employing a mixed-methods research design, the study integrates qualitative interviews with ten school leaders, direct observations of assembly practices, and quantitative survey data from teachers and students. Transformational Leadership Theory was used as a lens for underpinning this study. Data was analysed thematically and confidentiality was maintained throughout the study. Findings revealed that well-organized assemblies contribute significantly to improved communication, heightened student engagement, and elevated staff morale. Morning assemblies also serve as a consistent platform for strengthening behavioral expectations and institutional goals. The research identified several challenges that hinder the full potential of morning assemblies, including limited time allocation, inconsistent participation, and varying levels of student attentiveness.
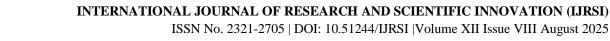
Keywords: Morning assembly, school management, principal leadership, daily operations, educational administration

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Morning assemblies are a long-standing tradition in educational institutions worldwide. Rooted historically in religious, colonial, and moral traditions, these gatherings were initially established as platforms for collective worship, moral instruction, announcements, and community affirmation (Ezzani, 2020). Over time, as education systems evolved and the functions of school leadership expanded, morning assemblies began to take on broader roles. In contemporary education, assemblies are increasingly viewed not merely as ceremonial routines but as powerful tools for developing institutional culture, reinforcing discipline, promoting learner motivation, and exercising school leadership (Hattie, 2017; DeWitt, 2017).Internationally, school assemblies have been studied within the context of whole-school approaches to education. In the United Kingdom, for example, OFSTED (Office for Standards in Education, 2019) reports have emphasized the importance of morning assemblies in cultivating a shared ethos, reinforcing school values, and contributing to student well-being. In Australia, studies have shown how assemblies function as pedagogical spaces that support social-emotional learning and encourage community engagement among learners (Dockett et al., 2011).

In many African contexts, the tradition of school assemblies was inherited from colonial education systems but has been recontextualised over time to serve evolving educational needs. In Nigeria, assemblies are used not only for moral and religious instruction but also for behavioral regulation, announcements, and nationalistic rituals such as singing the national anthem and reciting the pledge (Adewale, 2016). Similarly, in Kenya, morning assemblies are platforms for reinforcing school rules, celebrating academic achievements, and providing guidance and counselling to students (Nderitu & Gichuhi, 2020). These practices illustrate the utility of assemblies as low-cost, high-impact leadership tools, particularly in resource-constrained educational settings.

In South Africa, school assemblies have been explored in terms of their role in reinforcing the values of the curriculum and building school culture. The South African Department of Basic Education (DBE, 2011) recommends that assemblies be used to support life skills education, communicate expectations, and provide

moral guidance. Research by Govender and Moletsane (2013) highlights how assemblies can ensure a culture of inclusion and shared responsibility among learners and educators when properly structured. Furthermore, the scholars argue that assemblies provide a vital link between school leadership and learner engagement, especially in schools with limited formal administrative platforms for communication. Morning assemblies are a common feature in schools across Africa, yet their implementation varies widely and they remain an area with limited research and understanding. While some school leaders as observed by Tilhou (2020) see assemblies as an essential aspect of institutional leadership and community-building, others treat them as routine obligations without strategic intent. This inconsistency often stems from a lack of training in school leadership, competing administrative priorities, or an absence of clear policy guidelines on the use of assemblies as governance tools (Bush & Glover, 2016).

Turning to Eswatini, morning assemblies remain a deeply entrenched part of school culture across public, mission, and private institutions. These daily gatherings are often used for announcements, devotionals, singing, and the communication of important updates. However, the extent to which these assemblies are utilized for strategic school leadership varies significantly across schools. While some principals use assemblies as dynamic spaces for vision-setting, behavioral reinforcement, and learner engagement, others conduct them in a perfunctory manner brief, non-interactive, and devoid of structured goals. The Eswatini education system presents contextual challenges that heighten the importance of strategic leadership tools such as morning assemblies. These include disparities between urban and rural schools, high student-teacher ratios, limited access to specialized psycho-social support services, and persistent issues with learner discipline and motivation (MoET, 2018). Additionally, the country's school leadership structures are often overstretched, with principals expected to serve as administrators, instructional leaders, counsellors, and community liaisons all within the limitations of constrained budgets and resources (Dlamini & Dube, 2022).

