

Rehabeam K. Shapaka

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COMPLEX INTERPLAY BETWEEN SERVANT, DEMOCRATIC, TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND SYSTEMIC CHALLENGES

Abstract: *This study explores complex interplay between servant, democratic, transformational leadership and systemic challenges. Data was collected through interview schedule, field notes and open-ended questionnaire. Criterion purposeful sampling technique was used to select ten educational leaders from ten schools. Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis, typological analysis and content analysis using Atlas.ti. The findings have established the complex interplay between servant, democratic and transformational leadership and systemic challenges, leadership styles used and the complex interplay between them. Educational leaders need to study and learn the application of leadership styles, apply leadership styles to optimise their success and enhance schools performance which results on student performance. Educational leaders should integrate elements of servant, democratic, and transformational leadership to support teachers, enhance job satisfaction, and promote student success. Leadership styles have complex interplay on schools performance which affects schools, teachers' performance and student performance.*

Keywords: *leadership styles, schools performance, democratic, servant, transformational*

1. Introduction

Leadership styles have emerged as pivotal factor in improving schools performance, recognised as fundamental for building positive and innovative conducive schools environments to achieve quality education. Leadership styles are critical in directly impact the management of resources, overall organisational culture (Gaol, 2021), help to create academic environments where teachers can thrive, and are empowered to deliver quality learning experiences (Pont, 2020).

In an era of global shifts, educational leaders today are tasked with guiding their schools through ever-changing situation by employing innovative strategies that encourage change and resilience (Akbari et al., 2024). Educational leaders need to adopt diverse strategies to address various issues and complexities faced by schools, acknowledge that providing quality education demands effective leadership practices that are both strategic and collaborative. By involving teachers in decision-making and fostering a shared sense of purpose and direction, they can create a more cohesive, engaged team that further

¹ Corresponding author: Rehabeam K. Shapaka
Email: rehashapaka@gmail.com

enhance schools performance and student outcomes (Kiral, 2020; Nambinga & Haufiku, 2024).

At core of educational leaders today is ability to empower teachers, while recognising their vital role in educational ecosystem (Safrida et al., 2023). Educational leaders need to support teachers in maximising their impact within and/or out of schools, thus extending their influence to inspire the community, while bringing favourable change throughout the schools (Suyatno et al., 2022). Empowered teachers are more likely to be engaged, motivated, and satisfied with their roles, which in turn, benefits student learning (Muguna et al., 2022). Teachers should be aware of the importance of their actions, potential impact on schools and its stakeholders, including students, parents, and the broader community (Fernandes, 2023).

Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture (MoEAC) consistently strive to ensure that every school is supported by a competent leadership, regardless of its location and/or stage of development. Despite these efforts, many educational leaders have encountered various obstacles which hinder their ability to manage resources effectively and lead teams successfully (Fajar & Alias, 2020). Common barriers encountered include low level of organisational commitment, inadequate staff-management efficacy, weaknesses in leadership competencies, which erode leaders' confidence and the capability to make impactful decisions (Suhaili et al., 2020).

As Namibian educational sector continues to evolve, particularly in response to local and global systemic challenges, understanding, refining leadership styles is crucial to ensuring that schools remain adaptable capable to meet students' needs. Effective leadership not only enhances internal performance of schools, but also contributes to the broader objective of educational excellence to support Namibian's ongoing efforts to provide quality education for all

students.

Considering above, this study sees an urgent need to investigate the complex interplay between servant, democratic, transformational leadership and systemic challenges. The aim of this study was to explore complex interplay between servant, democratic, transformational leadership styles and systemic challenges in Oshana Region.

The overarching primary research questions the study explored were:

What complex interplay which exists between servant, democratic, transformational leadership styles and systemic challenges in Oshana Region?

Which leadership styles do educational leaders use in Oshana Region?

Which existing leadership styles that enhance school performance?

What existing school performance which associates with leadership styles?

What challenges associate with the application of the leadership styles?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Servant leadership

Servant leadership was introduced by Robert Greenleaf in 1977, is a leadership style which is characterised by the desire to serve others naturally, resulting in a commitment to fulfil the needs of others (Mustam & Najam, 2020). Servant leaders are driven not by the authority, but by their fundamental urge to support and empower staff. This perspective on leadership which focuses on service to others, organisational responsibility for societal improvement aligns with the growing demand for leadership models that counteract the perception of self-serving corporate leadership (Pawar et al., 2020). Servant leadership enables educational leaders to serve without expecting anything in return, while providing the best opportunities to

staff (Setiawan & Irwanto, 2020). This philosophy resonates in today's organisational climate as it prioritises the growth and/or development of the staff, thus nurturing a positive psychological environment that benefits both individuals and the institution. As Setiawan and Irwanto (2020) have highlighted, last decade has been seen resurgence of interest in servant leadership, emphasising its relevance as a staff-centric leadership style that actively promotes employees' wellbeing and growth.

