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The Role of Entrepreneurial Leadership of Head Teachers in High Performing Schools: A Case of Selected Schools in Lusaka District

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Abstract

The study was an exploration of the role of entrepreneurial leadership of head teachers in high performing schools, a case of selected schools in Lusaka district. Data was analysed thematically. The study population targeted secondary schools and headteachers. The study used qualitative method targeting 4 headteachers who were in charge of high performance in secondary schools. The study utilised purposive sampling to select four schools and four headteachers. The study used Headteacher interview and Focus Group Discussion with Heads of Departments to collect data. It was established that Headteachers exhibited entrepreneurial leadership practices characterised by visionary thinking, strategic risk-taking, collaboration, innovation and problem solving. They prioritized teacher empowerment, community engagement and school improvement was what the headteachers highlighted as practices used in their schools. However, headteachers faced challenges in implementing leadership practices that included financial constraints, managing change and resistance. This limited their ability to invest in staff development. Regardless of these challenges, headteachers had effective strategies such as two-way communication to build relationships and encourage feedback; knowledge sharing through workshops and collaborations. It was found that effective entrepreneurial leadership required a unique blend of skills which included visionary thinking, strategic risk taking, adaptability, resilience and collaboration. The recommendations were that the Ministry of Education both at District and National level should intensify monitoring so that best practices in high performing schools are shared with other schools.

Keywords: ***Entrepreneurial leadership, high performing schools, Headteacher, implementing***

1.1 Introduction

Entrepreneurial leadership has emerged as a promising approach to addressing these challenges. Entrepreneurial leaders are characterised by their ability to innovate, take calculated risks, and foster a culture of creativity and experimentation. Entrepreneurial leadership practice is an exclusive leadership practice that aid in confronting the tasks and challenges of organizations (Dahiru & Pihie, 2016; Ng'andwe &Phiri 2017). However, many questions had been raised on the influence of the leadership style in the educational settings. General entrepreneurial behaviour, according to Dahiru and Pihie (2016), reflect one's ability to apply an entrepreneurial approach at work and provide an encouraging and supportive environment for staff to be innovative and take risks in performing their tasks and persist in the face of problems and quickly change the strategies that might not be effective.

Studies have shown that there is a significant correlation between teachers' perceptions of school principals' entrepreneurial leadership practices and school innovativeness (Pihie, Asimiran & Bagheri, 2014: Phiri & Chileshe, 2016) although with limited research on the impact of school leaders' entrepreneurial leadership practices on school innovativeness. This shows that importance of the leader for identifying and creating new opportunities to improve the performance of an organization of school leaders and teachers in bringing about educational changes by recognizing new opportunities as well as developing and implementing innovative ideas and approaches to different aspects of educating pupils is critical. Improving entraprenuership can also be done through strengthening the homework policy through giving homework at least twice in a week; positive parental response and involvement; negative parental response and involvement; and enhanced academic performance of learners (Mwanamwambwa, et al., 2021). Mubita et al., (2022) also proposed that there was need to enhance a collaborative approach between university lecturers, curriculum developers and other stake holders in curriculum implementation.

In recent years, entrepreneurial leadership has emerged as a promising approach to address the challenges facing schools. Entrepreneurial are characterised by their ability to innovate and foster a culture of creativity. This approach has been successful in various sectors, but its application, particularly in high performing schools remain understudied. Many questions are being raised on the influence of a leadership style on school performance (Dahiru & Pihie, 2016) owing from inadequate resources that influence performance. Zambia, like any other sub-Sahara African countries face significant challenges in providing quality education.

