School heads' construction and understanding of instructional leadership for inclusive secondary schools: Taking context out of the shadows of school leadership narratives

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Abstract

This study explores school heads' construction and understanding of instructional leadership for inclusive secondary schools. It seeks to provide answers to the central research question: How do school heads construct and understand instructional leadership for inclusive secondary schools? The paper forms part of a larger qualitative, multiple-case study on the challenges to and opportunities for instructional leadership in inclusive secondary schools of Zimbabwe. The cases comprised three secondary school heads in one district of Zimbabwe. The schools were identified through nomination by district officials in terms of the extent to which they embraced the inclusive framework ahead of other secondary schools in the district. Using a qualitative approach, framed by an interpretivist epistemology and informed by the sense-making theory, data required to answer the overarching question in this study were collected using face-to-face interviews with research participants. Key findings included that, whilst there were some important areas of overlap in their understanding, by and large, school heads understood instructional leadership in inclusive secondary schools differently. These differences seem to be shaped by factors of the school leadership context, interacting with resources of biography for each of the school heads involved. Our findings as presented in the present study elaborated and, in many instances, brought new insights on the work of earlier writers on instructional leadership for inclusive education and policy implementation studies.

Keywords: *inclusive education, instructional leadership, resources of biography, school leadership context, whole schooling*

Introduction

This study explores school heads' construction and understanding of instructional leadership for inclusive secondary schools. It forms part of a broader study on the challenges to and opportunities for instructional leadership in inclusive secondary schools in Zimbabwe. This study comes at a time when the movement towards educational inclusion of learners with exceptionalities into the mainstream education system and accountability demands on school heads on the performance of their schools dominate academic discourse and educational policy throughout the world (Donohue & Bornman, 2014). This study also comes at the backdrop of heightened pressure and role expectations amongst school authorities globally towards commercialisation and marketisation of education (Florian, 2014), apparently in response to the neo-liberal competitive market-based entrepreneurial logics (Rigby, 2015). As a result, our findings are very important for the future of inclusive education, both in Zimbabwe and beyond. We found it important to focus our study on secondary schools because, in recent years, secondary education has also become an important element of basic education both in Zimbabwe and beyond. Our study is also considered relevant at a time when, internationally, schools are assuming a socialisation role as the only agent of primary socialisation, following a steady and gradual disintegration of the traditional family system (Haralambos & Holborn, 2013). Specifically, our aim in this study is to examine how school heads construct and understand instructional leadership for inclusive secondary schools. The study has two interrelated objectives. The first objective is to report on data that contribute insights into how school heads construct and understand what instructional leadership for inclusive secondary schools ought to be. The second objective is to assess the implications of this sense-making on the future of inclusive instructional practices in secondary schools, both in Zimbabwe and beyond.

The Concept and Context of Inclusive Education

The call for an inclusive approach to education began to appear in special-education literature in the 1980s (Choi et al., 2020). This call first appeared in the context of providing an environment with the least number of restrictions to learners and has been identified with a quasi-resistance movement that emerged in response to increasing segregation of students identified for special education in the USA (Florian, 2014). This means that inclusive education is a hybrid framework emanating from the gradual and incremental convergence of the mainstream and special-school systems towards a whole-schooling agenda (Chitiyo & Muwana, 2018).

Canada is credited as the first country to use the term inclusive education and this appellation has increasingly been preferred above terms such as mainstreaming and integration, which have been used, for example, in the USA to refer to similar or related practices (Walton, 2018). Since its inception in the countries of the Global North, the inclusive education framework has spread to countries of the Global South (Naidu, 2018) as a policy initiative to make education more responsive to the needs of all learners. Whilst some writers celebrate the inclusive education framework as the only viable way of humanising classrooms (Musengi & Chireshe, 2012), critics of this framework see it as a conceptual muddle (Florian, 2014). Others view it as a dead concept that has failed to deliver the promise. The more moderate critics view it as "… an idea that has outpaced its practice" (Artiles et al., 2006, p. 97). In the book, *Inclusive Education Isn't Dead, it Just Smells Funny,* Slee (2018) acceded to the controversies surrounding inclusive education whilst remaining positive about its position and potential as the only fair and just approach to education. Anderson and Boyle (2015) thus asserted that "… since its inception and subsequent development as a policy initiative, the meaning behind the concept and practice of inclusive education has shifted from being exclusively about students with disabilities to now encompassing the delivery of a high-quality education to all students" (p. 4). This view is in line with assumptions on whole schooling (Chambers et al., 2017). Internationally, inclusive education is grounded on a firm

foundation of regulations and conventions. According to the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education and Stakeholders (2020), international legislations that support inclusive education include the Jomtien Convention (1990), the Salamanca Statement (1994), the Millennium Development Goals (2000), UN Conventions on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) (2006), Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) (2015), and the General Comment on the Right to Inclusive Education (GRPD) (2016). In southern Africa, inclusive education is also supported by the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) (1999) and the South African Development Community (SADC) agreement of 1997 (Kamwendo, 2009).

At a national level, many African countries, such as Nigeria, Kenya, South Africa, Botswana, and Zimbabwe, have also promulgated their own home-grown inclusivity-related policies (Donohue & Bornman, 2014; Musengi & Chireshe, 2012; Slee, 2018). In particular, Zimbabwe enacted the Education Act of 1987, as amended; the Disabled Persons Act of 1996; and several policies formulated by the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (MoPSE). The New Curriculum Framework for Primary and Secondary Education (2015–2022) has also provided renewed energy in the drive for inclusion. Clearly, literature as reviewed in this section seems to confirm Slee's (2018) proposition that inclusive education is not dead, [if anything], it just smells funny. This proposition also seems to support the observation that, regardless of the firm policy foundation and apparent resilience of the ideas surrounding inclusive education, as literature says, full inclusion, both in Zimbabwe and beyond (Musengi & Chireshe, 2012), has largely remained a mirage. In his acceptance remarks for the New Curriculum Framework for Primary and Secondary Education (2015–2022), one of whose key principles is inclusivity, former State President Robert Mugabe thus said, "Over the years I have called for a relevant, quality and inclusive education in the school curriculum whose hallmarks are competences desired in life and work. Simultaneously, such education must remain accessible and affordable to all" (MoPSE, 2015, p. i).