Servant leadership is well-suited for Namibian schools, where leaders need to prioritise serving the needs of students, staff, and stakeholders. By focusing on others' wellbeing and development, servant leaders foster a supportive and collaborative environment that enhances personal growth and/or schools overall success. This approach includes prioritising professional development for staff and/or creating student-centred policies (Pawar et al., 2020). Servant leadership has been posited to improve staff morale, job satisfaction, enables educational leaders to offering support, while ensure that they feel valued (Setiawan & Irwanto, 2020). When staff perceive their leaders as attentive to their needs, they are more likely to report higher levels of job satisfaction, as they experience personal and continuous professional growth in a supportive environment (Mustamil & Najam, 2020). Servant leadership also tends to increase staff retention, as teachers who feel nurtured and supported are more likely to remain committed to their roles (Nordin et al., 2020). By focusing on the continuous development of staff and fostering a sense of community, servant leaders have contributed to a more cohesive productive institutional culture. Servant leadership, that emphasises prioritisation of others' needs over the leader's personal ambitions, is particularly advantageous for Namibian schools, where nurturing students' and staff's holistic development is critical. By fostering a culture of empathy, support, servant leaders can create an environment that prioritises

student welfare and professional growth for staff. In Namibia, where educational disparities exist across urban and rural areas, servant leadership can support efforts to enhance equitable access to quality education (Adams, 2022; Shapaka, 2024b).

2.2 Democratic leadership

Democratic leadership was introduced by Kurt Lewin in 1939 which posits that leadership need to emphasise collaboration and shared decision-making (Nordin et al., 2020). Educational leaders who adopt democratic leadership often encourage open communication and collective decision-making by actively involving staff which fosters a sense of camaraderie, while balancing praise with constructive criticism. Educational leaders not only value team member input, but they also increase team members' commitment to organisational goals by reinforcing shared responsibility for outcome (Muguna et al., 2022). Democratic leadership, which encourages inclusive decision-making and shared responsibilities, has been associated with positive student performance. This approach allows for collaboration between school leaders, teachers, other stakeholders, including students, to create a supportive learning environment (Azar et al., 2020). In Namibia, schools where democratic leadership is practiced often report higher levels of teacher engagement, which lead to more effective teaching methods that benefit students. Research indicates that democratic leadership tends to improve staff motivation, which can enhance students' academic engagement (Azar & Adnan, 2020; Shapaka, 2025a).

Democratic leadership is well-suited for Namibian schools, where leaders tend to be receptive to the views and constructive criticisms of their team, thus they are able to leverage the insights of multiple stakeholders to make holistic, informed decisions. According to Nordin et al. (2020), democratic leadership enables educational

leaders to make decisions that prioritise organisation's collective success, rather than focusing on personal success. By involving staff in goal-setting and problem-solving, they encourage a collaborative environment where everyone feels invested in achieving shared objectives.

Democratic leadership is relevant, where involving staff in decision-making can yield a stronger sense of ownership, motivation, and/or engagement. Educational leaders who adopt democratic leadership can create inclusive culture which makes all stakeholders feel valued and empowered (Safrida et al., 2023). Leaders who practice democratic leadership are characterised by increased flexibility and responsiveness within their institution. Democratic leadership aligns schools goals with schools strengths and community needs, thereby creating a more engaged and collaborative academic environment.

Research suggests that democratic leadership tends to positively contribute to staff performance and/or organisational culture. Kholil (2021) have found that leaders who implement democratic leadership tend to improve staff performance by creating an environment where they feel secure, respected, and motivated to excel. Educational leaders who encourage staff to express ideas and concerns freely allow them to contribute meaningfully to institutional policies and initiatives. By providing staff with the autonomy to influence institutional decisions, they promote a sense of belonging and commitment, thus benefiting students and other stakeholders through enhanced teaching quality and innovative practices (Mohamed & Fook, 2022).

