

**ADOPTING A RELATIONAL LEADERSHIP AS A STRATEGY FOR
EMPOWERING TEACHER COUNSELLORS: A PATHWAY TO PROMOTING
LEARNERS' WELL-BEING AND EMPOWERMENT**

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Abstract

This paper explores how schools in the 21st century can position themselves such that they facilitate the achievement of sustainable development goals (SDGs). It is actually the mandate of global education systems and schools to address and ensure achievement of SDGs, particularly SDG4; that aims at quality education that ensures inclusivity and equity for promotion of lifelong learning. This paper fits in this context as it aims at addressing guidance and counselling provision and teacher counsellors' empowerment in Lesotho schools, viewing guidance and counselling from a point of view that it is an educational service that supports and facilitates achievement of educational goals. While global education systems are committed towards achievement of sustainable development goals it is essential that schools consider ways in which they can strengthen learners support structures more than ever before. This paper argues for teacher counsellors' empowerment as a means of strengthening of guidance and counselling provision. The paper recognises the critical role of teachers beyond content delivery-towards promoting learners' well-being and empowerment. The paper views teacher counsellors' empowerment to be very critical to promoting learners' well-being and empowerment in the midst of complex societal challenges that seem to threaten their academic journeys, well-being and life in general. A thematic analysis of data generated through a qualitative semi structured interviews, focus group discussion and dialogue with teachers participating in in-service BEd Honours programme (Educational Psychology) at National University of Lesotho (NUL) revealed that some of the challenges such as working in isolation, feelings of inadequacy and lack of empowerment contribute to teacher counsellors' failure to provide effective guidance and counselling services to learners. The discussions also pointed to the need for empowering leadership in schools. Informed by Ubuntu/Botho theory and Asset-based theory this paper proposes purposeful adoption of relational leadership in Lesotho' schools as a strategy for teacher counsellors' empowerment towards promotion of learners' well-being and empowerment.

Keywords: *Relational leadership, guidance and counselling, teacher counsellors, well-being, empowerment, Ubuntu/Botho and Asset-based theory*

Introductory background

The 21st century demands global education systems and schools to position themselves such that they respond to the mandate of facilitating the achievement of sustainable development goal number four “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all” (Sustainable Development Goals Fund). Lesotho is part of the

global nations that have committed to strive towards attainment of quality education that is inclusive and equitable for all. Despite different interpretations of the concept of quality education, this paper understands it as the kind of education that goes beyond aiming at accurate subject content delivery-to a level of developing necessary skills and competencies necessary for survival in the 21st century. According to Fredriksson (2004:4) quality education is an education that provides students with the tools to deal with and find solutions to the challenges confronting mankind. He further suggests that “teachers must teach about values, not just through the substantive content of their teaching”, but also, through other means, teachers have to instil democracy, interaction, equality, respect and cooperation (Fredriksson 2004:4) as part of working together. Most importantly quality education is viewed as the type of education that prepares children and youth academically and emotionally for the challenges they will face at school and the world they will enter when they graduate.

With this type of education we can be hopeful that lifelong learning is attained. It should be noted however that lifelong learning as a concept also has different meanings depending on its interpretations in different countries. According to Soni (2012:1) lifelong is about acquiring and updating all kinds of abilities, interests, knowledge and qualifications from the pre-school years to post retirement which promotes the development of knowledge and competencies that will enable adaptation to the knowledge-based society and also valuing all forms of learning. Laal (2011:471) concurs that “LLL literally means that learning should take place at all stages of life cycle and, in more recent versions that it should be life-wide; that is embedded in all contexts from the school to the workplace, the home and the community”. Additionally, Laal (2011:471) says the LLL concept refers to the activities people perform throughout their life to improve their knowledge, skills and competence in a particular field, given some personal, societal or employment related motives (Laal 2011;471). Longworth & Davies (1996:21) on the other define lifelong learning as “the development of human potential through a continuously supportive process which stimulates and empowers individuals to acquire all the knowledge, values, skills and understanding they will require throughout their lifetimes and to apply them with confidence, creativity and enjoyment in all roles, circumstances, and environment” This paper views guidance and counselling as a prerequisite to make both quality education that is inclusive and lifelong learning a reality in Lesotho.