Pihie, et al. (2014) found that teachers perceived entrepreneurial leadership as highly important for school principals because at the study area, the principals were practicing it moderately. In support of the current findings, Silume (2014) showed that the leadership behaviours of principals in successful high schools are compatible with transformational leadership, distributed leadership and instructional leadership theories. This is justified by Kefa (2019) who observed that headteachers leadership traits significantly influence academic performance either negatively or positively. This is why Miller (2018) shows that education consumers demand more and better value and results from schools, competition between schools have simultaneously increased. This is supported by Mumba (2022) who revealed that there was a relationship between head teachers' leadership styles and teachers' performance in schools. Teachers in rural areas sometimes find it hard to adapt in the schools and fit in the leadership styles therefore, their performance gets affected and they fail to fully support the entrepreneurship activities in the schools. Ngambi, Kabika, Moonga, Chikopela, Moonga, & Mpolomoka (2020) recommends that a responsive teacher education curriculum should be cognizant of equipping teachers with knowledge and skills that may make them adapt easily and that there is need for administrative and policy adjusts towards enhancing responsiveness of teacher education.

Lope, et al. (2014) showed that entrepreneurial leadership is a multidimensional construct that can be explained by five leadership behaviours including general entrepreneurial leader behaviour, explorer behaviour, miner behaviour, accelerator behaviour and integrator behaviour. This is supported by Sengendo and Musinguzi (2024) who established that the headteachers' transformational leadership attributes of idealized influence and Inspirational motivation influence academic performance which suggested that that a unit increase in idealized influence increases academic performance while a unit increase in inspirational motivation decreases academic performance. This has aligned well with the study by Silume (2014) who found that the leadership behaviours of principals in successful high schools are compatible with transformational leadership, distributed leadership and instructional leadership theories. Dahiru and Pihie, (2016) observed that the positive impact of a school head teacher's entrepreneurial behaviour on organizational innovativeness and the changes created in schools foster performance.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The elements of entrepreneurial leadership practice and entrepreneurial leadership characteristics and skills can be successfully employed by school leaders (Dahiru & Pihie, 2016). This is more reason that some universities offer an EAP (Education Administration and Policy Studies) course in Management, Leadership and Policy Studies in an attempt to train and qualify school leaders. However, this qualification is not a requirement for promotion to a position of the Headteacher. One problem experienced in Zambian public schools is that school Headteachers are primarily primed in a classroom - most likely an accomplished teacher in the class room showing good results in teaching specialized subject content. Such a teacher soon finds oneself in a promotional post despite lacking the necessary leadership skills and knowledge, with negative consequences for the school and its effectiveness. Despite the lack of adequate training for the Headteachers in the Zambian education leadership context, many schools are successful in providing high quality education. Naiker, et al. (2016) show that there are many schools in developing countries such as Zambia, which defy the odds, and despite the challenges they face, continue to perform at exceptionally high levels. The resulting problem is that it is not known what entrepreneurial leadership skills these headteachers put in place to have high performing schools in Lusaka district.

1.2 Objective of the Study

The objective of the study was to investigate the role of entrepreneurial leadership of head teachers in high performing schools. This study endeavored to generate literature that enriched the body of knowledge and provided a base for future research.

2.1 Entrepreneurial Leadership Theory

The study utilised Renko, et al. (2015) Entrepreneurial Leadership Theory (ELT) which posit that leaders who exhibit entrepreneurial traits drive innovation, growth and success in organisations. ELT integrates entrepreneurship and leadership principles by emphasizing seven key components: entrepreneurial mindset; innovative culture; risk-taking; proactive strategy; collaborative leadership; opportunity recognition and visionary thinking. The theory suggests that entrepreneurial leaders foster a culture of experimentation, creativity and continuous learning, empowering others to contribute to decision making and innovation by recognizing opportunities, taking calculated risks and inspiring others with a clear vision. Entrepreneurial leadership navigate complex

environments and achieve exceptional outcomes. In the context of education ELT provided a framework for understanding how headteachers' entrepreneurial leadership influence school performance, teacher motivation and student achievement, offering insights into developing effective leadership strategies for improving educational outcomes.

3.1 Methodology

In order to investigate the role of entrepreneurial leadership of head teachers in high performing schools, this study adopted a descriptive phenomenology research design. The study population focused on secondary school headteachers, targeting 4 headteachers from Lusaka district. To choose participants, the research employed purposive sampling because all headteachers came from schools in Lusaka district. Qualitative data was collected through the use of focus group discussions and interviews. During interviews and focus group discussions, the researcher ensured that the participants' actions were observed so as to understand the feelings they communicated with their words if indeed they meant what they said. This meets the argument which Nyimbili and Nyimbili (2023) presented that observation can be used when the researcher is satisfied with the conditions which have to be created in order to collect the needed data.