Educational leaders who implement democratic leadership establish regular, structured feedback sessions which allow staff to voice their ideas and opinions on institutional operations, curricular matters, and professional development needs. Creating decision-making committees and/or task forces that include staff and student

representatives will enable them to promote a participative culture. By instituting open-door policies which make staff feel comfortable to discuss issues and/or suggestions without formal protocols, leaders reinforce the openness and inclusivity that characterise democratic leadership. By integrating democratic practices, educational leaders not only strengthen relationships with their teams, but also create a more adaptable and/or supportive educational environment, thus establishing organisational culture that is rooted in collaboration, shared accountability, and continuous improvement (Mokhlis & Abdullah, 2025).

Democratic leadership enables leaders to practice participatory approach. This style promotes the active engagement among staff in curriculum development and policy implementation, resulting in a more innovative educational practice. For Namibian schools, where the need for inclusivity and/or collaboration is paramount, democratic leadership aligns well with the national aspirations for a more student-centred and community-engaged educational framework (Arias et. al, 2023).

Democratic leadership has a positive impact on staff morale and job satisfaction (Hoque & Raya, 2023), tends to reduce staff burnout, as it encourages mutual support, which contributes to higher retention rates (Kholil, 2021), enhances motivation and commitment to schools improvement initiatives as staff believes that their input is valued. Schools led by democratic leaders are likely to promote a sense of shared purpose and/or strengthens relationships among staff (Mohamed & Fook, 2022; Shapaka, 2025b).

Although democratic leadership is evident in literature, it remain questionable as to whether its impact is evident in practice of educational leaders because time necessary for a leader to build trust, commitment, interdependence and empowerment of teachers is not always available (Siraj et al., 2022). In some contexts, not every

educational leader has the ability to convince teachers to make effort to perform at higher level (Alzoraiki et al., 2023). Democratic leadership focuses more on team relationship than on educational work of school management in which the quality of these relationships is not unequivocally predictive of the quality of student outcomes (Adams, 2022). Educational leaders may use the language of democratic decision-making, but it remains questionable as to how they will achieve this with limited time available and/or accountability to authority (Safrida et al., 2023). However, democratic leadership can be applied together with participative leadership because this leadership also emphasises on teacher participation in power sharing in decision-making process (Mokhlis & Abdullah, 2025)

2.3 Transformational leadership

Transformational leadership was first introduced by Bass in 1985, target general leadership, later expanded by Avolio and Bass in 1988 to encompass business leaders. Since 1990s, it has been adopted by educational administration, thus underscoring its versatility and applicability across sectors (Berkovich & Eyal, 2020). Educational leaders who practice transformational leadership are characterised by ability to inspire and motivate staff to exceed expectations, thus enhancing morale, ideals, interests, and values. Transformational leaders act as role models who can elevate staff awareness on the importance of their tasks, while aligning their personal goals with broader organisational mission (Berkovich & Eyal, 2020). Transformational leaders tend to focus on empowering the staff by providing support which encourages them to perform beyond perceived limits (Alharbi & Aljounaidi, 2021), drive change by managing long-term plan, inspiring staff to adopt an initiative-taking, and values-driven approach to their roles (Alessa, 2021).

Transformational leadership has a positive impact on student performance, whereby educational reforms and innovation are ongoing. Transformational leaders motivate staff to adopt innovative instructional strategies and invest in professional development, which equips them with the skills necessary to address diverse student needs (Siraj et al., 2022). In Namibia, where students face varying socioeconomic challenges, transformational leadership can foster an adaptable, inclusive teaching approach that enhances learning outcomes. It promotes a vision of academic excellence that inspires both staff and students to strive for higher standards and quality, thereby enhancing students' academic achievement (Alzoraiki et al., 2023; Shapaka, 2026).

Educational leaders who practice transformational leadership exhibit foresight regarding future needs, broad perspective on organisational challenges, and capacity to elevate staff commitment to organisational objectives. They are highly impactful as they inspire changes in staff attitudes and core values, aligning them with organisation's vision. This, in turn, fosters environment that is conducive, development-focused, and adaptable to change (Alessa, 2021).

Transformational leadership is effective, especially during periods of reform when many schools are adapting to digital technologies, instructional methods, and policies. Educational leaders who adopt this style can drive innovation, create a shared vision for the future, and foster a culture of continuous improvement (Alessa, 2021; Shapaka, 2025c).