This statement shows that, more than 35 years after independence and 21 years after the Salamanca Statement, Zimbabwe still grappled with inclusive education, apparently with no end

in sight. It is not clear why full inclusivity in Zimbabwean education remains a wish, in the backdrop of an ostensibly supportive political and policy environment, as literature has shown. Since instructional leadership by school heads is considered instrumental to the success of any educational policy programme meant to improve student learning (Malinga & Jita, 2016), it was felt that an understanding of how school heads make sense of instructional leadership for inclusive secondary schools would shed light on possible reasons for the failure by Zimbabwean schools to embrace full inclusion and to advance its principles of equity and social justice. In support of this type of thinking, which motivated our study, Timothy and Agbenyega (2018) said, "… successful implementation of inclusive practice requires the support of school leaders" (p. 4).

The Concept and Context of Instructional Leadership

Walker and Qian (2020) contended that the concept "instructional leadership" "originated in the US in the 1980s. Since its inception, the concept has become firmly embedded in school leadership research, discussions, and policy across the globe. School leadership, in particular instructional leadership, has been considered as key to the success of any policy programme that is designed to improve student learning (Malinga & Jita, 2016) and school improvement, ahead of any other practice (Dimmock & Tan, 2016). Notwithstanding a general agreement on the importance of instructional leadership in promoting student learning and school effectiveness, there is little consensus on what precisely it includes. Rigby (2015) thus said that "[although] twenty first century principals are considered to be instructional leaders, conceptualisations of this role and associated practices differ amongst different writers [and practitioners]" (p. 375). Dimmock and Tan (2016) also affirmed that "[a] generally agreed definition of 'instructional leadership' has been difficult to secure" (p. 4). However, Howley et al. (2019) felt that although conceptualizations of instructional leadership differ (across time and space), the central meaning refers to school heads' efforts to improve classroom practice as the key direction for the school.

Fowler and Walter (2020) accepted the multiple conceptualisations of instructional leadership, as literature has shown, and further affirmed that this practice can be perceived either narrowly or broadly. The narrowness or broadness can be perceived from two angles, that is, in terms of actors and content, on the one hand, and in terms of context and purpose, on the other. According to Marks and Printy (2003), in terms of its purpose, "… instructional leadership, narrowly defined, focuses on leadership functions directly related to teaching and learning" (p. 374). In the same vein, Mestry (2017) saw the narrow view as comprising the activities that school heads engage in insofar as to create a satisfying and productive working environment for teachers and necessary conditions for students in which to excel. In its broad view, Spillane et al. (2003) viewed instructional leadership as associated with "the identification, acquisition, allocation, coordination, and use of the social, material and cultural resources [artefacts] necessary to establish the conditions for the possibility of innovation in teaching and learning" (p. 4). Fowler and Walter (2020) defined it as a "concept drawn from the literature of educational leadership to describe the role that a school principal plays in helping to create a culture of instruction and assessment in a school, placing student learning at the centre of the instructional process, and fostering the professional growth of teachers as classroom instructors" (p. 465). Clearly, the goal of education, as literature shows, focuses on student learning.

However, the meaning and practice of student learning seem to be perceived differently by stakeholders and writers from different academic traditions. From the competitive market-oriented entrepreneurial logics (Florian, 2014; Rigby, 2015), student learning seems to be associated with and assessed in terms of academic education only. But, from the equity-based whole-schooling perspective (Chitiyo & Muwana, 2018) we embraced in the present study, the concept student learning involves affording high-quality learner-centred education to all learners, including those with physical disabilities and/or low ability to learn, each according to need (Timothy & Agbenyega, 2018). This view also suggests different conceptualisations of the purpose for

instructional leadership from one that is based on the competitive market goals to one that is based on equity and social justice logics.

Clearly, literature as reviewed in this section points to multiple conceptualisations and somehow conflicting views on what instructional leadership actually involves. This observation is in line with Rigby's (2015) proposition that "[although] twenty first century principals are considered to be instructional leaders, conceptualisations of this role and associated practices differ significantly among different writers [and practitioners]" (p. 375). This complexity of and lack of a clear-cut answer on what instructional leadership precisely includes (Mestry, 2017; Rigby, 2015) also seem to distort its purpose, that is the goal it seeks to achieve. An appreciation of these distortions prompted Mestry (2017) to assert that "school leadership has become a high wire act that only the most skilled are able to perform successfully" (p. 258).

This general lack of agreement on what precisely instructional leadership entails has also led some writers to criticise it as a dead idea that should be relegated to the dustbins (Hallinger, 2009) of both scholarship and practice. In a more moderate assessment, Dimmock and Tan (2016) saw it as an obsolete concept that is in need of renovation. More positively, Hallinger (2015) saw it as a growing fad that has refused to die. Instead, after an apparent death in the 1990s, instructional leadership is seen to have reincarnated in a morphed form (Hallinger, 2009). Despite the equivocation of the term and difficulty in securing an agreement on what instructional leadership precisely includes its place within the school-leadership, effectiveness, and improvement literature remains central and assured (Dimmock & Tan, 2016; Mestry, 2017). Literature as discussed in this section has shown that school leadership, in particular instructional leadership, is the key to successful implementation of school programmes that are meant to educate the child, inclusive education included (Mokhele & Jita, 2012). It has also been shown that sense-making is the key to human action (Spillane et al., 2002). However, it is not immediately clear how sense-making explains instructional leadership thought and practice by school heads in inclusive secondary schools and hence our study.