Guidance and counselling relevance in the 21st century

It is generally believed that the 21st century is characterised by ever increasing complex societal challenges that put heavy demands on school going children and youth, hence contributing to large numbers of learners experiencing emotional challenges (Boitt 2016:27, Chirran 2014:2, Gatua, Sindabi & Chepchieng 2015:28, Ocansey & Gyimah 2016:99). Ocansey and Gyimah (2016:99) note that the social and psychological needs of school pupils have manifested in diverse and mal-adjusted behaviours such as withdrawal behaviours, unhappiness, annoyance, anger, anxiety and hyperactivity that hinder their academic performance. Additional behavioural problems revealed by research are drug abuse, violence, bullying and early unwanted early pregnancy, dropping out of school and even suicide in

some cases (Nasilumbi, Jennifer & Prisca, 2016:39, Gatua, et al 2015:29). For this reason, guidance and counselling is suggested by research as one way to overcome their overcome challenges, while promoting resilience and wellbeing (Egbo, 2015:49, Ocansey & Gyimah, 2016: 99). It is generally agreed that promoting learners' well-being and empowerment are critical to attainment of all other educational goals. Nkechi, Ewomaoghene and Nkechi (2016:36) point out that "guidance and counselling provision has the potential of preparing students for the challenges of the 21st century through academic, career, and personal/social development, relating educational program to future success, broadening and developing decision-making and problem solving skills, assuring equitable access to educational opportunities and fostering resiliency factors for students". Cognizant with these, global education systems continue to embrace guidance and counselling as the critical educational support service that is intended to promote learners well-being and empowerment (Chirran 2014:2). They regard school going age as the best time for developing social and emotional skills, knowledge and behaviours that sustain healthy lifestyles. This period is viewed as suitable for setting a pattern for how children and youth will manage their mental health and wellbeing into adulthood. Also, considering the time that children spend at school, it is a fact that schools provide an ideal environment for promoting good emotional wellbeing and empowerment, for inclusivity purposes and promotion of lifelong learning.

Lesotho also is "cognizant of the fact that its school-age population remains the nation's window of hope in terms of reversing or halting the spread and/or impact of HIV and AIDS, and other social problems likely to derail national development goals" (MOET 2005:2). The MOET (2005:6) writes that the school –age population is at stage where it is anxious and willing to learn and discover new things. Therefore any positive interventions are likely to have a significant impact on character building including behaviour. Hence, Lesotho education, as stipulated in the new curriculum and assessment policy (2009) aims at among other things; promoting students psycho-social skills to deal with personal and social developmental challenges, providing students with moral and religious education for the development of socially and culturally acceptable character, promoting the spirit of co-operation and service to others and providing moral and religious awareness as a foundation for promoting positive attitudes, acceptable social behaviour and skills for coping with life challenges and preparing learners to respond to social, economic and technological challenges (Ministry of Education and Training 2009:10). It is understandable that the ministry of education and training, in its school health policy draft (2005) emphasises the need for guidance and counselling in schools. Nkechi, Ewomaoghene & Nkechi (2016:410) suggest collaboration of guidance and counselling as supportive aspect of curriculum. The crux of this paper therefore is to address issues of guidance and counselling provision, particularly teacher counsellors' empowerment in Lesotho schools as another angle from which learners' well-being and empowerment can be promoted as we strive towards quality education and lifelong learning. In Lesotho, like in many other Sub-Saharan countries, teachers are entrusted to provide guidance and counselling services to school-going children and youth. Many countries have clearly stipulated in their education policies that schools have to ensure that

guidance and counselling is integrated in school curriculum, with teachers assuming the role of teacher counsellors. In these countries, a teacher counsellor is a teacher who has been entrusted with the responsibility of rendering counselling or any type of psychosocial support to learners within a school setting (Mushaandja, Haihambo, Vergnani and Frank 2013:77). Adhering to this, teacher training institutions in these countries (Lesotho included) have ensured incorporation of courses such as educational psychology, introduction to guidance and counselling and life skills education as components of teacher training programmes.