Transformational leadership has been widely acknowledged in educational settings as a means to inspire change, as a method of motivating staff to exceed their own expectations and align with broader organisational goals. Educational leaders who adopt transformational leadership inspire staff and students to embrace novel and innovative learning methodologies, utilise technology more effectively, and

strive toward shared educational goals. In Namibia, where reform efforts aim at integrating digital technology with 21st century skills into curriculum, transformational leadership enables educational leaders to drive change and foster a progressive, adaptive culture within their institution (Adams, 2022). Leaders who practice transformational leadership enhance staff morale and/or job satisfaction by providing a clear vision, offering continuous professional development opportunities, and fostering a culture of innovation. They motivate staff to exceed expectations and align their personal values with the organisational mission, thus resulting in higher job satisfaction by promoting a supportive and forward-thinking environment (Mokhlis & Abdullah, 2025). Staff collaborating with transformational leaders are more likely to remain in their positions, as they feel motivated and/or engaged by leaders vision, are given tools and encouragement to grow professionally (Mirsultan & Marimuthu, 2021). By focusing on staffs' personal development and/or fostering a sense of purpose, transformational leaders increase emotional investment in their work, which promotes staff retention in the long run.

However, transformational leadership may be used as vehicle for the manipulation and control of teachers who are required to support vision and aims of principals (Pont, 2020). Government can use the language of transformation but this is about implementation of centrally determined policies, not the identification of and/or the commitment to the school-based vision and/or goals. Although transformational leadership is evident in the literature, it remains questionable as to whether its impact is evident in the practice of the principals because the time necessary for a transformational principal to build the trust, commitment, interdependence and empowerment of teachers is not always available (Siraj et al., 2022). In some contexts, not every principal has the ability

to convince teachers to make an effort to perform at a higher level (Alzoraiki et al., 2023). Transformational leadership focuses more on relationship between principals and teachers than on the educational work of the school management in which the quality of these relationships is not unequivocally predictive of the quality of the student outcomes (Adams, 2022). The main difficulty arises when teachers and/or stakeholders do not support values of principals (Safrida et al., 2023). This process is likely to be uncomfortable for the people concerned and may lead to dissonance within schools.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. Research design

Following an interpretivist paradigm, this study explores the complex interplay between servant, democratic, transformational leadership and systemic challenges as applied to learning theory in interpretivist notion, represents untruth about ways individual learn (Ling & Ling, 2017). This study utilise case study to describe and clarify phenomenon under study (Dey, 2003). Case study was, therefore, used for in-depth exploration of the actual case (Creswell & Creswell, 2017) and to explore the complex interplay between servant, democratic, transformational leadership styles and systemic challenges in Oshana Region in Namibia.

Following interpretivist paradigm, the study employed qualitative, exploratory, single descriptive case study (Creswell & Creswell, 2017) to explore and to describe complex interplay between servant, democratic, transformational leadership and/or systemic challenges in Oshana Region in Namibia. Case studies focus on the contemporary issues within the real-life contexts. The issues in this case refer to complex interplay between servant; democratic, transformational leadership and/or systemic challenges in Oshana Region in Namibia.

Case study was chosen for this study because the study's aim was to explore the complex interplay between servant, democratic, transformational leadership and systemic challenges in Oshana Region in Namibia.

The emerging nature of this study is best suited to constructivist research design that can yield rich understanding of key issues by minimising distance between researcher and participants to develop practical and theoretical understanding; generate new and alternative understanding into concepts and issues under the study (Leedy & Ormrod, 2023). The dominant positivist research design has adversely affected relevance of resulting research because the researcher needs not only to consider the technical aspects but also social aspects and/or their continuous interaction concerning the study (Dey, 2003), approach to which constructivist worldview is suited.

When researcher is interested in immediate responses to particular situation such as this study, it may require that the researcher uses subjective data since it is unlikely that objective data would have been collected at precisely right times or instances. This is not to devalue positivist research but to suggest that alternative approaches can supplement and/or strengthen this study since the quantitative approach cannot reveal this study's completely detailed story.

The investigation of complex interplay between servant, democratic, transformational leadership and systemic challenges in Oshana Region in Namibia cannot be studied outside of its natural setting with its focus on this contemporary issue. The issue is that control or manipulations of subjects, in this instance investigation of the complex interplay between servant, democratic, and transformational leadership and systemic challenges, is not possible. Theoretical knowledge on the issue under investigation is limited and not yet mature. Case study method was thus suitable method for this study (Leedy & Ormrod, 2023).