To promote dependability of the study, the researcher engaged two peers during focus group discussion and interview. The engagement enabled the researcher to be monitored by peers and assess the methods employed in this study for feedback. Data was coded and analysed thematically. Themes that emerged from this study were used to draw conclusions from each finding.

The University's ethical clearance committee was contacted for clearance and introductory letters to follow the data collection protocol. The researcher used an interview guide and focus group discussion on the headteachers. Additionally, consent from the participants and heads of institutions were obtained before collecting data. The participants were given a full explanation of the study's goal as well as assurances that the information collected would only be used for academic purposes.

4.1 Findings

4.1.1 Which Entrepreneurial Leadership Practices Do Headteachers in High Performing Schools Exhibit?

This research question was answered by teachers from the sampled primary schools through an interview guide. The instrument was used to guarantee that data was collected qualitatively and that factual and rich information was obtained from the participants' lived experiences at their school.

The participants were asked to state which entrepreneurial leadership practices headteachers in high performing schools exhibited in some selected secondary schools in Lusaka district. It was established that headteachers in high performing schools exhibit entrepreneurial leadership practices characterised by visionary thinking, strategic risk-taking, collaboration, innovation problem solving and adaptability. The prioritized teacher empowerment, community engagement and continuous school improvement. Headteacher form school one said that: *As a Headteacher, I have to be visionary, thinking ahead by anticipating challenges and opportunities. I empower my teachers to take ownership of their classrooms, giving them autonomy to innovate. This keeps our school moving.*

Another Headteacher from school 2 noted that: *I believe in collaboration. Therefore, I work with my teachers to promote teamwork so that our goes are achieved. Further, as a school, we take calculated risks to try new approaches and that leads to significant improvement of the school performance.*

Another Headteacher from school 3 also mentioned that: *I encourage my teachers to think outside the box to find creative solutions to problems. The other thing is that I have open door policy. I always listen to their concerns and ideas. This makes us productive.*

This was supported by Headteacher from school 4 who highlighted that: *I believe in community engagement because it is crucial in school development. As a school we partner with local businessmen to provide real-world learning experiences. The school continuously assesses and refines the strategies to stay ahead of the curve.*

4.1.2 How Do Headteachers Develop and Communicate their Vision for Educational Excellence?

It was established that headteachers in high performing schools exhibit visionary leadership through inclusive planning and communication, collaborative leadership through team meetings, innovative problem-solving through autonomy and professional development and balanced risk-taking with

accountability through stakeholders' involvement. Headteacher from school one said that: *I involve my teachers and students in developing our school's vision to ensure that everyone participates.*

Another Headteacher from school 2 observed that: *I provide teamwork by providing opportunities for gross-grade collaboration. The school has programs such as inter-class and inter-grade completion. The higher grades always want to be on top so they work hard.*

A Headteacher from school 3 highlighted that: *I give my teachers autonomy to try new approaches by way of learning from successes and failures the school had experienced.*

Headteacher from school 4 stated that: *I involve stakeholders in decision-making by ensuring that there is proper accountability and transparence. This makes it easy to receive support from the staff, teachers and funders of academic programs.*

4.1.3 How Do Headteachers Foster a Culture of Collaboration Among Teachers and Staff?

The findings demonstrated headteachers' commitment to collaborative leadership by enhancing teacher engagement and school performance through team meetings, cross grade collaboration, peer mentoring and empowerment. Headteacher from school one observed that: *I encourage team meetings were teachers share ideas and expertise. Collaborative planning helps in aligning our goes and strategies.*

Another Headteacher from school 2 mentioned that: *We have cross-grade collaboration where teachers work together across year levels coupled with peer mentoring programs that support teacher development and growth in their career progression.*