Guidance and counselling provision creates opportunities to develop learners' fundamental skills that will help them reason, think creatively, analyse and work collaboratively for sustainability purposes (Ross 2017). Its contribution to quality education is its potential to provide learners with tools to deal with different tasks that they will need to perform in their lives. Apart from that it helps learners to prepare themselves for both their private lives and to participate in the economic, cultural and political life of their societies. Furthermore, it ensures acquisition of knowledge and skills necessary to promote; sustainable lifestyles, respect for human rights, culture of peace and non- violence, appreciation of cultural diversity as one of the targets of sustainable development goal 4. Among other skills that are critical in the fast changing world, guidance and counselling promotes acquisition of skills such as collaboration, creativity, critical thinking and communication as stipulated by research. With these skills, students become principled, open minded, caring, problem solvers, ethical, communicative and collaborative. According to Gudyanga, Wadesango and Gudyanga (2015:43) the responsibility of the teacher counsellor is to unlock opportunities for the students to help nature their character and behaviour so as to adjust to the society, make them able to interact with others, and be mentally and physically healthy.

Inevitability of teacher counsellors' empowerment in the 21st century

Guidance and counselling provision in the 21st century demands teacher counsellors that are more empowered than ever before to succeed in empowering learners to tackle ever increasing complex challenges that impact negatively on their emotional/mental wellbeing, behaviour and academic performance. According to Fandino (2010), the twenty-first century has brought sweeping changes in education, hence the need for teachers who are capacitated to deal with the unexpected and the complex demands on their profession. This paper therefore suggests that the Lesotho education system should strive towards designing frameworks that favour collaborative questioning and creativity. They should come up with strategies for teacher counsellors' empowerment. This implies that schools need to be reformed such that they provide a consistent protective and therapeutic environment, which can help both teachers and learners to cope with the unnerving circumstances that impact negatively in their working and learning ecologies. Additionally, the paper considers teachers (at different levels) as pillars of quality education and other educational agendas such as promoting learners' wellbeing and empowerment. Fandani (2010) supports that one of the key elements in most educational reforms is the teacher. They are therefore expected to respond adequately to the pressing demands of the modern world and to the growing concerns of the educational

community (Fandani 2010). Without their empowerment for , the country can give up on attainment of national educational goals. Hence, there is a need to empower them to take a lead in educational transformational agendas. UNESCO (2017) supports that sustainability starts with teachers.

Moreover, research shows that growing up today seems to be harder than ever before-with the worrying trend of declining well-being of many learners (Chirran 2014:2, Ocansey & Gyimah 2016:99, Boitt 2016:27). Children and young people face a host of novel stressors that impact on their well-being. The MOET 2005:12) writes that in Lesotho, as is the case in most developing countries, young people of school-going age face a multitude of emerging and chronic social problems threatening young people to date include HIV and AIDS, sexual and reproductive health issues; poverty and drug use/abuse. These problems manifest themselves in the form of school dropout, unwanted early pregnancy and delinquency among others (MOET 2005:23). The Lesotho School Health Policy therefore aims at ensuring guidance and counselling provision, and other HIV/AIDS life skills activities that promote values and beliefs on sex and sexuality that are consistent with the culture and orientation of the beneficiaries. The MOET, through the School Health Policy also seeks to ensure that orphans and vulnerable children, particularly girls, have access to HIV and AIDS life-skills education specifically guidance, counselling and character building in order to prevent early marriages, unwanted pregnancies, HIV and STIs (MOET 2005. This indicates Lesotho education system's commitment to rebalance academic learning, emotional well-being and empowerment of school children. The question is; are teachers well positioned to facilitate these? The argument is, without empowering teachers counsellors' attainment of the above mentioned goals is questionable.

Problem Statement

Despite the universal consensus of the significance of guidance and counselling in promoting quality education, empowerment, well-being and lifelong learning, its provision in Lesotho schools, as it is the case with many other Sub-Saharan countries guidance and counselling is faced with a number of challenges that blockade its effective provision. In Sub-Saharan countries (Lesotho included), school guidance and counselling provision is the mandate of teachers. The normal practice, where efforts are made is that principals as positional school leaders decide on who and how guidance and counselling provision is handled. In many cases the principal select people on the basis of their workload and the trust they have for such teachers. In some cases teachers voluntarily take the responsibility of initiating guidance and counselling service provision.

The problem is although the MOET is cognizant of the need for guidance and counselling in schools, policies addressing this issue fail to recognise the power and position of teachers as readily available counsellors for school going children and youth. For instance, the Lesotho School Health Policy Draft (2005:16) emphasises that “services to help school children overcome social and psychological obstacles are best left to those with special training such as school psychologist, guidance counsellors, or social workers. This is a problem because in

Lesotho psychologists and social workers are not placed in schools for this purpose. The other issue is that although the MOET has committed to ensure expansion and strengthening of guidance and counselling services through the training of trainer (TOT) approach and peer counselling clubs, nothing seem to be in practice up to this far. While this is the case, other Sub-Saharan countries recognise teachers as having potential of providing guidance and counselling services to their learners. This paper notes that despite this disempowering approach by the MOET, many schools make efforts to provide guidance and counselling for their learners. However, lack of empowerment work against sustainability of these efforts.