In such a context, morning assemblies offer a potentially underutilized opportunity for school principals to enact daily leadership, ensure learner motivation, reinforce discipline, and nurture a cohesive school culture. Morning assemblies are cost-effective, culturally resonant, and already embedded within the daily rhythm of school life (Tripathy & Kumar, 2019). When strategically employed, assemblies can serve as platforms for promoting positive behaviour, celebrating achievements, instilling values between school leadership and learners.

However, there remains a notable gap in the scholarly literature regarding the functional use of morning assemblies as leadership tools within Eswatini. While studies have addressed broader issues of instructional leadership, school climate, and discipline management (Phebeni & Mpofu, 2024), few have examined how school principals in Eswatini deliberately use assemblies to advance school governance, communication strategies, or values education. This study, therefore, seeks to explore the roles that morning assemblies play in school management, leadership, and learner development within the Eswatini educational context.

Problem Statement

In Eswatini, school principals face increasing pressure to maintain discipline, ensure learner engagement, and communicate effectively within environments often constrained by limited resources and overcrowded classrooms. Morning assemblies have long been a tradition in schools, yet their strategic potential as tools for school management remains largely underexplored in both policy and research. Existing literature (Tshabalala, & Faremi, 2024, Phebeni & Mpofu, 2024, Bhebhe & Nyathi, 2019) on educational leadership in Eswatini focuses predominantly on curriculum delivery, instructional supervision, and administrative challenges, with little attention paid to how routine structures such as morning assemblies can be used for broader leadership functions. Observations suggest that some school leaders informally use morning assemblies to communicate institutional goals, reinforce discipline, and motivate learners (Silbert & Jacklin, 2015). However, these practices are inconsistent, undocumented, and often underutilized. Without a clear understanding of how principals deliberately use assemblies to support daily management tasks, opportunities for promoting school culture, enhancing communication, and building learner morale may be missed. This study, therefore, seeks to examine how principals in Eswatini utilise morning assemblies as intentional platforms for effective school management, and what challenges and successes they experience in doing so.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to examine how principals in Eswatini utilize morning assemblies as leadership tools to enhance the daily management of schools.

Research Questions

- How do principals in Eswatini utilise morning assemblies to support daily school management?

- What roles do teachers and learners play in the planning and execution of morning assemblies?

- What challenges do school leaders face in using morning assemblies as leadership tools?