From school 3, one head-teacher highlighted that: *I facilitate whole school professional development days such as department meetings focusing on sharing best practices for all my teachers and students in the school.*

A Headteacher from school 4 also stated that: *I empower teacher leaders to drive initiatives and projects and I regularly check on the progress and ask for feedback. I also encourage open communication to foster trust and collaboration in the school.*

4.1.3 How Do Headteachers Encourage Innovative Thinking and Creativity Among Teachers and Students?

Headteachers in high performing schools encourage innovative problem solving through autonomy professional development and action research. They provide resources, support and freedom for teachers to experiment and learn from failure. One head-teacher from school one mentioned that: *I give my teachers autonomy to try new approaches through learning from successes and failures. As a school, we conduct action research to inform innovative solutions.*

A head-teacher from school 2 highlighted that: *Professional development opportunities help teachers stay updated on best practices. The school encourages experimentation and provides necessary resources and support.*

Another head-teacher from school 3 alluded that: *I empower my teachers to take risks that fosters a culture of innovation. I encourage collaboration planning because it helps in identifying creative solutions in our school.*

One other head-teacher from school 4 stated that: *I involve teachers in decision making, valuing their input and expertise. The school also uses data driven decision-making to inform innovative strategies that can impact positively on the school performance.*

4.1.4 How Do Headteachers Balance Risk-Taking With Accountability in their Decision Making?

The findings established that the Headteachers in high performing schools balance risk-taking with accountability through calculated risk assessment, stakeholder involvement and continuous monitoring of and evaluation. They also prioritize transparency communication and reflection to ensure responsible decision-making process is undertaken. A head-teacher from school one observed that: *I involve stakeholders in decision making by ensuring that there is accountability and transparency. The school also conduct though risk assessment before implementing new initiatives.*

Another head-teacher from school 2 noted that: *The art of continuous monitoring and evaluation help us to adjust strategies. This helps the school to develop a reflective practice that enables us to learn from success and failures.*

From school 3, one head-teacher mentioned that: *I communicate clearly about risk and potential consequences. I have noted that collaborative decision-making promotes shared responsibility.*

A head-teacher from school 4 highlighted that: *I prioritize transparency by keeping all our stakeholders informed. The use of dada driven decision-making ensures accountability.*

Focus Group Discussion with Headteachers

Participants were asked to mention entrepreneurial leadership practices High Performing Schools Exhibited. This research instrument was used in order to triangulate. The instrument was used to guarantee that data was collected qualitatively and that factual and rich information was obtained from the participants' lived experiences at their school. Discussions from School 1 showed that: *We have developed a local strategic plan that enables us to address our immediate school needs and align resources to the projects that matter the most. Our priority is to empower students and community engagement so that there is continuous school improvement.*

Discussions from school 2 highlighted that: *We value teamwork by providing opportunities for gross-grade collaboration. School have put in place programs that encourage competition among learners. We also attend continuing professional development programs that are aimed at enhancing our skills.*

Discussions from school 3 stressed that: *We are given autonomy to try new approaches by way of learning from successes and failures the school had experienced. Sometimes we invite stakeholders in decision-making by ensuring that there is proper accountability and transparence. This makes it easy to receive support from them.*

5.1 Discussion of Findings

It was established that Headteachers in high performing schools exhibited entrepreneurial leadership practices which was characterised by visionary thinking, strategic risk-taking, collaboration, innovation problem solving and adaptability. The prioritized teacher empowerment, community engagement and continuous school improvement was what the headteachers highlighted as practices used in their schools. They also promoted teachers for professional development opportunities to help teachers stay updated on best practices. The schools encouraged experimentation and provided

necessary resources and support. These findings are similar and are supported by Pihie, et al. (2014) who found that teachers perceived entrepreneurial leadership as highly important for school principals because at the study area, the principals were practicing it moderately. In contrast Chikopela, Chitundu, & Mpolomoka (2020) found that head teachers who had teachers in commuter marriages found it hard to engage them in innovative activities during school holidays as they always travelled back home to be with their families. Furthermore, the study found a significant correlation between teachers' perceptions of school principals' entrepreneurial leadership practices and school innovativeness. Implications of the findings are that Headteachers should have the ability to embrace entrepreneurial leadership and school innovativeness. Therefore, the study findings added value to the current study findings which was conducted in Lusaka district.

