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RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN A HEAD TEACHER'S LEADERSHIP BEHAVIOUR AND TEACHER COMMITMENT TO WORK

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Abstract

The present study examined relationships between a head teacher's leadership behaviour and the degree of teacher commitment to work. Second, it explored factors that are likely to influence teacher commitment to work.

As predicted, the results of the study indicated that the head teacher's authoritarian leadership behaviour was inversely correlated with teacher commitment to work. Second, the head teacher's supportive leadership behaviour was significantly and positively correlated with teacher commitment to work. Finally, factors which appeared to have significant effect on teacher commitment to work included the head teacher's supportive leadership behaviour, teacher qualification, location of the school, and quality of teaching materials and facility. The four factors explained about a third (32%) of the variance on teacher commitment to work (multiple $R = .56$).

The Problem

While there is general agreement that leadership at the school level is a key component in facilitating the teaching/learning process (Hoy and Clover, 1986), not much research has been done to link it with teacher commitment to work, especially in Third World Countries (Cohn and Rossmiller, 1987; Fuller 1987; Manasse, 1982; Ferris and Aranya, 1983). Yet, the leadership behaviour of the head teacher and the level of teacher commitment to work are critically important to the effectiveness of a school (Purkey and Smith, 1983). Is there a relationship between a

leadership behaviour of a school administrator and teacher commitment to work?

The Context

In attempt to answer this question, an exploratory (pilot) study was conducted in Swaziland. Swaziland is the second smallest country in Africa with a population of about 8 million. The educational system of Swaziland is modelled after that of the English system: it is highly academic, examination oriented, pyramidal in outlook and highly centralized (*Swaziland National Development Plan, 1984; Magagula, 1991*). All schools in Swaziland are controlled by the Ministry of Education through a team of regional education officers. Head teachers are appointed by the Teaching Service Commission (an employing unit) of the Ministry of Education. This unit is responsible for hiring and firing teachers.

Invariably, head teachers have no power to hire and fire teachers, nor the power to expel students. It is only the Ministry of Education through the director of education and the Teaching Service Commission that has the power to do so (Ministry of Education, 1990). In other words, teachers are recruited, hired, paid, and fired by the Ministry of Education through the Teaching Service Commission. Whereas all children pay school fees, government provides school equipment, teaching facilities and materials, accommodation for teachers, and pays teachers' salaries. All schools follow a national curriculum.

In recent years, and because of growing numbers of the teaching force, government has been unable to provide decent accommodation to all teachers, especially in the rural areas. On several occasions, teachers have threatened to go on strike over this issue. Recently, the local media, for instance, reported primary school teachers who went on strike due to poor conditions of classrooms, teachers' houses, lack of toilet facilities, classroom and office furniture (*Times of Swaziland, 1992*).

Conceptual Framework

The study was guided by the literature on effective schools (Purkey and Smith, 1983; Debevoise, 1984; Shoemaker and Fraser, 1981; Wellisch et al., 1976; Fuller, 1987), leadership behaviour (Bossert, Dawyer, Rowan and Lee, 1982; Heck, Larsen, Marcoulides, 1990; Hallinger and Murphy, 1986), and teacher commitment to work (Ferris and Aranya, 1983).

The literature on effective schools indicates that, apart from defining the mission and purpose of schooling, setting school-wide goals, providing a sense of direction to the school, maintaining an orderly and safe environment, effective head teachers involve teachers in the decision making process, protect them from outside pressures and encourage them to be initiative, innovative, and creative in their teaching (DeBevoise, 1984). Such head teachers are not necessarily authoritarian (Hallinger and Murphy, 1986).

Furthermore, the literature on effective schools and leadership behaviour suggests that teachers who work under such leadership are likely to be committed to their work, not only because of the leadership behaviour of the head teacher, but also because of the availability of teaching facilities and materials, good climate, and decent accommodation (Purkey and Smith, 1983; Heck, Larsen, Marcoulides, 1990).

Research Questions

On the basis of this literature and the social context of the educational system of Swaziland, the following questions were raised:

- What is the relationship between the leadership behaviour of a head teacher and teacher commitment to work?
- What factors are likely to influence teacher commitment to work?

To address these questions, two hypotheses were formulated:

Hypothesis 1

The head teacher's authoritarian leadership behaviour is likely to be inversely correlated to teacher commitment to work.

Hypothesis 2

The head teacher's supportive leadership behaviour is likely to be positively correlated to teachers' commitment to work.

Methodology

Data for this study were gathered from a total of 82 full-time B.ED. students at the University of Swaziland. The majority of the students had taught for not less than 5 years in secondary schools. The average age of the B.ED. students was 35 years. Of the 82 B.ED. students, 35 were females and 47 were males.

Questionnaire

A structured questionnaire was used to collect data. The questionnaire had two parts. Part one collocated background characteristics of the respondents: age, sex, teaching experience, and location of the school where they taught. Part two focused on the leadership behaviour of the head teacher, teacher commitment to work, quality of accommodation, and availability of teaching materials as perceived and recalled by the respondents.