3.2. Participants

Using Oshana directorate of education's latest statistics of 2025, population of ten educational leaders from ten schools in junior/senior primary, junior and senior secondary schools in Oshana Region utilised. Based on Oshana regional directorate, many schools are poorly underperformed (Shapaka, 2024a; United Nations Children's Fund [UNICEF] 2015), which may lead to many dysfunctional schools. Principals were chosen for this study because they are the main pillars of the school optimisation who are directly involved in organising and/or managing schools and are mostly held responsible for running of schools. Principals appear to play integral and pivotal role that influences delivery of quality education. Those who trusted with school management have the responsibility for promoting quality education by ensuring that teaching and learning, which is primary task of schooling, is taking place in classroom. As central decision-maker, principals' strategic position serves as the focal point, around which all the school activities are centralised. This study was confined to educational leaders with seven years' experience and/or above in management and leadership of the schools. With this process, the researcher was able to gather useful and/or meaningful information, and/or more importantly ability to employ distinct and analytical techniques in his effort to discover the complex interplay between servant, democratic, transformational leadership and systemic challenges in Oshana Region in Namibia. These made interpretation and understanding of the phenomenon in its context and within its natural setting (Suyatno et al., 2022).

3.3. Sampling

Criterion purposeful sampling was used, based on the researcher exposure to, engagement of ten educational leaders from ten schools in Oshana Region. According to

the Oshana directorate of education's latest statistics of 2025, there are five Circuits in the Oshana Region; they are Eheke, Oluno, Ompundja, Onamutai, Oshakati circuits. The researcher selected two educational leaders per Circuit. These techniques help researcher to explore, learn and understand complex interplay between servant, democratic, and transformational leadership and systemic challenges in Oshana Region in Namibia.

3.4. Data collection

Data was collected through the interview schedule, field notes and open-ended questionnaire to find participants' views on complex interplay between servant, democratic and transformational leadership styles and systemic challenges in Oshana Region in Namibia.

3.5. Procedure

After all the required permission were sought and granted, all instruments were pilot tested and re-adjusted.

3.6. Data analysis

Data were analysed using thematic analysis, typological analysis, and/or content analysis using Atlas.ti (Leedy and Ormrod, 2023). Using the principles of fairness, awareness and/or action, authenticity was ensured meaning all the views, perspectives, claims, concerns and/or voices of participants were heard and/or accepted. Audio tape was used to record interviews and/or later transcribed verbatim. Emerging themes from data and those predetermined from literature review were analysed (Dey, 2003). Similar codes and responses were aggregated, grouped together into categorical themes. These processes provided insights on understanding the views of individual participants (Ling & Ling, 1017).

3.7. Trustworthiness

Researcher used member checking to determine accuracy of qualitative findings through taking the themes back to participants and determining whether participants felt that they were accurate. This study was interpretive, the researcher was self-effective about his role in research, how he interpreted findings and how his background has shaped the interpretation of data (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Researcher triangulated different data sources of information from interview schedule, open-ended questionnaire and field notes to strengthen the depth of its findings as data from one source supported by data from another source. Researcher examined each information source and found evidence to support themes, ensured that study was accurate. The researcher checked transcripts to ensure they did not contain apparent mistakes made during transcriptions, compared data with codes as well as wrote memos about codes and their definitions.

3.8. Ethical consideration

After all the required permission were sought and granted, researcher sent a letter to participants informing them about the information concerning the study. This process was done to avoid the reality and the appearance of coercion. Confidentiality was maintained and participants were informed of the rationale, recording, transcriptions and safekeeping of audio-taped interviews. Ethical measures were done through making sure that the participants sign informed consent, ensuring privacy in subsequent interviews, guarding against manipulating the participants during data collection, reporting processes. Anonymity, confidentiality was observed when reporting on utterances, and narratives of the participants. Participants' names were replaced by pseudonyms to protect participants' identity. Participation was voluntary.

4. Findings

This section presents findings on the interplay between servant, democratic and transformational leadership styles and the systemic challenges. The section comprises the views of ten educational leaders participated in this study. Some participant responses were summarised and presented in descriptive forms, others were reported verbatim and presented in italics.

4.1 Servant, democratic, transformational leadership and systemic challenges

The theme presented in this section is derived from the thematically analysed data obtained from the interviews, open-ended questionnaires and field notes, with selected ten educational leaders from Oshana Region. The theme is on the complex interplay between servant, democratic and transformational leadership styles and systemic challenges. It is worth-noting that the theme relates to the manner in which the interplay between servant, democratic and transformational leadership styles and the measures of systemic challenges could be constructed and developed to find the complex interplay between them. In this study, the researcher has to determine whether educational leaders understand the interplay between servant, democratic and transformational leadership styles and the systemic challenges. This was done to respond to the question: What complex interplay which exists between servant, democratic, transformational leadership styles and systemic challenges in Oshana Region? Responses from educational leaders showed that educational leaders use leadership styles to encourage teachers to focus on teaching and learning process. For example one educational leader at senior secondary phase said:

“Educational leaders apply leadership styles to ensure that effective academic performance take place.”