Purpose of the study

The study therefore investigates the root cause for teacher counsellors' lack of empowerment in Lesotho schools. It also explores relational leadership as a potential strategy for bringing about a positive change regarding empowerment of teacher counsellors.

Research questions

The following questions guided the inquiry that led to the achievement of the above mentioned purposes of the study

1. What are the contributing factors to teacher counsellors' failure to efficiently provide guidance and counselling services to learners?
2. What kind of leadership is necessary for promoting teacher counsellors' empowerment?

Framing teacher counsellors' empowerment within Ubuntu/Botho Theory and Asset-based approach

This paper combined the perspectives of Ubuntu/Botho theory/philosophy and asset-based approach in framing teacher counsellors' empowerment. This serves the purpose of theoretical triangulation (Myende 2015:32) for the purpose of enhancing the researchers' ability in providing a clearer understanding of the problem. To avoid confusion the paper discusses the two theories separately, starting with Ubuntu/Botho. Ubuntu/Botho exhibits an African world-view of human existence especially its approach to solving problems facing the community and our schools. Its adoption in this paper is influenced by Pitsoe and Letseka (2018:37) in their argument that "Afrocentricity, as a theory concerned with African epistemological relevance to achieve intellectual agency, is indispensable to transforming the dominant (Eurocentric) philosophy in education and research". Also, the paper considered Tlali's (2018:35) view that considering the challenges the African continent is faced with, there is need for philosophy that could contribute towards the general upliftment of the African people. To add more, adopting Ubuntu/Botho as a theoretical framework is an attempt to respond to the call that "in order for education to fully serve its purpose, it has to resonate with the socio-cultural context for which it is meant" Tlali (2018:35). Actually Ubuntu/Botho principles reflect the Lesotho New curriculum and Assessment (2009) which is derived from the Basotho philosophical statement of justice, peace, prosperity, participation, democracy and mutual co-existence. Consideration of these principles in strategies formulated for teacher

counsellors empowerment imply capacitated teacher counsellors that are well positioned to instil the same values to learners through guidance and counselling practice. These values are essential components for quality education and lifelong learning agenda.

Ubuntu/Botho prides in values of participation, collaboration, empathy, care, fairness, integrity, mutual support and empowerment (Hailey 2008:10, Mabovula 2011:41 & Swason 2007:54). Other values instilled by Ubuntu/Botho that are relevant to teacher counsellors' empowerment are humanism, sharing, interactive dependency and collective responsibility (Van der Walt, 2010:252). Ubuntu/Botho supports participation and collaboration as the best approaches to address sustainability issues and transformational agendas such as in the case of teacher counsellors' empowerment. Additionally, Ubuntu/Botho support research that shows that in order for schools to achieve effective guidance and counselling provision, all parties concerned with education have to be committed and work together to bring a positive change. In the same vein, the MoET (2005:5) suggest that equity must be applied in school health and school health must adhere to principles of social justice. In fact, one of the objectives of Lesotho school health policy is to ensure participation of parents, guardians, and the community in promoting supporting and protecting the health and general welfare of young people in both formal and non-formal education settings (MoET 2005:5). Related to this, Fredriksson (2004:4) suggests that every new generation must learn how to improve and develop society, but at the same time be able to base these changes on the traditions and achievements already established in society.

Asset-based approach is supportive of entrenching teacher counsellors' empowerment in Ubuntu/Botho philosophy. Similar to Ubuntu/Botho, Asset-based approach to empowerment of teacher counsellors suggests environments that allow teachers to invest their strengths and capacities towards improving academic performance in their schools (Myende 2015:31). This implies the adoption of bottom-up approaches to transformational initiatives intended to promote learners' well-being. Asset-based approach advocates for a shift from dependency on positional leaders and authorities for providing ready-made solutions for problems in our schools. The problem with this perspective to education is that it results to schools and communities that are unable to acknowledge their strengths, capacities and resources (Myende 2015:34).