Significance of the Study

This study is significant for several reasons, both at the theoretical and practical levels. Firstly, the study contributes to the limited body of research on educational leadership practices particularly within the under-documented context of Eswatini. While school leadership literature often centers on instructional supervision and administrative efficiency, this study expands the conversation by exploring a culturally embedded and cost-effective leadership tool; morning assemblies that remains largely overlooked in empirical scholarship. Secondly, the study provides context-specific insights into how principals in Eswatini are innovatively using routine structures to address management and leadership challenges, particularly in resource-constrained environments. As schools grapple with issues such as learner indiscipline, poor communication flow, and low morale, understanding how assemblies can serve as strategic touchpoints for promoting order, unity, and shared values is critical. Thirdly, the findings have practical implications for policy and training. The study might inform the Ministry of Education and Training in Eswatini as it develops guidelines or capacity-building initiatives aimed at enhancing leadership effectiveness by revealing best practices and common barriers. The results could help institutionalize assembly-based interventions that align with national education goals and values. Moreover, the study highlights the value of learner participation and voice in shaping school culture. It illustrates how student involvement in assemblies can build confidence, leadership skills, and a sense of ownership all of which are essential for ensuring inclusive, resilient learning communities. This research further opens up new possibilities for comparative and longitudinal studies on how routine structures like school assemblies can impact academic outcomes, school climate, and leadership development across diverse educational systems. In this way, the study not only addresses local educational needs but also contributes to global discourses on high-impact school leadership strategies.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored in Transformational Leadership Theory (TLT), originally introduced by Burns in 1978 and subsequently refined by Bass and Avolio in 1994. TLT provides a robust theoretical lens through which to examine the mechanisms by which leaders enact institutional transformation, cultivate team cohesion, and motivate followers to transcend conventional performance standards by promoting a collective sense of purpose and intrinsic motivation. Within educational settings, TLT is particularly salient for analyzing the leadership practices of school principals operating in multifaceted and frequently resource-limited environments (Warrilow, 2012). The theory delineates four core dimensions of transformational leadership: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. These interrelated components collectively offer a structured framework for investigating how school leaders articulate and operationalize a compelling vision, exemplify ethical conduct, foster a culture of innovation, and attend to the unique developmental needs of both staff and students (Warrilow, 2012). In the context of this study, TLT serves as a pertinent analytical tool for exploring how morning assemblies function as strategic leadership platforms through which principals may reinforce institutional values, galvanize collective engagement, and enact transformational influence.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The function and significance of school assemblies have evolved significantly over time, shifting from their early roots in religious and moral instruction as viewed by Cappy (2019) to dynamic platforms for school leadership, student engagement, and operational management. In contemporary educational settings, especially in resource-constrained contexts morning assemblies serve as powerful but often underutilized tools for school administration. Given the ongoing challenges in instructional time, staffing, and discipline management, the assembly offers a low-cost, high-impact platform to initiate learning, set the tone for the day, and build a unified school culture.

One of the most vital roles of morning assemblies is their function as a communication platform (Siti Suherni et.al 2023). Assemblies provide a structured and consistent channel for top-down information sharing, enabling principals to communicate policies, event updates, academic expectations, and behavioral guidelines. Research (Marzano et al., 2005) indicates that regular and transparent communication through such gatherings improves the overall school climate and reduces confusion or misunderstandings among staff and students. In contexts where time for formal meetings is limited, school leaders have found assemblies to be an efficient way to address the entire school community, resulting in enhanced organizational flow and clarity (DeWitt, 2017).

Morning assemblies also contribute significantly to student discipline and moral development. Drawing from Sergiovanni's (2000) theory of moral leadership, principals can utilize assemblies to embed ethical values and behavioral expectations into daily school life. Publicly acknowledging positive behavior during assemblies helps reinforce school rules and promotes a culture of accountability and respect. In Eswatini, where corporal punishment remains a contentious issue, assemblies serve as a constructive alternative for non-punitive behavior management. Morning assemblies also allow school leaders to model and normalize values such as integrity, punctuality, and empathy, guiding learners to internalize these traits as part of their daily conduct.

Another crucial dimension of assemblies lies in their role in developing social and emotional development (Dunbar, 2020). Morning gatherings promote unity, teamwork, and a sense of belonging among students. Assemblies provide an inclusive space where learners interact beyond their immediate class groups, enabling socialization across age and academic levels. Assemblies also help cultivate communication and interpersonal skills as students participate in public speaking, listening, and collaborative presentations. These interactions not only boost confidence and reduce anxiety but also promote cooperation, leadership development, and peer learning key attributes for holistic development. Assemblies also offer a platform for celebrating diversity and promoting school identity and cultural pride. As Hattie (2017) notes, collective rituals such as assemblies contribute to school belonging and learner motivation. Integrating student voices through speeches, poetry, music, or drama not only makes assemblies more engaging but also transforms them into participatory and empowering spaces. When learners are given opportunities to lead prayers, read reflections, or present their talents, it boosts their self-esteem and develops leadership and organizational skills. Brooks, Normore and Wilkinson (2017) observe that such participation ensures a sense of ownership and connectedness, reinforcing a positive school culture where all students feel valued.