Theoretical Framework

This study, which is framed by two key concepts of inclusive education and instructional leadership, is informed by the enactive sense-making theory (Spillane et al., 2002; Tsakeni & Jita, 2019). According to Brock et al. (2008), "sense-making refers to building schematic mental models for decision-making by integrating different pieces of information in terms of individual emotions, projected outcomes, individual goals, and expectations" (p. 450). Therefore, Di Paolo et al. (2010) said that people think through and act in terms of their interpretation of the environment. Similarly, Hallinger (2018) asserted that "a leader's life experience and personal resources act as a prism through which information, problems, opportunities and situations are filtered and interpreted" (p. 7) as a basis for action. This means that individual sense-makers can construct and understand phenomena around them either differently or similarly, depending on the context of the environment in which they are operating. Hallinger (2018) and Leithwood (2017) classified these contexts of instructional leadership into person-specific, institutional, widely shared, and community contexts. Jita (2004) used the term "resources of biography" for what Leithwood (2017) and Hallinger (2018) referred to as person-specific context. We preferred the enactive sense-making theory as a social lens for our study because of its power to explain human action or lack of it in terms of the relationship between cognition, emotions, and the environment as building blocks for action (Thompson & Stapleton, 2009). Our thinking in this sense is in line with Di Paolo et al.'s (2010) assertion that the boundary of the mind is not the skull. Instead, according to the extended mind thesis, "the physical states sub-serving human sense-making extend beyond the skull, as to include, different aspects of the individual's body, along with the context of the environment (Boem et al., 2021, p. 15).

Methodology

For our study, we employed a qualitative research approach, an interpretivist research paradigm, and a multiple-case study research design. The cases involved three secondary school heads from one district in Zimbabwe as research participants. The schools were nominated by the district office in terms of the extent to which they had embraced the inclusive framework ahead of other schools in the district. Specifically, the three school heads that participated in the present study were purposively drawn into the study sample. The criterion for selection was the school heads were considered to be information rich (Creswell, & Clark, 2017; Palinkas, 2015), as a result of their participation in instructional leadership in inclusive secondary school settings. For ethical reasons, pseudonyms were used to identify the research sites research participants. The schools were arbitrarily named Open Gates High School, Holy Ghost High School, and All Souls High School, and the school heads were named Mr Simango, Mr Sithole, and Mr Moyo, respectively. We collected data using semi-structured, face-to-face interviews with the research participants. The interviews involved the first author, after agreeing on the research approach, research design, and research instruments with the second author, visiting the schools, asking questions, tape-recording the interviews, and making notes on what research participants were telling him and what was observed during the interviews.

We began the data collection process after we were granted permission by the University of the Free State (UFS) and the MoPSE in Zimbabwe. Permission was granted after it was established that ethical issues had been fully observed. The UFS ethical clearance number for the study is UFS-HSD2017/0531. Informed consent was also sought from research participants. The participants were advised that they retained the right to withdraw from the study if, for any reason, at any point in the study, they felt compelled to do so. We analysed data using a combination of narrative analysis (Esin et al., 2014) and reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019) approaches. Initial data analysis involved the first author listening to the interview recordings and

transcribing them into text-based narratives, followed by merging the transcripts with field notes of the interviews. This initial stage was followed by a detailed study of the transcripts to establish central organising concepts (Braun & Clarke, 2019) around which data were arranged. The first author then drew data excerpts from the transcripts and presented them around the organising concepts to create data-driven stories of the research participants. The texts were then shared with the second author for further analysis and reviewing for possible biases. Our findings after this collaborative data analysis phase are presented case by case, using a semi-narrative approach, followed by discussions of the research findings around four key themes.

Results

In this section, we present data regarding the three cases comprising our study. We present the data case by case, starting with that collected regarding Mr Simango.

Mr Simango: A Disenchanted Team Captain: Loving without Expectations

Mr Simango first shared with us information regarding his biographic information and the context of his school leadership environment. He indicated to us that he is a substantive head with 25 years of teaching experience. He is aged 54, married, and a father of two girls and a son, whom he named after his late brother, Tryagain. He explained: "I named my only boychild after my brother with disability in order to show the world how much, as a sibling, I loved my brother, regardless of his physical circumstances." He further disclosed his background saying: "I grew up alongside Tryagain, whom I can safely say was also my childhood friend."

Talking about his qualifications, Mr Simango revealed: "I am a holder of a certificate in education, a bachelor's degree and a master's degree in educational leadership." On listening to his voice carefully, one gets the impression that Mr Simango is very confident and grossly immersed in the inclusive framework embraced in his school. However, we were able to sense from the interview discussion that he is somehow disillusioned by the prevailing situation in his school leadership environment where education seems to be based on the entrepreneurial logic as opposed

to equity and social justice. This view was evident in his repeated use of the rhetorical question, "When will we learn?" during the interview discussion. This rhetorical question was his way of expressing disenchantment regarding the country's continued approval of competitive market-based entrepreneurial logics, in the backdrop of repeated failure by the education system to meet equity expectations of the community that it is meant to serve.

Concerning the purpose of his school, Mr Simango revealed that, originally, Open Gates High School "… was built to accommodate young people whose education had been disturbed by the protracted war of liberation and returning refugees who were coming back home from neighbouring countries following the end of the war and the birth of an independent Zimbabwe in 1980". He described his school as an inclusive school from its inception when he said: "… this is why I say this school is truly non-selective." The school has an enrolment of 2244 learners, which also comprises enrolled learners with various forms of exceptionalities, clearly showing its inclusive nature, for which Mr Simango described it as a non-selective school.

Speaking about what he viewed as his most important responsibilities as an instructional leader at his school, Mr Simango's first expression was that: "I feel I am the torchbearer for my school. … I am expected to make sure that the school has a well-defined vision and purpose which is shared by all the people who matter." When asked to clarify whether he viewed defining the school vision and purpose to be his singular responsibility as an officially designated school leader, he responded:

> Issues of the school vision should involve all key stakeholders, rather than being my private preserve as the head of station. … On my part, as the team captain, I should be seeing to it that the school vision and goals agree with public policy, expectations of the RA (responsible authority) and the needs of the people for whom the school was built … I mean children … As a torchbearer, I should be supervising, motivating, and controlling the work of my team so that all eyes are kept on the goal, I mean, that which we all agree we should expend our effort to achieve.

The verbatim quotes above show that Mr Simango viewed himself as the team captain and torchbearer for his school. His concept of torch-bearing also involved supervising, motivating, and coordinating the work of his team members on behalf of other stakeholders. When asked whether he felt supervision of teachers was his individual responsibility as an officially designated school leader, Mr Simango started by asking a rhetorical question, something he did very often during the narration of his lived experiences. He said: "Isn't it that a manager does his work with and through others? Like a game of soccer, I win or lose with others." This response points to Mr Simango's construction and understanding of instructional leadership as a collaborative and shared social responsibility and himself as a team player.