Asset-based approach is a shift from needs-based approach that creates communities and schools that are consumers rather than producers of their solutions. This approach promotes tendencies of people paying attention to their deficiencies instead of possibilities for deploying their assets for the enhancement of learners' academic performance, mental wellness and empowerment. This paper views this tendency as one of the root causes for intervention strategies that fail to sustain. The asset-based approach is relevant for addressing teacher counsellor's empowerment in Lesotho schools as it reflects Basotho philosophy of unity. This approach is premised on the assumption that transformation and development that benefits all is possible and sustainable when local community people are committed to investing themselves and their resources.

Both Ubuntu/Botho and asset-based approach support the advocacy for adoption of relational leadership as a strategy for teacher counsellor's empowerment as we strive for promoting learners wellbeing and empowerment. They both emphasise community members engagement in knowledge construction and creating solutions for the problems that affect them, rather than depending on authorities and external organisations to provide ready-made solutions that may not fit well with the cultural context on which they are supposed to be implemented, hence failing to sustain. The two theories support teachers as capable of providing effective guidance and counselling services that are context orientated. They resonate literature showing that "the history of guidance and counselling around the world varies greatly based on how different countries and local communities have chosen to provide personal, academic, social and emotional adjustment". For instance, it is agreed that African societies, historically, have provided a range of social services to young people and children with a vision of developing and growing the children into responsible and productive members of their communities (Songok, Yungungu & Mulinge, 2013:109; Keabona, 2008:3). Keabona (2008:3) adds that young people "were socialised in the ways of their communities as well as the various skills their forebears used to earn a living and/or to provide for their families".

Relational leadership: Contextualising teacher counsellors empowerment

The notion of teacher counsellors' empowerment draws from Fandani's (2010) idea of teacher empowerment as "validating the role and authority of the teacher's experience in ways that enable teachers to overcome the barriers to effective practice that their daily experiences deemed as necessary". According to Fanani (2010) this demands the schools to be regarded as sites for the creation of democratic understanding and sympathies that guarantee teachers' decision-making and increased power. Additionally, teacher empowerment is about helping teachers to become "central shapers of the educational enterprise by validating their experience, decision-making and power, and ultimately by making sure that they have a genuine say in school practices and circumstances" (Fandani 2010). These can be achieved with the leadership paradigm shift in schools. This paper views teacher counsellors' empowerment through the lens of relational leadership precepts.

Despite different interpretations of RL, it is generally agreed that it is a shift from hierarchical styles of leadership that are authoritative and disempowering since power is only vested in one person at the top (Rice, 2012:1). Komvies (2007:75) understands RL as "a relational process of people together attempting to accomplish change or make a difference to benefit the common good". In addition, Uhl-Bien (2006:667) and Rice (2012:1) agree that RL is a shift from traditional beliefs and practices about leadership and is an alternative to the hierarchical model of leadership. Murell (1997) cited in Uhl-Bien (2006:663) adds that "relational leadership is born out of relational perspective that views leadership as a social act, a construction of "ship" as a collective vehicle to help us where we go as a group, organisation or society desire to go". From another angle, Uhl-Bien (2006:663) views RL as "a process of relational dialogue in which members engage and interact to construct

knowledge systems together”, and this consequently brings transformation where all participants are raised to a point of becoming capable leaders (Komvies, 2007:73). Further, Ancona and Bresman (2007:1) and Smit (2014:119) agree that RL is a pattern of communal interrelating through which knowledge held by different people in a particular social context interpenetrates, to make sense of a particular situation.

Suggesting adoption of relational leadership as a strategy for teacher counsellors’ empowerment suggest a transformational agenda based on the understanding that leadership is central to any organisational transformation. By virtue of its component of empowerment relational leadership is considered as more appropriate for addressing teacher counsellors’ empowerment. As a strategy, it is expected that it permits creation of a climate where teachers are afforded opportunities to develop the competence to take charge of their own growth and to resolve their own problems while increasing opportunities for meaningful collective participation (Fandani 2010). In addition, it fosters autonomy where teacher counsellors develop confidence in the sense of freedom to make decisions and to control aspects of their work life. Apart from that it speaks to the issue of hope as it enhances teachers’ perception that they have an impact and influence on learners’ wellbeing, empowerment and academic success and school life in general. Moreover, relational leadership promotes healthy relationships where teachers’ belief that others truly respect their professional knowledge and that they have the genuine support of their colleagues is promoted. Most importantly, RL permits creation of an atmosphere where teacher counsellors develop a feeling that they have the skills to provide guidance and counselling in a way that a positive change is ensured, and are competent in building effective guidance and counselling programmes that promote learners’ wellbeing and empowerment. Understandably, relational leadership as a strategy for teacher counsellors’ empowerment allows platforms for collective knowledge sharing and construction and creating a room for significant collaborative participation, while ensuring the creation of democratic understanding. It allows teachers to exercise power over educational lives, to constructively resist control mechanisms and ultimately challenges the top-down hierarchical structure of the educational status quo.