Moreover, assemblies play a significant role in disseminating knowledge and increasing awareness on a wide range of issues, including current events, social challenges, and multicultural perspectives. They serve as informal learning environments where students are educated on civic responsibilities, global citizenship, and life skills. Assemblies can also be designed around weekly themes such as honesty, wellness, or environmental responsibility providing continuity and depth in moral and intellectual engagement. Schools that use assemblies to teach morals and values through storytelling, prayers, or thought-provoking speeches contribute to the development of well-rounded, ethically grounded individuals.

Importantly, assemblies provide a platform for recognizing and motivating both students and teachers. Celebrating academic achievements, sports victories, and co-curricular successes in front of the whole school encourages a culture of recognition and motivates others to strive for excellence. Regular recognition boosts morale and establishes a merit-based culture where effort and improvement are visible and appreciated (Gyasi, Xi, & Owusu-Ampomah, 2016). Similarly, morning assemblies often begin with physical exercises that

energize students and contribute to physical well-being. Simple activities such as stretching or light aerobics prepare students for the school day by enhancing alertness, attention, and mental readiness.

Morning assemblies according to Nderitu and Gichuhi, (2020) promote discipline through structured routines and behavioral expectations. Students learn the importance of time management, following instructions, and demonstrating respectful behavior. These habits, instilled daily, extend beyond the assembly to other areas of school life, enhancing the overall learning environment. Furthermore, assemblies allow school leaders to address emerging issues, resolve minor conflicts, and ensure collaborative problem-solving. When assemblies are used to discuss shared challenges or to clarify misunderstandings within the school, they reinforce transparency and collective responsibility.

Although there are numerous benefits, there remains a disparity in how assemblies are implemented, especially across different school contexts in Eswatini. Some schools maintain rigid and monotonous formats that disengage learners, while others creatively use assemblies to energize and educate. Globally, countries like Singapore and Japan provide structured assembly models such as "Morning Reflection" and "Chorei" that are designed to inspire discipline, mindfulness, and collective harmony (Tan, 2018). However, in Sub-Saharan Africa, research on the strategic use of assemblies is limited. Most studies in the region focus on broader leadership practices, resource limitations, or disciplinary concerns, with little attention to how daily rituals like assemblies can serve as operational tools for school management (Novita Dewi, 2021).

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a sequential mixed-methods research design, integrating both qualitative and quantitative approaches to provide a holistic understanding of how school principals in Eswatini utilise morning assemblies as tools for effective school management. The design was strategically chosen to capture the lived experiences of principals (qualitative phase) while also allowing for broader validation of emerging patterns through empirical generalization (quantitative phase). The initial qualitative phase offered deep insights (Maree, 2020) into the strategic intentions and contextual realities surrounding assembly practices, while the subsequent quantitative phase enabled the examination of trends and relationships across a larger and more diverse population of school stakeholders.

Purposive sampling was used in the qualitative phase to select fifteen (15) school principals across a range of settings urban, peri-urban, and rural areas reflecting variation in school type, governance structure (government, mission, and private schools), resource availability, and enrolment size. This approach ensured a rich diversity of perspectives and allowed the study to account for how contextual differences shape the use of morning assemblies (Macmillan and Schumacher, 2016). In the quantitative phase, a broader sample of fifty (50) participants was selected, comprising ten (10) teachers and forty (40) senior secondary school students. These participants were drawn from schools included in the qualitative phase.

Data were collected through three complementary methods: semi-structured interviews, surveys, and direct observations. The qualitative interviews targeted the selected principals and focused on their strategic use of morning assemblies, including agenda-setting practices, leadership objectives, and challenges faced in implementation. These interviews provided rich narratives that revealed how assemblies are embedded within broader school management routines. In the quantitative phase, structured surveys were administered to teachers and students. The surveys were designed to assess perceptions of assembly clarity, engagement levels, and the perceived impact of assemblies on school discipline, communication, and culture. This allowed for triangulation of perspectives (Creswell, 2018) and helped identify areas of alignment and divergence between leadership intentions and stakeholder experiences.