Clarifying further what he viewed as his most important objective as he led learning in his school, Mr Simango described his role as follows: "I should be creating an environment in which all children are given the chance and motivation to learn, each according to his or her needs …" When asked to briefly explain his response, he quietly reached for his cell phone, which was placed on the table, and asked the first researcher to read a message he had recently received from a colleague (fellow school head). He explained: "This message is a letter by a school head written to parents whose children were due to write examinations for the 2017 academic year." The letter, which he later forwarded to us, read as follows:

Dear parents

The exams for your children will start soon. I know you are all really anxious for your child to do well. But please do remember: Among the students who will be sitting for the exams, there is an artist who does not need to understand maths. There is an entrepreneur who does not care about history or English literature. There is a musician whose chemistry marks would not matter. There is an athlete whose physical fitness is more important than physics. If your children do get top marks, good luck. If they don't, please do not take away their self-confidence and dignity from them. Tell them it is okay. It is just an exam. They are out for much bigger things in life. Please do this and watch your children conquer the world. One exam or low marks will not take away their

dreams and talent. And please do not think doctors and engineers are the only happy people in the world. (A letter forwarded by Mr Simango from an unknown author who was also a school head)

In clarifying what he thought this letter meant to him and why he was sharing it with us, Mr Simango articulated: "I think, as a school head in a non-selective school, I am in the same predicament as the author of this letter." He further explained:

You know what, sir? This discussion reminds me of the time I was at school. I had this friend of mine, Mabhena (not his real name). Mabhena was such a talented athlete. He specialised in 12 rounds and no one in the district could out-compete him in this race. Unfortunately, in class, he was a very slow learner, but school authorities forced him to follow the academic route, ignoring his real calling. At the end, Mabhena left school with nothing of value after failing his O levels. I believe, if his talent was properly identified and nursed, he could have been a very successful athlete, even at an international level. To Mabhena, time at school was time wasted. … This is why I sometimes say, "You and me, and all the people you see out there (*looking through the window*) are as poor as we are partly because we are sending children to school at times for wrong reasons and no benefit to the children themselves. At the end, both financial resources and time are wasted." I therefore see my responsibility as to create an environment in which every child enrolled will prosper in his or her own unique way regardless of varying life circumstances, and parents get value for money. Not like what happened to my good friend (Mabhena).

The verbatim excerpt above suggests that Mr Simango believed in multiple and differential intelligence. He also saw his role as to attend to the varying needs of learners equally. He further expressed his views thus: "Personally, I don't understand why after spending four years at high school, a child should be allowed to leave school empty-handed." In clarifying and reaffirming his conviction, he added:

You may have noticed that in most schools, when admitting children, the first consideration is what the child can potentially do for the school and not what the school can do for the child, as people want to make names out of children without thinking of the future of such children first [laughing].

At Open Gates High School, we practise what we call love without expectations. ... We don't aim at making names out of children but at children making names out of us (emphasis added) … My guiding question when enrolling a child at this school is: What will I do for the child? not: What will the child do for me if I admit him/her in this school?

Clearly, Mr Simango viewed his role to be multidimensional and his responsibility as to promote child-centred education. In endorsing his inclination to an inclusive stance to instructional leadership, Mr Simango emphatically explained:

Well, Tendai Manzwanzwike once said: "The images, scars and victories that we live with have shaped us into the people we have become. We will never know who a person is until we understand where they have been." For me, I can safely say, my school experience with Mabhena and life with my brother, Tryagain, prepared me to be what I am … Tryagain had a physical disability. Virtually, no one expected him to achieve anything meaningful in life. However, against all odds, he became a maths teacher of repute. He could teach maths at high school from a wheelchair in a way that you just had to see to believe. I wish if God had given him a longer life to practise his talent. I am pleased, however, that he died a happy man after society afforded him the chance to follow his passion. Such is what schools should do and, as a school head, I should make every child in my hands become his or her best.

Data as presented in this section show Mr Simango's understanding, and acceptance of inclusive instructional practices as partly shaped by early socialisation. His acceptance of people with exceptionalities was particularly evident when he confided that: "I named my only boy child after my disabled brother in order to show the world how much, as a sibling, I loved my brother, regardless of his physical circumstances." He also believed that, by embracing an inclusive approach to instructional leadership, he was following the founding vision of the school. He explained his position thus: "Ours is a church school which from the beginning was built with the disadvantaged in mind." Concerning his assessment of whether the MoPSE supported his brand of inclusive education, Mr Simango remarked: "I see the ministry placing too much emphasis on

academic results as the only indicator of school effectiveness, ahead of any other performance criteria you may think about (*laughing*) … This is regardless of the fact that since independence, the O-level pass rate in the country has averaged around 20 percent, thereby condemning to hopelessness about 80 percent of children who write these examinations each year. This is why I sometimes asked the question, 'When will we learn?' He concluded with these words. Clearly, Mr Simango's story shows that he was disillusioned by his school leadership context.

Mr Sithole: The Cautious Stickler: Protecting Personal Identity and Ensuring Self-legitimacy in the Eyes of the Public and Key Stakeholders

Mr Sithole, the head of Holy Ghost High School, is a member of the Zera Church of Christ (not its real name), the responsible authority (RA) for the school. He revealed: "I joined HG (Holy Ghost) High School as a teacher in 2010 when I was promoted to the post of deputy head … I have been the acting head of the school since 2012 when the incumbent head moved to another school run by our church."

Talking about his teaching qualifications, Mr Sithole revealed: "… I have a bachelor's degree in religious studies, a certificate in education and a master's degree in curriculum studies." Listening to his voice, one can discern from the background a strong desire to balance pressure and expectations of diverse stakeholders in order to guarantee self-legitimacy and to protect his personal identity as an aspiring substantive head. Talking about the founding purpose for his school, he revealed: "Holy Ghost High School was opened in 1981 … to provide education to the disadvantaged children within the church and beyond." At the time of this study, the school had an enrolment of 772 learners. Mr Sithole confirmed: "This school also enrols learners with various forms of physical disabilities as well as orphaned and vulnerable children [OVC] from the church and as referred to us by the Ministry of Social Welfare."