Another educational leader at junior secondary phase said:

“It refers to the implementation of teaching and learning theory used by educational leaders.”

One educational leader at senior primary phase, when asked on the complex interplay between leadership styles and systemic challenges, said:

“It refers to the implementation of teaching and learning philosophy applied at school.”

Moreover, educational leaders said that the complex interplay between leadership styles and systemic challenges affect the teaching and learning process. One educational leader at senior primary phase, when asked on the complex interplay between the leadership styles and systemic challenges, said:

“It refers to teaching and learning model which promote academic achievement among learners and teaching staff.”

One educational leader at junior secondary phase said:

“Educational leaders use leadership to encourage advocate of high academic performance.”

Another educational leader at senior primary phase, when asked on complex interplay between leadership styles and systemic challenges, said:

“Leadership styles can be used to manipulate and control teachers to support vision, and aims of educational leaders.”

One educational leader at senior secondary phase expressed this view as follows:

“Government can use leadership styles to implement centrally determined policies rather than school-based vision and goals.”

4.2 Leadership styles used by educational leaders in Oshana Region

In order to determine leadership styles used by educational leaders, researcher asked question: Which leadership styles do educational leaders use in Oshana Region?

The responses of the educational leaders indicated that educational leaders use various leadership styles to monitor school programs. One educational leader at senior secondary phase said:

“Educational leaders use transformational leadership.”

Another educational leader at senior primary phase said:

“Educational leaders use servant leadership.”

Moreover, educational leaders said that educational leaders use many leadership styles to give instruction to teachers to implement curriculum. For example, one educational leader at junior primary phase said:

“Educational leaders use democratic leadership.”

Another educational leader at junior secondary phase, when asked on the prevailing leadership styles, said:

“They use transformational leadership.”

One educational leader at junior secondary phase said:

“They use democratic leadership.”

Another educational leader at senior primary phase said:

“Educational leaders use servant leadership.”

4.3 Leadership styles which enhance school performance

In order to determine existing leadership styles which enhance school performance, researcher asked the question: Which existing leadership styles that enhance school performance? The responses from educational leaders indicated that educational leaders use varieties of leadership styles to monitor teaching and learning process and to ensure learners academic performance are taking place. One educational leader at junior primary phase said:

“Educational leaders ensure that teachers give as many assessment activities as they can.”

Another educational leader at senior secondary phase said:

“Educational leaders ensure that learners are drilled to answer examination questions.”

One educational leader at senior secondary phase said:

“They ensure transformational education is in place.”

Moreover, one educational leader at junior primary phase said:

“They ensure that school produces innovators and creators.”

Another educational leader at senior secondary phase said:

“They ensure that teaching/learning, instruction, assessments promote lifelong learning.”

One educational leader at senior primary phase said:

“They ensure assessments enable learners to perform after classroom context.”

Another educational leader at senior secondary phase said:

“They ensure teaching/learning instruction boost innovation and entrepreneurial rigor.”

4.4 School performance which associates with leadership styles

In order to establish existing school performance which associates with leadership styles, the researcher asked question: What existing school performance which associates with leadership styles? One educational leader at junior primary phase said:

“They use democratic leadership to reinforce the collaboration among stakeholders”

Another educational leader at senior primary phase said:

“Servant leadership aligns with fulfilment of holistic needs of teachers”

Moreover, educational leaders in the study indicated that it depend on situation at school. One educational leader at junior primary phase said:

“Transformational leadership support innovation.”

Another educational leader at senior primary phase said:

“They use servant leadership to create nurturing environment.”

One educational leader at senior secondary phase said:

“They use democratic leadership to reinforce a shared responsibility”

4.5 Challenges associate with the application of the leadership styles

In order to determine challenges associate with the application of leadership styles, researcher asked the question: What challenges associate with the application of the leadership styles? One educational leader at senior secondary phase said:

“Many teachers are not properly trained or equipped to implement the curriculum.”

Another educational leader at junior secondary phase said:

“The curriculum comprises of unfamiliar teaching methods and contents.”