METHOD

The study adopted a qualitative inquiry to data generation since the purpose of the study was to understand teachers experiences, opinions and feelings about their additional role of providing guidance and counselling to learners. Focus group discussion, dialogue and semi-structured interviews with participating teachers were adopted as methods of data generation. Prompts were used for both focus group discussions and dialogues. Fifteen teachers participated in the study. All of these teachers are practising teachers with teaching experience exceeding seven years. They are currently participating in-service teacher training programme (Educational psychology)-all taking a course; “*Counselling Psychology Theory and Practice*” as part of the curriculum at postgraduate level (BED Honours). Twelve of them participated in focus group discussion, while three of them failed to participate in focus group session but willing to share their experiences, observations, feelings and opinions. A session for engaging

in a dialogue with them was arranged. Five of them were willing to further share their experiences individually. A semi-structured interview was arranged with them. Participation was voluntary and the respondents were made aware of their freedom to withdraw whenever they felt they wanted to. The responses were recorded down in a notebook. A digital voice decoder was also used for thorough capturing of the conversations.

The intention to engage teachers participating in in-service training programme at postgraduate level was based on the assumption that they are fully aware of the situation guidance and provision in schools. In one class discussion, around the issues pertaining to learners' well-being and counselling provision in schools, there was a general concern for improvement of guidance and counselling provision. This paper was actually triggered by this concern. Engaging them in inquiry on teacher counsellors' empowerment was regarded as a legitimate way of developing and empowering them to be active knowers and critical agents who are capable of undertaking innovative action to transform their practices and circumstances as teacher counsellors (Fandino 2010:). In addition, the purpose was to stimulate critical thinking through discussions to question and resist means of regulation and control, while empowering them to take command of their own lives in a way that enables them to develop their professional skills. Also engaging this group of teachers in data generation process was a way to allow them to assume educational practice as an object of reflection that increased their capacity for analysis, observation and insight (Fandino 2010). Another intention was to allow them an opportunity to contribute to knowledge production and also to enable them to be the subjects of knowledge who are recognised and followed by others. This approach facilitates the emergence of collectives, groups and networks of teachers ensuring the success of the shared agenda. Practising teacher's participation in focus group discussion served the purpose of amplifying their voice as far as guidance and counselling provision issues and teacher counsellors' empowerment are concerned. Their reflections and analysis uncovered that lack of empowerment for teacher counsellors is one of the major causes for underutilised guidance and counselling in Lesotho.

Data Analysis

The data was thematically analysed. Responses were categorised on the basis of the meaning they conveyed.

RESULTS

Themes that emerged from the participants' responses guided the presentation of the results.

Collective responsibility

All the responds were of the view that lack of collaboration and collective responsibility between teachers and school leaders disempower selected and volunteering teacher counsellors since they often work in isolation. Working in isolation means that teacher counsellors fail to engage in collective knowledge construction and reconstruction necessary for improvement and continuity of services. It also implies inaccuracy in learners' needs

assessment since one teacher cannot manage to assess the guidance and counselling needs of every learner in the school, at the same time organising for provision of services. The respondents pointed out that, usually those with the responsibility of providing guidance and counselling to learners get discouraged and decide to focus on certain aspects of learners support. In some cases, they totally abandon this responsibility. It was also found by this study that even other stakeholders such as parents, teacher training institutions and other relevant sectors are rarely involved. In cases where they come to address learners in crucial matters, the approach is usually individualistic than collective and systematic. In many cases teachers are not involved in the organisation of such occasions. They pointed out that this make them feel very insignificant.