Talking about what he regarded as his most important responsibility as an instructional leader for his school, a smiling and friendly Mr Sithole began by saying, "I view myself as a policy

implementer." In further describing his perceived role expectations and also confirming his desire to balance pressure from multiple stakeholders, he added: "I think you are aware that every school is built for a purpose and this school is no exception. To be seen to be worth my salt …, I should act as the policy implementer and foot soldier for both the church and the MoPSE."

The phrase "worth my salt" was repeated several times in the discussion. When asked to explain what he meant by this term, Mr Sithole clarified: "Like any other worker, I have my superiors behind me who look forward to seeing me perform to their expectations." He also explained the term "foot soldier" as follows: "I mean, as head, I am responsible for carrying out very important work for the good of the school and the people to whom I am directly answerable." Clearly, this shows that Mr Sithole associated his leadership with a search for self-legitimacy in the eyes of his superiors, towards whom he felt a high level of accountability. He explained: "As a frontline worker … for my school, I should also focus my attention on maintaining the inclusive framework on which the school is built, as I also make sure that children pass their examinations." He also explained what he meant by the "inclusive framework" as he elucidated on the nature of inclusivity in his school, saying:

> Yes. Inclusion is defined differently by different people, but in this school, we take inclusive education to mean bringing children with physical disabilities and OVCs into normal classrooms so that they learn side by side and compete with their peers who ordinarily do not have special-needs designations ... *The whole idea is about giving children equal chance and as the school head and the foot soldier on all educational matters concerning the church, I should make sure this founding purpose for the school is maintained* (emphasis added).

The data presented above show that Mr Sithole, in line with expectations of the church, viewed his role as partly to maintain inclusive education of children with physical disabilities and OVC in his school. In the discussion, he repeatedly used the terms "foot soldier", "worth my salt" and "giving chance". This suggests that his inclusion thrust was influenced by forces beyond him from whom he cautiously sought to guarantee self-legitimacy and support. His focus on inclusive

education seems to be centred on allowing learners to compete, apparently in line with the competitive market-based entrepreneurial logics and accountability expectations of his role. Mr Sithole further described his perceived accountability responsibilities as follows:

> As the school-based supervisor, I am supposed to account for the performance of all my teachers. … I think you are aware that education is about results and we get these results through people. Without good supervision and motivation, we cannot dream of good results. It is my duty as the local chief accounting officer to supervise, motivate, and report on the performance of my teachers, and therefore guarantee effective performance of the school towards its goals … I mean … I am fully accountable on the performance of my school.

It is evident here that Mr Sithole viewed his instructional leadership role as being much wider than the direct supervision of teaching/learning activities only. In fact, he also viewed his role as being an inclusive instructional leader and accounting officer. He explained his motivation for embracing his brand of inclusive education when he categorically stated:

> Inclusive education practised in this school is more a project for the church than anyone else. From the church's viewpoint, this school was built as an evangelical centre and to provide for disadvantaged children, both within the church and beyond. … The bishop is fully behind inclusive education as we see it in this school. To be specific, it is his baby through which he demonstrates practical Christianity. As the man on the ground, I am only supporting this founding vision of church leadership … *I am a tool in the hands of the church* (emphasis added).

The above excerpt suggests that Mr Sithole viewed inclusive education at his school as a project of church leadership. In explaining why he embraced his brand of the inclusive framework, he added: "As head …, I should represent the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education 100 percent, and the church 100 percent, if I should be seen to be worth my salt." In clarifying the position of the MoPSE on his adoption of the brand of inclusive framework embraced in the school, he shared the following opinion:

Whilst this is the key ministry in terms of education in this country, the MoPSE seems not to have a genuine interest in inclusive education beyond issues of policy, that is, beyond the regulations it has put in place. In fact, the ministry appears to be more interested in academic results and inclusion of black children in former whites-only schools, something like what happened at X High School (a secondary school formerly reserved for white learners, prior to independence). This means, for the ministry, inclusion as we practise it here is only a paper thing without any monitoring in place. There is nothing to show on the ground by way of practice … What counts at the end of the day are academic results and political inclusion.

Evidently, Mr Sithole believed that the MoPSE had put in place the necessary regulatory framework to enable inclusive education to take root. However, for failure to put monitoring programmes in place, he also saw the MoPSE as paying lip-service to the agenda of inclusive education advanced in these policies. What seemed to count as a measure of effective school performance from the perspective of the MoPSE are results in public examinations and not equity (inclusivity). Mr Sithole thus regarded inclusion practised at his school as a programme more of the RA than of the MoPSE. As a result, he felt, in terms of the inclusive brand embraced in his school, he was a tool in the hands of the church. The paradox is, however, that, as a foot soldier, he should represent the RA 100 percent and the MoPSE 100 percent, even though their focus and accountability expectations were seen to be at variance. Clearly, Mr Sithole's story is a story of a cautious stickler who sought to protect personal identity and to guarantee self-legitimacy in the eyes of the public and key stakeholder for his school.

Mr Moyo: An Empathetic Multiple Inclusionist: Viewing Life through the Eyes of His Learners, Hearing through Their Ears and Feeling through Their Heart

Mr Moyo, the head of All Souls High School, is aged 55 with 24 years of teaching experience, eight of which as a school head. By merely talking to him, one could easily discern the impression of a very confident and empathetic multiple inclusionist who was deeply immersed in

his brand of inclusive practices. He also exhibited a strong sense of internal locus of control and a positive self-image. However, he seemed to believe that people around him looked down upon persons with disability in general and learners with exceptionalities in particular. He called these learners "differently abled children". In relation to his positive attitude towards such learners, and the lack of similar attitudes by what he referred to as "the more fortunate people in society", Mr Moyo expressed: "It is only people without septic wounds on the mouth who say, 'We can't eat food with pus on the mouth.' ... Affected people, like some of us, will appreciate that people with special needs are human too." By this, he seemed desirous to reveal his own disability even as it is clearly visible.