One educational leader at senior primary phase said:

“This challenge includes teachers’ resistance to change.”

Moreover, another educational leader at junior primary phase said:

“It includes inconsistent implementation of the revised curriculum across classrooms.”

One educational leader at senior secondary phase said:

“Lack of resources namely updated textbooks, teaching materials, and access to technology.”

Another educational leader at junior secondary phase said:

“These challenges include large class sizes and diverse student needs.”

Moreover, one educational leader at senior primary phase said:

“This includes lack of professional development for educational leaders and teachers alike.”

Another educational leader at junior primary phase said:

“It includes time constraints versus limited instructional hours for both educational leaders and teachers alike.”

Moreover, one educational leader at senior secondary phase said:

“Assessment alignment can be an issue.”

Another educational leader at senior primary phase expressed this view as follows:

“Traditional testing methods versus required new forms of assessment can be another concern.”

4. Discussion

This section discusses findings on interplay between servant, democratic and transformational leadership styles and systemic challenges. The discussion is based on views of ten educational leaders who participated in this study..

4.1. Servant, democratic, transformational leadership and systemic challenges

This study explored the interplay between servant, democratic and transformational leadership styles and systemic challenges in Oshana Region in Namibia. The main question answered by study was: What complex interplay which exists between servant, democratic, transformational leadership styles and systemic challenges in Oshana Region? The paramount issues that emanated from the findings were that there is a complex interplay between servant,

democratic, transformational leadership styles and systemic challenges which have direct effects on schools performance, teachers' performance which could result in positive or negative student academic performance. Researchers have found that the use of transformational leadership allow learning-focused process which foster improvement in learning and teaching (Alessa, 2021). Studies have found that the leadership role of educational leaders is crucial in advancing student academic achievement (Kholil, 2021).

Another crucial issue that emanated from findings were that leadership styles could promote and enhance teaching and learning. Studies found that while some teachers enjoy the teaching and learning process, others are frustrated due to insufficient preparation and/or training workshops, unclear procedures, coupled with poor academic literacy skills and lack of commitment shown by some students (Hidayat et al., 2024). All four leadership practices are associated with academic performance, and they are defining school mission, managing of school instructional program, promoting a positive learning climate, advancing teachers' interests (David & Naparan, 2024).

4.2. Leadership styles used by educational leaders in Oshana Region

The primary issue encompassing these findings is that this complex interplay is attributed to how leadership styles are used to monitor school programs, thus confirming similar findings of earlier research study such as Hidayat et al. (2024). The sample of this study revealed that educational leaders use leadership to give instruction to teachers to implement the curriculum. Learners are drilled on how to answer examination questions. That said, it should be noted that the concern in this study was on the interplay between servant, democratic and transformational leadership styles and systemic challenges not vice-versa (cf. Methodology Section). However, a possible

interpretation for this finding could be that there are arrangements on implication of ministerial mission and vision statement within educational setting (MoEAC, 2023). As a result of the top-down cascades of ministerial mission, vision, and policies, many educational leaders might have difficulty to adapt and/or change status quo. However these anomalies need to be addressed by involving various stakeholders in planning and implementation process.

4.3. Leadership styles which enhance school performance

Another profound issue noteworthy from study is that educational leaders use leadership styles to monitor teaching and learning and to ensure that learner academic performance are taking place. This finding is consistent with previous studies which assessed the usefulness of transformational leadership which empower teachers, promote well-being, provide lifelong learning opportunities and improve the quality of the students' learning (David & Naparan, 2024). Findings point that democratic leadership foster collaborative learning and/or continuous improvement. This finding correlates with earlier study by Nordin et al. (2020) on importance of effective communication, cooperation and trust within group.

4.4. School performance which associates with leadership styles

Most obvious findings emerge from study is that this complex interplay is attributed to factors that determine the choice of the leadership styles. Studies indicate that educational leaders' roles play an important part on the school performance and the organisational environment (Mustamil & Najam, 2020). Leadership styles positively correlate with the welcome environments and a culture of continuous improvement in the schools (Setiawan & Irwanto, 2020). Studies have found positive relationship between servant, democratic,

transformational and teaching/learning practices (Mirsultan & Marimuthu, 2021).