Purposeful communication

Another aspect that was found to be a contributing factor to teacher counsellors' lack of empowerment is lack of purposeful communication and dialogue. In their view, leadership in many schools is not committed to promote communication culture intended to address guidance and counselling practices in school. This leaves teachers in a state of confusion about what should and should not happen. Some of them shared experiences where other teachers who are interested and knowledgeable in guidance and counselling field are reluctant to be involved, with the fear that they might be taken as intruders since they are not selected by their principals. The common situation is members of schools hardly communicate amongst themselves about what direction should guidance and counselling practices take. Lack of communication implies no platforms are created for the sharing of perspectives and skills which would otherwise contribute to empowerment of those involved.

Shared understanding and purpose oriented initiatives

Participating teachers identified lack of shared understanding and purpose about guidance and counselling provision practices as a contributing factor to disempowerment of teacher counsellors. Almost all of them are of the view that teachers often have differing views about what school guidance and counselling should entail. Because of lack of coordinated communication, the differing views become more destructive than constructive. In some cases teachers judge one another as incapable and not knowing what they are doing. This discourages teaches to involve themselves or support the selected and volunteering teacher counsellors. This results to teacher counsellors who also question their effectiveness. Reavie (2015:1) states that "change happens when there is strong vision at the start" This vision is created out of shared understanding and purpose of the initiative. According to the respondents, lack of shared purpose affect the performance of teacher counsellors, hence guidance and counselling practices become sporadic, lacking quality, equity and social justice.

Lack of support

Lack of support for both selected and volunteering teacher counsellors by the principal and other teachers was found by this study as another contributing factor to teacher counsellors'

feelings of inadequacy, questioning their ability and competence in providing guidance and counselling effectively. The tendency is that school leaders fail to involve themselves adequately to understand what is going on as far as guidance and counselling provision is concerned. Therefore they fail to offer proper supervision and guidance as positional leaders. Minimal involvement of principals impact negatively on the performance teacher counsellor since by virtue of leadership patterns adopted in many Lesotho schools, teacher counsellors are reluctant to take full responsibility of what should happen. This implies negatively on teacher counsellors decision making skills. According to the respondents, teachers are usually afraid to take decision without consultation and confirmation from their principals. In cases where they do, they are often accused of their mission to become principals themselves. In addition, participating teachers pointed to lack of professional development through workshops that support them to implement skills that are acquired during their training as another factor to their failure to initiate guidance and counselling programmes and sustain them. They hold that the Ministry of Education and Training and teacher training institutions need to show a positive attitude towards the success of guidance and counselling provision by doing follow ups of what is taking place in schools and providing support where necessary.

Dependency on Western approaches to guidance and counselling

The participating teachers cited their failure to put into practice approaches to guidance and counselling that they learned during their training as one of the contributing factors to the development of feelings of inadequacy. In their view some of these approaches do not have space in the cultural context of their schools. Those that sit well with the context need school climate that promotes collaboration and teamwork so that consensus is reached about which approaches are to be adopted as pillars of developing counselling programmes. Many of them hold that their guidance and counselling practices need to be guided by collectively agreed assumptions and principles. They alluded to the point raised by one of them during the focus group session that the collective choice of approaches to guidance and counselling may eliminate situations of teachers suspected and accused of spending a lot of time with certain learners for reasons unknown by the principal and other teachers.

Leadership that values teamwork

The respondents hold that leadership is crucial to effective guidance and counselling practices in schools. The general view is that schools need leadership that promote school climate that enhances participation collaboration. Two teachers shared their stories where they observed leadership practices that promote competition other than collaboration and teamwork. From their experiences and point of view such leadership incubates mistrust and the spirit of competition other than collectively working towards the attainment of shared goals. One teacher told of a story where in one school, the principal openly spoke of his decision to permit only two teachers of his choice to be the ones providing guidance and counselling to learners because he does not trust other teachers. Other teachers also shared experiences of witnessing leadership that deliberately selecting certain teachers to be responsible for guidance and

counselling without providing guidance on how these teachers can work hand in hand with other teachers.

DISCUSSION

A qualitative study with teachers revealed that some of the contributing factors to teacher counsellors' lack of empowerment are minimal collective responsibility, lack of purposeful communication, shared understanding and purpose oriented initiatives, lack of support, dependency on Western approaches to guidance and counselling and leadership that values and promote teamwork.