In addition, the findings revealed that headteachers in high performing schools exhibited visionary leadership through inclusive planning and communication. They embraced collaborative leadership through team meetings. Headteachers encouraged teamwork by providing opportunities for cross-grade collaboration. The schools had programs such as inter-class and inter-grade completion. This provided an opportunity for higher grades to always want to be on top so they work hard. In support of the current findings, Silume (2014) showed that the leadership behaviours of principals in successful high schools are compatible with transformational leadership, distributed leadership and instructional leadership theories. The relationship between the principals' years of professional experience and gender did not account for a significant correlation with the leadership practices principals in the study at hand exercised at their schools.

The findings established that innovative problem-solving was provided through autonomy and professional development and balanced risk-taking with accountability through stakeholders' involvement. Another study by Pihie, et al. (2014) supports the current findings by suggesting that although teachers perceive entrepreneurial leadership as highly important for school leaders, the principals moderately practice this type of leadership style. Teachers from ordinary academic schools perceived entrepreneurial leadership as more important and frequently practiced by their school principals compared with high performing school teachers. This study also found higher teachers 'perceptions of school innovativeness if the principal have management training. There was significant correlation between frequencies of principals 'entrepreneurial leadership practices and school innovativeness.

Additionally, the findings demonstrated that headteachers' commitment to collaborative leadership enhanced teacher engagement and school performance which was conducted through team meetings, cross grade collaboration, peer mentoring and empowerment. Headteachers encouraged team meetings. This opportunity enabled teachers share ideas and expertise. Collaborative planning was embraced and helped in aligning their goals and strategies. To justify the current findings, Kefa (2019) observed that headteachers leadership traits significantly influence academic performance either negatively or positively. The researcher concluded that headteachers leadership traits should frequently be enhanced through training which is based on policy. The study recommended that the school management should formulate capacity building programs so as to empower both the head teachers and teachers in their leadership skills and styles.

In addition, the findings established that Headteachers empowered teachers to drive initiatives and projects which they regularly checked on the progress and asked for feedback. They also encouraged open communication to foster trust and collaboration in the school. In support of the current findings, Miller (2018) shows that education consumers demand more and better value and results from schools, competition between schools have simultaneously increased. The environment in which school leaders' work is requiring and fostering entrepreneurial leadership. However, the study comparatively concluded that, male and female school leaders approach entrepreneurial in very different ways this is because of national culture and national context which significantly influence and shape the work, and thus the attitudes and behaviours of school leaders, who must embrace entrepreneurialism as an essential skill, and a response to changes in school funding arrangements, and the changing role of education in national educational policy agendas.

Further, the findings established that Headteachers in high performing schools encouraged innovative and problem solving through autonomy professional development and action research. They provided resources, supported the staff and gave freedom for teachers to experiment and learn from failure. They gave their teachers autonomy to try new approaches by way of learning from successes and failures the school had experienced. This encouraged teachers to continue learning about new things. These findings are supported by Mumba (2022) who revealed that there was a relationship between head teachers' leadership styles and teachers' performance in schools. The head teachers were found to use any of the three leadership styles to manage the schools. The leadership styles used included democratic, autocratic and laissez-faire. Democratic leadership

styles dominated most of the schools although some schools were dominated by the autocratic leadership style. Schools which were dominated by the democratic leadership style, teacher's performance was better than those dominated by autocratic. The study found that for the head teacher to be said effective they had a combination of democratic and autocratic leadership styles. Teachers were able to effectively perform given a good leadership style. In contrast, Mpolomoka, Muzovu & Chikopela (2022) showed that seconded teachers who were underqualified did not perform well in the schools they were teaching despite the leadership styles of the head teachers. The current study established how head teachers' leadership styles increase their performance in schools.