To further strengthen the study's credibility, direct observations of thirty (30) morning assemblies were conducted across participating schools. These observations focused on capturing the structure, duration, sequencing of events, roles of speakers, student attentiveness, and general atmosphere during the assemblies. Field notes and structured checklists were used to ensure consistency across observation sessions. The combination of interviews, surveys, and observations provided a vigorous and multidimensional dataset.

Qualitative data from interviews and observations were analysed using thematic analysis, guided by the six-phase model of Braun and Clarke (2006). This involved familiarization with the data, generation of initial codes, identification and refinement of themes, and interpretation in relation to the study's theoretical framework and research questions. The thematic analysis enabled the researchers to distill key patterns related to leadership practices, assembly content, and contextual constraints.

Quantitative data from surveys were analysed using descriptive statistics to summarize trends in participant responses and to examine associations between student engagement and leadership practices in morning assemblies. The integration of qualitative and quantitative findings occurred at the interpretation stage(Resnik, 2020) allowing the study to present a comprehensive narrative supported by both statistical evidence and contextual depth.

The research process was conducted in full adherence to ethical research standards. All participants were informed of the purpose of the study, their right to withdraw at any time, with assurances of anonymity and confidentiality (Macmillan and Schuma 2016). Participation was entirely voluntary, and no personal identifiers were recorded in either the qualitative or quantitative phases of the study.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings from this study revealed the complex role of morning assemblies in Eswatini schools, highlighting their significance as instruments of leadership, communication, discipline management, and cultural reinforcement. The evidence gathered through interviews, surveys, and observations demonstrates that morning assemblies serve as strategic operational tools that align with various leadership theories, especially transformational and moral leadership models. As affirmed by Dunbar (2020), these daily rituals contribute significantly to students' emotional and social development, thereby reinforcing their role beyond mere ceremonial routines. Instead, they emerge as deliberate, structured, and meaningful engagements through which school principals enact visible leadership. This section presents the findings organized into thematic categories, each aligned with insights from the literature review.

Assemblies as strategic communication platforms

A key theme emerging from the study is the strategic use of assemblies as centralized platforms for school-wide communication. Principals consistently emphasized that morning gatherings facilitated the efficient dissemination of information, reducing the need for fragmented communication through multiple meetings or classroom announcements. One principal stated, "*When I speak during assembly, I know every learner and teacher hears the same message at the same time there is no confusion, no misinterpretation.*" In a similar voice another principal echoed; "*the assembly gives me a chance to reach everyone at once students, teachers, even support staff. There is no room for miscommunication when we all start the day together, hearing the same message in the same space,*" These findings resonate with Siti Suherni et al. (2023), who assert that assemblies provide structured and consistent avenues for top-down communication. Similarly, Marzano et al. (2005) emphasize that regular and transparent messaging positively influences school climate and clarity. Over 81% of teachers surveyed affirmed that morning assemblies enhanced their understanding of daily objectives and operational priorities. This outcome aligns with DeWitt's (2017) suggestion that consistent communication through assemblies contributes to effective organizational flow and enhances instructional time management.

Assemblies in Eswatini schools often included announcements of academic expectations, updates on extracurricular activities, behavioral reminders, and motivational messages. These gatherings became institutionalized routines through which leadership was not only communicated but also publicly demonstrated. In this regard, the findings are in line with Fullan's (2014) view that effective leadership is embedded in routine practices that are infused with vision, purpose, and relational depth. Principals considered assemblies the "*heartbeat of the school,*" reaffirming that visible, transparent communication ensures collective awareness and operational unity.