The items forming the questionnaire were either adapted from previously developed instruments or developed by the researcher. The items were simple descriptive statements. Respondents were asked to rate, on a Likert-type four point scale, the leadership behaviour of their immediate past head teachers, the level of teacher commitment to work in that school, and the availability and quality of teaching materials and accommodation.

Teacher commitment to work was defined as the existence of collegial relationships, team spirit, sense of unity, dedication, and harmony among teachers in working toward the achievement of organisational and personal goals (Smith, 1966). Level of teacher commitment to work was determined by the participants' responses to 10 items asking them to indicate the extent to which the statements were true or false in describing the behaviour of teachers. The Cronbach's alpha for the teacher commitment scale was .68.

An authoritarian leadership was defined as the behaviour of a head teacher who is rigid, inflexible, domineering, very strict, ruled with an iron hand, monitored and supervised teachers very closely, and prohibited teachers freedom to act on the basis of their professional judgement (Tarter, Bliss, and Hoy, 1989). Respondents rated the authoritarian leadership behaviour of a head teacher on a 4-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). The Cronbach's alpha for the authoritarian behaviour scale was .61.

A head teacher's supportive behaviour was defined as behaviour aimed at channelling, releasing, and directing teachers' energy towards performance of school tasks (Tarter, Bliss and Hoy, 1989). Participants rated, on a Likert-type four point scale, the extent to which the item described a head teacher's supportive leadership behaviour. The Cronbach's alpha for the supportive behaviour scale was .58.

Results

The purpose of this study was to explore relationships between the leadership behaviour of a head teacher and teacher commitment to work. The first hypothesis proposed that a head teacher's authoritarian leadership behaviour would be inversely correlated to teacher commitment to work. As expected, the hypothesis was confirmed, Table 1 shows that a head teachers's authoritarian leadership behaviour was inversely correlated with teacher commitment to work, although not significant statistically ($R = -.16$). In short, the higher the head teacher's authoritarian leadership behaviour, the lower the level of teacher commitment to work.

The second hypothesis predicted that the head teacher's supportive leadership behaviour would be positively correlated with teacher commitment to work. As expected, the hypothesis was confirmed by the data. As Table 1 indicates, supportive leadership behaviour was significantly and positively correlated with teacher commitment to work ($R = .38$). In other words, the higher the head teacher's supportive behaviour, the higher the level of teacher commitment to work.

Table 1

Means, Standard Deviations, And Zero Order Correlation

	Authoritarian	Supportive	Mean	STD
Authoritarian	-	-	2.36	0.67
Supportive	-.33*	-	2.53	0.63
Commitment	-.16	.38**	2.80	0.53

Notes

N of cases = 82; 1 - tailed signif: * $p < .01$, ** $p < .001$ Authoritarian 1 (strongly disagree), 4 (strongly agree). Supportive leadership Behaviour: 1 (never), 4 (all the time) Commitment to Work 1 (definitely false), 4 (definitely true)

Regression Analysis

The relationship between variables may be a consequence of their relationship with a third or more variables. To resolve this problem, a secondary analysis was conducted to explore variables likely to influence teacher commitment to work. It was necessary to first identify the group effect of the independent variables on teacher commitment to work, and later to isolate them. In determining the group effect of the independent variables on teacher commitment to work, multiple regression analysis was conducted. As table 2 indicates, the independent variables loaded in this equation had a significant influence on teacher commitment: They explained about 37% (multiple $R = .61$) of the variance on teacher

commitment to work. Of the eleven independent variables, teacher qualification, location of the school, quality of teaching materials and facilities, and the head teachers's supportive behaviour had significant influence on teacher commitment to work.

Table 2
Summary of the Regression of Perceived Teacher Commitment

Independent Variables	B	SE B	BETA	t for B	P
Quality of Housing	1.7342	0.04556	4.2987	0.0380	.9697
Gender	-0.1333	-0.1070	-0.1259	-1.2450	.2171
Qualification	0.4256	0.1372	0.3394	3.1020	.0028
Gener. Manag	-0.02967	0.0662	0.0531	-0.4480	.6668
Location	-0.2507	0.1211	-0.2323	-2.0700	.0421
Directive Behaviour.	-0.1199	-0.0861	0.1519	-1.3920	.1882
Age	-0.0371	-0.1632	.0342	-0.2280	.8206
Facil./Mater.	0.1607	0.0763	0.2711	2.0990	.3094
Supportive behaviour	0.1927	0.1006	0.2291	1.9150	.0591
Quality of water	-0.0651	0.0512	-0.1662	-1.2700	.2083
Teaching Exp.	0.17404	0.1693	0.1584	1.0280	.3076
Multiple R	0.61149				
R Square	0.37392				
Adjusted R Square	0.27554				
Standard Error	0.45310				

Analysis of Variance

	DF	SS	MS	F	SIG F
Regression	11	8.58283	.78026	3.80	.001
Residual	71	14.37068	.20530		

That these variables have a positive influence on teacher commitment to work is not surprising. Indeed, an unqualified teacher¹ is likely to be less committed to work than a qualified one because the former does not have the professional teaching qualifications. Likewise, poor accommodation, teaching materials and facilities, and a dull social life in rural areas are likely to negatively impact on teacher commitment to work. Teachers would rather work with a head teacher who is supportive and considerate than one who is professionally inflexible.