The problem of minimal collective responsibility and lack of collaboration in guidance and counselling means that teacher counsellors work in isolation. It also shows that there is no involvement of other stakeholders. The engagement of stakeholders is crucial in building support structures that are empowering teacher counsellors. Literature supports collaboration as the best approach for strengthening guidance and counselling services ((Kok & Low, 2017:282; Wambu & Fisher, 2015:97; George, 2014:3; Lawanda et al., 2014:41; Boitt, 2016:30; McIntonch, 2013:11; Nzeleni, 2015:iii; Nyk'a'nen, 2011:17-18; New Zealand Post Primary Teachers Association, 2015:10). It allows sharing of perspectives and collective learning that contribute to empowerment of those involved. Working in isolation without support can bring feelings of loneliness, inadequacy and discouragement among teacher-counsellors. Various scholars concur that in order to tackle problems facing our education we need to move away from individualistic and non-systematic approaches that fail to bring a sustainable positive change ((Dixon et al., 2008:9; Mahlomaholo, 2012:5; Mahlomaholo & Tshelane, 2015:196; Mapesela et al., 2012:91; Nkoane, 2015:38; Reavie, 2015:1). Collaboration and team spirit are embedded in Ubuntu/Botho African view and way of life. Ubuntu/Botho and Asset-based approach advocates communal efforts for that empower those involved.

In addition, communication is essential for people working together. It is channel through which people's needs are understood and solutions that benefit all are created. Lack of purposeful communication implies that teachers are not adequately invested with the right to participate in the determination of guidance and counselling goals to exercise their judgement about what guidance and counselling programmes should entail. This is common in African countries such as Kenya, Nigeria and Namibia where it is reported that teacher counsellors work in silos without clear direction and support from other members of staff, parents and ministries of education (.Nyarangi, 2011:16; Egbo, 2015a:377; Mushaandja et al., 2013:79). Additionally, lack of teacher- counsellors' empowerment is evident when they are not enabled to fully personalise their services to the needs of each learner. As a result, they are not motivated and fail to enhance their problem-solving skills. Logically there is little teacher-counsellors can do in terms of empowering learners when they are not empowered themselves. Lack of empowerment for teacher-counsellors also implies low motivation to commit to facilitation of achievement of national education goals.

Another problem of lack of support as one of disempowering factors for teacher counsellors is reported by several studies ((Boitt, 2018:29; Mushaandja et al., 2013:77; McIntonch, 2013:5; Songok et al., 2013:109). Adebowale (2012:222) adds that “the counsellor is usually perceived as someone who performs magic to change the student, and also [regarded] as a rival in the school system”. Under such situations, it can be expected that trust among members of the school is most times non-existent. A study by Mushaandja et al. (2013:79) on major challenges facing teacher-counsellors in schools in Namibia, reports that teacher-counsellors are called to be accountable and demonstrate that they are effective and efficient in their work, while not having received any support from the administration. This is opposite to empowerment, rather, it is disempowering. It also indicates leadership that is not supportive.

Moreover, the problem of imported Western approaches coupled with lack of support make it difficult for teacher counsellors to contextualise them such that they sit well with the cultural context of African schools. Nyarangi (2011:2) suggests the creation of schools where learners are helped to learn their social roles and correct social values relevant to their context. Vermeulen (2011:48) postulates that “vast majority of psychological training is conducted using Western theories and frameworks, which continues the process of imperialism through colonising of the mind”. Closer analysis of this postulation implies disempowerment of teacher counsellors through strange approaches to guidance and counselling provision.

CONCLUSION

Today’s world demands teachers that are more empowered to take leadership and become authors and source of the theoretical foundations of the strategies formulated to influence their own practices. They need to engage in research that informs their professional roles and responsibilities. The findings point to the need for Lesotho education system and schools to shift from hierarchical leadership paradigms that are disempowering teachers as active decision makers and problem solvers of challenges facing their working ecologies. Schools need to adopt leadership patterns that are responsive to issues of sustainability, such that participation, collaboration, interdependence and communal efforts that promote well-being and empowerment are promoted in our schools.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Ministry of Education and Training need to recognise teachers as capable agents for promoting learners well-being and empowerment, and thus empowering them through support and follow ups.

Teacher training institutions need to strategize on how to support teachers to apply guidance and counselling skills acquired during training.

The study suggests schools leadership paradigm shift and adopt relational patterns of leadership that promote participation, communal efforts, interdependence and empowerment of all those involved.

Teacher training institutions should train principals through continuous workshops on leadership patterns that address the demands of the 21st century.

The study suggests continuous research focusing on identifying internal and external obstacles that create barriers to teacher counsellors' efficient provision of guidance and counselling.

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