Furthermore, it was established that entrepreneurial leadership is a particular leadership behaviour that enables leaders to face the challenges of their tasks and roles in the current environment of organisations. Education scholars believe that this type of leadership empowers educational leaders to meet the diverse needs of students as well as the ever-changing demands of the school environment. To support the current findings, Lope, et al. (2014) showed that entrepreneurial leadership is a multidimensional construct that can be explained by five leadership behaviours including general entrepreneurial leader behaviour, explorer behaviour, miner behaviour, accelerator behaviour and integrator behaviour.

Furthermore, the findings established that the Headteachers in high performing schools balance risk-taking with accountability through calculated risk assessment, stakeholder involvement and continuous monitoring of and evaluation. They also prioritize transparency communication and reflection to ensure responsible decision-making process is undertaken. Sengendo & Musinguzi (2024) findings supported the current findings by indicating that the headteachers' transformational leadership attributes of idealized influence and Inspirational motivation influence academic performance which suggested that that a unit increase in idealized influence increases academic performance while a unit increase in inspirational motivation decreases academic performance. The study concluded that transformational leadership has a significant influence on academic performance in private secondary schools. The policymakers and investors in Education System should closely monitor the school's alignment with the transformational leadership practices for sustainable academic performance.

The Headteachers involved stakeholders in decision-making by ensuring that there was proper accountability and transparence. This made it easy to receive support from the staff, teachers and funders of academic programs. These findings are critical to the study because they boarder on transparency. The findings are supported by Silume (2014) and Phiri, Ng'andwe & Mwenda (2019) who found that the leadership behaviours of principals in successful high schools are compatible with transformational leadership, distributed leadership and instructional leadership theories. Some demographic variables are also studied to determine the impact participants' differences in gender, their professional qualifications and the school to which they belonged, had on the results of the study. The relationship between the principals' years of professional experience and gender did not account for a significant correlation with the leadership practices principals in the study at hand exercised at their schools. Neither the gender nor the professional experience of principals was considered significant in this study.

Entrepreneurial leadership theory informs research on headteachers' practices in high performing schools, highlighting transformational leadership, risk taking, strategic decision making, collaborative culture and adaptability. Research findings support the positive impact of entrepreneurial leadership on school performance, innovation and sustainability. Similarly, Mandyata, Chikopela, Ng'ambi, Kasonde-Ng'andu, Ndhlovu, Kalabula, & Chinombwe (2017) shows that teacher training institutions should integrate entrepreneurship training in their programmes. However, arguments suggest potential drawbacks such as increased stress and conflicting social entrepreneurial goals. By applying entrepreneurial leadership theory, the study identified areas of alignment and has provided insights for effective Headteacher leadership practices.

6.1 Conclusion

The entrepreneurial leadership practices of headteachers in high performing schools was one of the best practices schools should emulate. However, there were challenges associated with implementing entrepreneurial leadership in secondary schools prompting headteachers to find opportunities associated with implementing entrepreneurial leadership in secondary schools for performance sustainability. Headteachers in high performing schools exhibited entrepreneurial leadership practices which was characterised by visionary thinking, strategic risk-taking, collaboration, innovation problem solving and adaptability. The prioritized teacher empowerment,

community engagement and continuous school improvement was what the headteachers highlighted as practices used in their schools. They also promoted teachers for professional development opportunities to help teachers stay updated on best practices. The schools encouraged experimentation and provided necessary resources and support. The study found a significant correlation between teachers' perceptions of school principals' entrepreneurial leadership practices and school innovativeness. Implications of the findings are that Headteachers should have the ability to embrace entrepreneurial leadership and school innovativeness.

6. Recommendation

Based on the research findings and conclusion of the study, it is recommended that;

i. The Ministry of Education at district and national level should intensify monitoring of schools so that the best practices in the high performing schools could be shared to other headteachers.

ii. Procurement Policy should be relaxed so that on the entrepreneurial leadership related activities so that learners could benefit in their academic.

iii. Schools should intensify capacity building of its staff through continuing professional development so that they can improve their skills that would ultimately benefit the learner.

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