Clearly, Mr Moyo appeared confident to talk about his own disability, which makes it easy for people to relate to him. This was further evident when, during the preliminary stage of the interview, he said: "You see my leg? I was bitten by a snake when I was still a young boy." He added: "... to tell you the truth, this disability does not make me any lesser human than others." However, in further talking to him, it was evident that his condition seemed to make him a bit sensitive to issues of disability, whilst at the same time motivating him to advance the cause of people with similar circumstances. His attitude towards children with exceptionalities was first evidenced when at the beginning of the interview discussion he categorically warned: "I can tell you all you want to know about my understanding and experiences as head of this inclusive school, as long as you don't frustrate me." Concerning his qualifications, Mr Moyo revealed: "I hold a bachelor of arts degree in ChiShona and philosophy, a special honours degree in ChiShona and a post-graduate diploma in education." Talking about what he saw as the founding vision and purpose of his school, Mr Moyo revealed:

> This school was built to provide secondary education to a growing population at this FCZ Mission (not its real name) headquarters … Its primary target were children of workers in this mission centre who, for one reason or the other, could not get access to education in any one of the boarding schools dotted around the province, even those that are run by our church.

He added: "As you are aware, the church also runs a school for the blind, a psychiatric centre, and a school for the Deaf in this district." He further bragged: "This shows, ours is an inclusive system in the real sense. In our church, we have come to accept that people that are differently abled are naturally equal partners in this short journey of life." At the time of this study, the school had a total enrolment of 468 learners from Form 1 to Form 6. Its enrolment comprised learners with learning difficulties, OVC, learners who are deaf and dumb, and what Mr Moyo referred to as "second-chance learners".

Responding to questions on what he understood as his most important responsibilities in his capacity as the officially designated instructional leader at his inclusive school, Mr Moyo expressed the following: "I see my most important role as to make sure that every child admitted at this school feels a sense of belonging, loved, and accepted. My purpose for life is to give hope to the hopeless." In explaining his thoughts, he referred to his own personal experience and that of his parents, saying:

> As a person living with a disability myself, I feel I am what I am because of the people who accepted me as I am. My personal feeling is that, as much as possible, I should help people in similar circumstance to develop and live their own independent life as healthy, responsible, and productive citizens who own and control their destiny. You know what? Even as a parent, when you have a child with a disability, and you find people who stand with you, you will feel very light in your heart … I remember my own parents felt relieved when, as a child with a disability, I was accepted as a person worth school authorities' attention … By embracing a non-selective approach to school leadership, I feel I am responding to the needs of the community that I serve … I feel, it is not by mistake that I am a headmaster, but God's providence. The truth is that God wants to work through me to reach his people, and mine is to answer to this call.

Clearly, Mr Moyo viewed himself as an advocate for the welfare of children with exceptionalities who faced discrimination in the mainstream school system. His attitude was also evident when he said: "As a person with disability myself, I feel my heart purified when I work for

the good of others …" He further remarked: "At times, what some of us need is a community of love and respect as fellow human beings." Clearly, Mr Moyo's attitude of caring for his fellow human seemed to stem from his experiences as a person living with a disability himself and from his apparent Christian background. He further explained his role expectations as follows:

> Considering the nature of some of the students we enrol in this school, I also see it as my duty as an instructional leader to come up with a school curriculum that equally addresses the varying needs of differently abled children. Children who are deaf and dumb and those with low intellectual ability, for example, need more practically oriented education than others and I should ensure that such learners also see learning in this school as a worthwhile experience.

Following a pregnant pause, which he aptly interpreted as asking for more, he rhetorically asked, "You know what, sir?" as he prepared to articulate in detail:

> Some of the students we admit in this school may never pass a theory-based examination, even under open-book conditions. Whilst such students also have a natural right to education, it is purely illogical to subject them to a purely academic and examination-based learning programme. If they are exposed to a practical and skills-based curriculum, even the so-called slow learners will surely excel in their own way, even without a full O-level certificate. Relevant education for such children should be more vocational than academic. I see it as my full responsibility to ensure that as a community, we move away from theory-based learning to more authentic learning which yields tangible results for all learners.

Clearly, Mr Moyo believed he should also focus his attention on providing a relevant curriculum for differently abled learners as he also attends to high-ability learners. His concept of differently abled learners seemed to encompass children with low ability to learn and those with physical disabilities. Mr Moyo further elaborated on his perceived roles as follows: "I also see it as my responsibility in this situation to improve the school name so that it becomes attractive to every member of the community we serve. Every parent should feel encouraged to bring his or her child

to this school regardless of the child's ability or their [parents'] financial position." This shows that, over and above his direct instructional responsibilities, Mr Moyo believed he should also work to improve the image of his school in the eyes of the public. He explained his position in detail as follows:

> Originally, this school was meant to cater for children of mission workers and those from the surrounding community who could not afford fees in boarding schools. This includes children that fail to get the required Grade 7 passes for acceptance in boarding schools. When I joined this school, we of course started to enrol children from X School for the Deaf (pseudonym), our primary school, just across the road. In addition, we also target to attract ... high-ability children in order to improve our pass rate and hence the image of our school in society.

The excerpt above shows that, even as he felt internally driven to embrace children with exceptionalities, Mr Moyo was uncomfortable with his school being associated with low-ability learners only. His desire to also attract high-ability learners was to improve the image of the school in the eyes of the public. Even as he felt a sense of internal locus of control in terms of giving equal access to learners, Mr Moyo was also conscious of community expectations on his performance as a public servant. This consciousness was further evidenced when he remarked: "Remember, we are a school in the community. As such, we are accountable to the community around us, the church and the MoPSE." Clearly, Mr Moyo's story is a story of an empathetic multiple inclusionist who views life through the eyes of his key stakeholders, hearing through their ears and feeling through their heart, whilst at the same time protecting his personal identity.

Discussion

The main argument in this paper is that, whilst there were important areas of overlap in their understanding, by and large, the participating school heads understood instructional leadership for inclusive secondary schools as different sounds from echoes of a single drumbeat.

This finding is consistent with the enactive sense-making theory (Thompson & Stapleton, 2009) which illuminates our study. The main area of overlap in this understanding is that all the participants understood instructional leadership in their respective schools in the reincarnated (Hallinger, 2009) sense of the concept as a collaborative, multidimensional and equity- (inclusive) oriented social activity. However, the reasons for embracing inclusive instructional practices varied amongst participants, across schools.