4.5. Challenges associate with the application of the leadership styles

Finally, many challenges associate with the application of the leadership styles. Of particular noticeable includes panic in implementing the curriculum, lack of modern media in teaching, poor infrastructure, inequality education and the need of teachers to review these implications (David & Naparan, 2024). Other critical yet contextual factor includes implementation process (Nambinga & Haufiku, 2024). Curriculum components influence implementation of curriculum (Azar et al., 2020). Topping the list include teachers' attitudes toward facilitating teaching program, teachers' beliefs, changing the attitudes and roles of administrators (Pawar et al., 2020). Potential pitfalls includes top-down approach, digital literacy initiatives in resource-constrained environments, interact with the broader systemic issues, and holistic view faced by teachers (Mokhlis & Abdullah, 2025). These anomalies might lead to instances where strategies might fail or have unintended consequences (David & Naparan, 2024).

This study presents the interplay between three leadership styles on the performance of schools namely servant, democratic, and transformational, gives insights into systemic challenges faced by educational leaders and seek potential solutions that could scaffold them in overcoming these systemic challenges. These leadership styles tend to shape institutional culture, faculty morale, and student outcomes, with context-specific implications on performance of schools in Oshana Region in Namibia.

In Namibian educational context, leadership styles such as servant, democratic, transformational affect staff and student performance. Servant leadership is well-suited to fulfil the holistic needs of Namibian schools, whereby staff development and

wellbeing are becoming a primary concern. Servant leaders can create a nurturing environment that enhances staff morale and commitment, which positively influence teaching and learning outcomes (Al-Azad et al., 2024). On the other hand, democratic and/or transformational leadership can foster educational environment which encourages the collaboration, innovation, and shared responsibility. These styles empower staff, support a sense of community, and lead to positive outcomes in terms of student engagement and learning. Thus, educational leaders should integrate various elements of servant, democratic, and transformational leadership to support staff wellbeing, enhance job satisfaction, and/or promote the student success. A more effective leadership approach should not be limited to one style, but rather a combination of style components that leverages strengths of each (Al-Azad et al., 2024).. In Namibia, an integrative leadership approach which encompasses the compassion of servant leadership, inclusivity of democratic leadership, and vision of transformational leadership, could best address current and emerging challenges faced by schools. These eclectic approaches align with nation's aspiration for a progressive, inclusive, and adaptable educational landscape that can thrive amidst rapid societal and digital changes (Azar & Adnan, 2020; MoEAC, 2023)..

5. Conclusion

Based on analysis of findings, and design used in this study, it can be concluded that leadership has effect on academic performance of teachers that affect the schools and teachers' performance which result in positive or negative academic student outcomes. It was evident from this study that educational leaders should take teachers academic performance very seriously.

In view of findings of the study, the following recommendations are made for practice: Firstly, educational leaders should

use leadership to improve and enhance their performance, teacher academic performance and learner academic performance. Secondly, educational leaders should use leadership to enhance teacher academic performance, to strike the balance between the styles and to avoid manipulation of one particular style against other one. This in turn will help them to strike the balance between authority of teacher expertise of curriculum and positional authority of educational leaders. Lastly, the study recommends an urgent need for principals to study and learn application of leadership styles, apply them to optimise success and enhance teaching and learning which result on student academic outcomes.

This study has several limitations that should be taken into consideration. Only ten educational leaders were selected for the interview sessions and open-ended questionnaire in which complex interplay between servant, democratic, transformational leadership and systemic challenges was feature of interest. The researcher utilised criterion purposeful sampling technique and/or only educational leaders with seven years experience and above in principalship were selected. This selection might have influenced responses. Researcher attempted to explore complex interplay between servant, democratic, and transformational leadership and systemic challenges in which educational leaders were influential individuals in schools. Their

responses might be affected by this. The sample size includes public school educational leaders who volunteered to participate in the study with the exclusion of private school educational leaders. Therefore, a question of generalisability to private school educational leaders is a limit. Its scope is confined to Oshana Region in Namibia which narrows generalisability of its findings thus limits broader applicability of its findings. However, the study applied multi method in which more than one data collection techniques and corresponding data analysis procedures utilised to strengthen the analysis and possibly to enhance robustness of the findings. Based on the findings of study, the following recommendations are made for future research: Firstly, future research should be undertaken to establish correlation between leadership styles and school performance since this was beyond the scope of this study. Secondly, future research should conduct comparative studies across different regions and exploring complex interplay between servant, democratic, transformational leadership and systemic challenges. Thirdly, future study should explore specific mechanisms through which these challenges impact school performance

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Rehabeam K. Shapaka

University of South Africa

South Africa

rehashapaka@gmail.com

ORCID 0009-0009-7921-3458