Assemblies as arenas for discipline and moral leadership

The findings further revealed that morning assemblies serve as proactive spaces for managing student behavior and instilling moral values. Principals described how assemblies were used to address emerging issues such as bullying, lateness, and disrespect before they escalated into larger disciplinary problems. The integration of a "moment of reflection" into many assemblies provided opportunities for moral storytelling, discussion of values, and clarification of behavioral expectations. This approach aligns with Sergiovanni's (2000) concept of moral leadership, where discipline is framed not as authoritarian control but as the internalization of shared values through relational engagement. Assemblies were thus not only platforms for outlining rules but also spaces where values such as empathy, punctuality, and respect were modeled and reinforced. These findings echo Cappy's (2019) assertion that assemblies historically functioned as instruments for religious and moral instruction, a role that remains relevant in contemporary school settings.

Principals emphasized positive reinforcement as a core strategy, frequently recognizing students publicly for good behavior, academic improvement, or acts of kindness. One principal noted, *"When we praise students in front of their peers, it sends a message that good behavior is noticed and valued."* This approach is congruent with Gyasi, Xi, and Owusu-Ampomah's (2016) argument that public recognition boosts motivation and establishes a culture of merit and accountability. As principals sought to move away from punitive methods, especially in contexts where corporal punishment remains contentious, morning assemblies emerged as effective alternatives for non-coercive discipline management.

Assemblies as catalysts for school culture and learner empowerment

Morning assemblies were also found to be essential in cultivating a positive school culture and empowering learners. Principals reported that when students were given active roles in leading prayers, making announcements, or presenting cultural items, they developed confidence and a stronger sense of belonging. One principal observed, *"When students take the lead, the assembly becomes theirs it is no longer just a staff led routine."* These findings align with Brooks, Normore, and Wilkinson (2017), who argue that student participation in assemblies ensures ownership, engagement, and identity. Similarly, Hattie (2017) emphasizes that collective rituals like assemblies contribute significantly to student motivation and institutional pride. Involving students actively in the planning and facilitation of assemblies also encouraged the development of public speaking skills, leadership abilities, and interpersonal confidence.

In rural and peri-urban schools, where students often face socioeconomic hardships, assemblies were reported as platforms for affirming the students' dignity and resilience. A principal stated, *"Our students face real challenges poverty, broken homes. The assembly is where we remind them they matter."* These sentiments align with Tan (2018), who highlights the inspirational nature of structured morning rituals such as 'Chorei' in Japan and 'Morning Reflection' in Singapore. Eswatini schools that implemented participatory and culturally relevant assemblies witnessed increased learner engagement and emotional investment in school life.

Challenges and constraints in assembly implementation

Although morning assemblies offer wide-ranging benefits, the study revealed several challenges affecting their implementation. Time management was a significant issue, with many principals noting that tight school schedules and late student arrivals often led to shortened or rushed assembly sessions. One principal remarked, *"We often have just ten minutes before lessons start it is hard to do anything meaningful in that time."* These time constraints often undermined the depth and intentionality of assemblies, reducing them to procedural formalities. Moreover, the study found that learner disengagement was particularly common in large or under-resourced schools, where poor acoustics, overcrowding, and monotonous formats led to a lack of attentiveness. A principal from a high-enrollment school noted, *"When assemblies become predictable, students tune out."* In line with Tan's (2018) concerns about rigid assembly formats, these findings suggest the need for greater creativity and structure in assembly planning. Only 40% of principals reported using documented themes or structured guidelines to direct assembly content, resulting in inconsistent educational value across schools. Novita Dewi (2021) note that in many Sub-Saharan African contexts, the strategic use of assemblies remains under-researched and inconsistently practiced. The findings from Eswatini confirm this gap, highlighting the

need for policy-level support, planning tools, and professional development to maximize the impact of assemblies.

Teachers' and learners' perspectives

Teachers overwhelmingly viewed morning assemblies as beneficial to the school's daily operations. Approximately 81% indicated that assemblies clarified expectations, schedules, and behavior standards. Teachers also appreciated that school-wide issues could be addressed collectively, thus reducing classroom disruptions. One teacher remarked, "*Assemblies help us start the day on the same page. That alone reduces confusion.*" Assemblies were also found to be motivational for teachers, especially when principals acknowledged staff efforts during these gatherings. However, some teachers raised concerns about inconsistent planning, repetitiveness, and the potential loss of instructional time echoing the concerns raised in the literature (Tan, 2018).