The major difference in the way participants understood instructional leadership for their inclusive schools was that perspectives of equality, equity, and social justice, upon which the inclusive framework is anchored and hence in which the purpose and ownership of the inclusive instructional framework embraced, were understood differently across schools. This means that whereas there were some common areas of understanding, inclusive instructional leadership was understood to mean different things for different participants. These common areas of understanding were with regard to the content, that is, the spread of activities comprising instructional leadership practices, and in terms of its context, that is, its purpose, ownership, and target-client mix. This explains our use of the term "different sounds from echoes of a single drumbeat". Participants' understanding of what instructional leadership for inclusive secondary schools ought to be was seen to be shaped by interactions of various factors of the person-specific, institution-specific, and widely shared contexts (Hallinger, 2018; Leithwood, 2017) of the school leadership environment, as further discussed below.

Resources of Biography as a Context for Instructional Leadership

Our findings point to early socialisation, experience with exceptionalities, promotion status, and desire by school heads to protect personal identity as some of the key elements of the personal resources (Hallinger, 2018) that shape their understanding of what it means to them to be an instructional leader in an inclusive secondary school environment. This relates in particular to their readiness to embrace inclusive instructional leadership and to advance its guiding principles. Jita

(2004) referred to these personal characteristics as "resources of biography". Hallinger (2018) and Leithwood (2017) used the term "person-specific context". Acceding to the operations of resources of biography as also witnessed in the current study, Hallinger (2018) asserted that "[t]he leader's life experience and personal resources act as a prism through which information, problems, opportunities and situations are filtered and interpreted" (p. 7). This observation seems to apply equally to school heads, as data in this study suggest.

For example, Mr Simango and Mr Moyo, two heads who had some lived experiences with exceptionalities at an early stage in their lives and were substantive heads in their respective schools, exhibited a strong sense of ownership and control of the inclusive instructional practices as adopted in their respective schools. Specifically, Mr Simango viewed himself as the team captain and the vision bearer for his school, and Mr Moyo viewed himself as an advocate for learners with exceptionalities. Unlike these two, Mr Sithole, who was an acting head and did not have early life experience with exceptionalities, showed signs of external locus of control. He viewed his role as a "policy implementer, a foot soldier and a tool in the hands of the bishop". As a result, he saw the inclusive framework adopted in his school as entirely a project of the church, without much input of his own. This finding is consistent with Spillane et al. (2002), who contended that depending on the situation at hand and the context in which leadership takes place, school heads may adopt the role of street-level bureaucrats or middle-level managers. In this case, and apparently in line with his resources of biography, Mr Sithole seemed to understand his role largely as a street-level bureaucrat, a foot soldier whose motivation was to please key stakeholders in order to be seen as worth his salt and thus protect his personal identity and guarantee self-legitimacy. In Mr Sithole's view, his purpose for instructional leadership was strictly to represent the MoPSE 100 percent and the church 100 percent, regardless of the fact that the ministry's policy as practice and its policy as written statements were at variance.

On the other hand, Mr Moyo and Mr Simango, both school heads on promotion posts and with some lived experience of exceptionalities at an early stage in life, seemed to view their role

as middle-level managers (Spillane et al., 2002). As a result, they felt a high level of ownership and control for the instructional brand and direction that their schools should follow. Their leadership was focused on providing relevant education to each and every learner enrolled, without discrimination. In a clear demonstration of internal locus of control and ownership of his practices; Mr Simango, for example, expressed: "In this school, we don't aim at making names out of children, but at children making names out of us." In further expressing his desire to provide relevant education for all, Mr Simango talked about his "love without expectation", as he also emphasised: "I don't understand why, after spending four years at high school, a child should be allowed to leave school empty-handed." In the same vein, Mr Moyo remarked: "… I see it as my duty to come up with a school curriculum that equally addresses the varying needs of differently abled children," and: "I see my heart purified when I work for the good of others."

These excerpts are clearly contrary to Mr Sithole's view, which seemed to be shaped by forces outside his person as an individual sense-maker. This view is evidenced by his drive to be "seen to be worth my salt", his role as a foot soldier and as a tool in the hand of the church. Clearly, findings in this study point to resources of biography (Jita, 2004) or technologies of self (Andrews et al., 2013) as important elements of the person-specific contexts of the school leadership environment that shape school heads' understanding of what instructional leadership for an inclusive secondary school ought to be. Our findings in this study suggest that, in line with their resources of biography, Mr Simango and Mr Moyo were better placed to institute individual education plans (Timothy & Agbenyega, 2018) for learners than Mr Sithole.

The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education Context

Participants' understanding of what instructional leadership for an inclusive secondary school ought to be also seemed to be shaped, in part, by what may be defined as the policy environment or specifically the MoPSE context. This is a "widely shared context" (Hallinger, 2018; Leithwood, 2017) in that it is a context of the school leadership environment that all three

participants shared, since they all took instruction and leadership from the same ministry. Included in this context is the fact that all schools involved are secondary schools. The policy context has a tendency to draw school heads towards a common understanding of what inclusive instructional leadership ought to be. Specifically, though with different levels of emphasis, as also shaped by resources of biography, instructional leadership focus for participants, as the data suggest, was, in part, influenced by their desire to embrace the vision, goals, and policy expectations of the MoPSE. This is in order to guarantee self-legitimacy and protect personal identity for the participating school heads. This finding seems to be consistent with what March and Olsen (2004) defined as logics of consequences. Jita (2004) used the term "accountability to the system" to refer to this type of logics that emanate from perceived role expectations by the MoPSE on school heads as officially designated school leaders and accounting officers.

Unfortunately, participants saw the MoPSE's policy as a written statement (overt policy) and its policy as practice (covert policy) to be at variance with each other. Written inclusive policy by the MoPSE was seen to be lip-service only. The ministry was seen to be more inclined to political inclusion of black children to formerly whites-only schools than full inclusion of children with disabilities and/or additional learning needs (Timothy & Agbenyega, 2018) into the conventional school system. The MoPSE was also judged as promoting exclusionary practices by assessing and rewarding school performance in terms of performance in public examinations only, ahead of any other performance criteria. This practice created disillusionment amongst participants, who regarded the MoPSE as contradicting itself by talking inclusion, on the one hand, whilst, on the other, rewarding schools that deselected low-potential learners in preference for learners with high cognitive ability only. This practice was meant to guarantee a high pass rate in public examinations and was oblivious of the fact that, since 1980, the examination system was seen as condemning to hopelessness more than 80 percent of children who wrote examinations each year. This high failure rate was described by the Student Christian Movement of Zimbabwe (2013) as

the manifestation of a neglected generation, and has prompted a disenchanted Mr Simango to ask the question, "When will we learn?"