Learners, too, generally responded positively to assemblies, particularly when they were given active roles. They reported increased self-confidence, public speaking skills, and a greater sense of belonging. One learner stated, "*When I lead the morning devotion, I feel respected and valued.*" These insights affirm the claims of Brooks et al. (2017) and Hattie (2017) regarding the empowering potential of participatory school rituals. However, learners in overcrowded schools raised issues about poor sound systems and limited engagement, reinforcing the need for logistical and infrastructural improvements.

Assemblies were widely acknowledged as having a positive impact on student behavior and motivation. Consistent messaging about punctuality, respect, and academic focus reinforced shared expectations and helped shape learner conduct. Many students appreciated the moral and reflective elements of assemblies, stating that they provided motivation to improve behavior and academic effort.

Public recognition during assemblies, such as praising students for good behavior or academic improvement, was especially motivating. This finding supports Gyasi et al. (2016), who argue that recognition enhances morale and promotes a merit-based culture. Moreover, these practices align with Fullan's (2014) assertion that effective leadership is grounded in the ability to infuse routine practices with deeper meaning, vision, and relational purpose. The findings reaffirm the potential of morning assemblies as vital tools for instructional leadership and school transformation.

CONCLUSION

This study affirms that morning assemblies, often perceived as routine formalities, are in fact critical leadership instruments within the daily operational practices of school management. In the Eswatini context characterized by resource constraints, socio-cultural diversity, and varying levels of administrative capacity morning assemblies emerge as a culturally grounded, low-cost, and high-impact strategy. When structured with intentionality, assemblies serve multiple leadership functions: they streamline communication, reinforce discipline, build a sense of community, and promote learner engagement. The findings demonstrate that effective principals strategically utilize assemblies to align school operations with shared values, ensure learner motivation, and maintain institutional order, thereby exemplifying key elements of transformational leadership. While morning assemblies hold considerable potential, the study also reveals several implementation gaps, such as inconsistent planning, limited student engagement, and persistent time management challenges. These limitations reveal the need for more structured support and professional development for school leaders in using assemblies as management tools. The study contributes to the discourse on educational leadership in developing contexts by demonstrating how everyday school rituals can be used as leadership opportunities that ensure academic and social cohesion.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To enhance the effectiveness of school assemblies, the Ministry of Education and Training should consider establishing a national framework that serves as a guiding standard for schools across the country. This framework should be adaptable to allow for local innovation based on contextual realities and available

resources. Such an approach would promote consistency while encouraging creativity and responsiveness to local needs. There is a need to institutionalise student involvement through learner-led segments such as announcements, presentations, and performances. Including students in these activities not only amplify their voices but also nurtures essential leadership skills and a stronger sense of ownership within the school community.

To keep assemblies purposeful and aligned with educational goals, schools should implement thematic planning. Adopting weekly or monthly themes like integrity, punctuality, environmental stewardship, and mental health helps maintain student interest and reinforce values tied to the broader curriculum. These themes offer a dynamic structure that can evolve with student needs and societal concerns. Professional development for principals and senior teachers is also essential. Equipping them with skills to design and facilitate impactful assemblies should be part of comprehensive instructional leadership and school management programs offered. Such training ensures that school leaders can make assemblies an enriching part of the school experience. Schools should also establish mechanisms for evaluating the effectiveness of morning assemblies. Schools can assess relevance and impact of morning assemblies by collecting feedback from students, teachers. Regular evaluations would enable responsive improvements; ensuring assemblies remain meaningful and continue to support the holistic development of learners.

Suggestions for future research

Given the positive yet complex role of morning assemblies in school leadership, future research could adopt a longitudinal design to examine the sustained influence of structured assemblies on learner outcomes, school climate, and leadership development. Comparative studies across different school types and education systems urban vs. rural, public vs. private would also provide valuable insights into contextual adaptations and scalability of assembly-based management practices.

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