The Responsible Authority as a Context for Instructional Leadership

Findings in this study point to church-related RAs as comprising a major element of the institution-specific context (Leithwood, 2017) of the school leadership environment that shapes school heads' understanding of what instructional leadership for an inclusive secondary school ought to be. Our analysis of data shows that participants embraced inclusive instructional practices partly because they believed they are pursuing the founding goals of their schools from the perspectives of their RAs. Mr Simango, for example, believed that his school "was built to accommodate young people whose education had been disturbed by the protracted war of liberation and returning refugees who were coming back home from neighbouring countries following the end of the war and the birth of an independent Zimbabwe in 1980". Mr Moyo also felt that the primary target for his inclusive school when it was first built by the church "were children from the mission centre who, for one reason or the other, could not get access to education in any one of the boarding schools dotted around the province". In a similar vein, Mr Sithole understood the inclusive brand embraced in his school as more of a project for the church than anyone else. Clearly, our findings show the RAs for individual schools as comprising a key element of the school leadership context that shape school heads' understanding of what inclusive instructional leadership ought to be. Specifically, participants felt that the particular brand of inclusive education embraced in their schools was in line with the founding vision of their respective RAs. As a result, they felt obliged to support the RA's vision and purpose for building the schools. This is why Mr Sithole said: "I am a tool in the hands of the church."

Community Expectations as a Context for Instructional Leadership

Our findings in this study also point to community expectations (perceived or real) as comprising key components of both the institution-specific and the widely shared contexts of the

school leadership environment that shapes school heads' understanding of what instructional leadership for inclusive secondary schools ought to be. This finding is in line with Rigby's (2015) assertion that people "do not act in isolation. Rather, they are influenced by the normative values … of the community" (p. 375). This view is also consistent with the thinking that school heads do not act out of context but, instead, in terms of logics created through their interactions and interpretations of messages (Coburn, 2004) from the school leadership environment. Instructional leadership in this context seems to be shaped, for example, by what March and Olsen (2004) defined as logics of social appropriateness and logics of consequences.

In response to the logics of social appropriateness, for example, Mr Moyo said: "For embracing the non-selective stance, I feel I am responding to the needs of the community." He also talked about his heart being purified when he works for the good of others. Similarly, Mr Simango talked about himself working in "the best interest of the child" and his "love without expectations". On the other hand, apparently influenced by the logics of consequences, and hence his desire to search for and guarantee self-legitimacy, Mr Sithole talked about him having "… a name to protect" and a desire to "be seen to be worth my salt". Clearly, findings in this article point to community expectations (perceived or real) as key elements of the school leadership contexts that shape school heads' understanding of what instructional leadership ought to be.

Conclusions

The main argument in this study is that, whilst there were some important areas of overlap in their understanding, by and large, participants understood instructional leadership in their schools as different sounds from echoes of a single drumbeat. The main area of overlap in this understanding is that, influenced by the widely shared context of their leadership environment, participants understood instructional leadership in their respective schools in the reincarnated sense of the concept, as a collaborative, multidimensional, and equity-based (inclusive) social activity, albeit for different reasons. The major area of divergence is that, with respect to the purpose and

ownership of the inclusive brand adopted, inclusive instructional leadership meant different things to each respective participant, across schools. In particular, the ideas of special needs, equality, equity, and social justice, which comprise the key pillars of the inclusive framework, were understood differently across participating schools. In some schools, for example, special needs, and hence the purpose of inclusive instructional leadership, were understood in the context of physical disabilities and OVC only. In others, these ideas included children with low ability to learn, as measured by past performance in public examinations. According to Slee (2018), the latter risked discrimination, and was likely to go unnoticed, as education became more commercialised and marketised. Whilst some participants understood equality in the context of social justice, fairness and morality, influenced by their resources of biography (Jita, 2004), in interaction with messages from the school leadership environment (Coburn, 2004; Hallinger, 2018), Mr Sithole, the odd one out, viewed it in the perspective of sameness, competition, and legal rights.

Clearly, our findings elaborate on existing knowledge and contribute new insights on instructional leadership for inclusive education by taking context and personal identity out of the shadows of school leadership narratives. These findings suggest that differences in resources of biography amongst school heads and in institution-specific contexts tend to drive school heads towards different understandings of what inclusive instructional leadership ought to be. On the other hand, factors of the widely shared context of the school leadership environment, such as the MoPSE (policy) context, tend to draw school heads towards a shared understanding of inclusive instructional leadership. The paradox, however, is on the conflicting nature of messages from the MoPSE's policy as practice (covert policy) and its policy as written statements (overt policy). This dissonance creates disillusionment amongst school heads, thereby causing a dilemma when deciding whether to embrace the overt or the covert policy of the MoPSE. The final decision, as data suggest, seems to be shaped, in part, by resources of biography for school heads, namely early socialisation, and by their desire to protect personal identity and self-legitimacy.

Our findings in this article seem to shed light on possible reasons why the education system in Zimbabwe still grapple with full inclusion more than 25 years after the Salamanca Statement, apparently with no end in sight. Specifically, there seems to be no agreement on what counts as the purpose for inclusive instructional practices across different contexts. Church authorities, for example, appear more inclined to full inclusion than the MoPSE. With regards to the MoPSE's covert policy, by roping in marginalised children through inclusive instructional practices, it appears that school heads also risk being marginalised themselves. Findings in this article suggest that the future of inclusive instructional leadership lies in the hands of church-related RAs and the early socialisation of children on issues of inclusive education.

These findings challenge communities and policy makers to redefine and refocus education away from competitive market-based examination-oriented learning only. In the absence of this redefinition and refocusing, the practise of inclusive instructional leadership may remain an impossible task for mere mortals like us, unless you are willing to "answer with your (own) life", as Kathleen Casey (2017, p. 1) would argue. In the light of our findings in the current study, it is recommended that further studies be carried out to establish how sense-making by school heads influence their instructional leadership practices in inclusive secondary schools. Since the current study was carried out with church-run schools, it is also recommended that further studies be carried out in schools run by some responsible authorities other than churches.

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