After identifying the independent variables that seem to have a significant influence on teacher commitment to work, and to explore the effect of the variables independent of the others, a series of partial correlation analyses were conducted. The head teacher's supportive behaviour appeared to have the highest significant influence on teacher commitment to work (beta = 0.31), followed by teacher qualification (beta = 0.29), quality of teaching materials (beta = 0.22), and location of the school (beta = -0.21). These four variables together explained about 32% (multiple R = .56) of the variance on teacher commitment to work.

1 *An unqualified teacher is one who has no professional teaching qualifications. Such a teacher may, for instance, have a degree but no teaching qualifications.*

Table 3
Coefficients of Partial Correlations and Beta Weights
Indicating Relative Importance of Some Independent
Variables Influencing Teacher Commitment

Independent Variables	Teacher Commitment				
	B	SE B	Beta	t for B	P
1.Teaching Materials	.1331	.0649	0.2246	2.0480	.0439
2.Supportive Leadership	.2569	.0885	0.3054	2.9030	.0048
3.Teacher Qualifications	.3636	.12.39	0.2899	2.9330	.0044
4.School Location	-.2286	..1120	-.2119	-2.0400	.0448
(constant)	1.6841	.3591		4.6890	.0000

Discussion

As this was an exploratory study based on a convenient sample, the results should be interpreted with caution. Moreover, the views in the present study were based on people's perceptions which may not be a true representation of reality in the schools. With these disclaimers, the results of the present study cannot be generalised beyond the group from which data were generated.

Nevertheless, all the hypotheses posited in the present study were confirmed by the data. As this study has shown, the head teacher's supportive leadership behaviour seems to have a positive effect on teacher commitment. This finding concurs with earlier research conducted in other countries. McKague's (1968) study in Canada found that teachers preferred working with a principal who was concerned with all aspects of

the school, who took an interest in what they were doing, and involved them in what is going on in the school. Tarter, Bliss and Hoy (1989) in the United States of America found that patterns of a principal's supportive leadership behaviour and teacher behaviour worked together to ensure teacher commitment. In this study, nearly 20% of the variance in teacher trust was attributed to the head teacher's supportive leadership behaviour.

On the other hand, the head teacher's authoritarian leadership behaviour seems to be inversely related to teacher commitment to work. The higher the directive behaviour of a head teacher, the lower the teacher commitment to work. Teachers are professionals and the nature of their work requires a certain degree of autonomy, self-motivation, self-direction, and creativity.

Although effective head teachers initiate action, enforce rules and regulations, supervise and evaluate teachers, they do not jeopardise the integrity of teachers and are not autocratic. A head teacher who enforces rules and regulations in a manner that enhances teacher commitment to work is not necessarily an autocrat. Indeed, teachers want rules and regulations to reduce job uncertainty, but they resent excessive negative supervision and the tight enforcement of those rules (Hoy, Newland, and Blazovsky, 1977).

Research elsewhere has also found that authoritarian leadership behaviour is inversely related to teacher commitment. Hoy, Tarter and Forsyth's (1978) study in the United States of America found that the authoritarian behaviour of a principal was inversely related to teacher loyalty. Conlye, Bacharach and Bauer's (1989) study also in the United States of America found that teachers with infrequent contact with supervisors and who received less positive supervision had higher levels of career dissatisfaction than those who had frequent contact with supervisors and had more positive supervision. These researchers also found that lack of appreciation of teachers' activities and a critical attitude toward teachers were important factors in explaining teacher dissatisfaction.

Provision of adequate instructional facilities and materials in classrooms is an important element to teacher commitment to work which in turn enhances student learning. We cannot expect teachers to be committed to their work if the tools for doing the work are not available. Indeed, teachers' comfort and ease of operation in school is vital to the overall output of a school (Ministry of Education, Swaziland, 1986). Research shows that availability of teaching facilities influences students' learning (Arriagada, 1983; Heyneman and Loxley, 1983). Likewise, availability of textbooks and reading materials increase student achievement and raises the quality of learning (Heyneman and Jamison, 1980; Lockheed, 1986; Psacharopoulos and Woodhall, 1985).

Within the Swaziland context, the 1986 school mapping exercise (Ministry of Education, 1986) found that one out of every 1,200 children at the secondary level had no proper sitting facilities in class. Such students used stones, empty tins, blocks or tree planks as seats. Also, this study found that over 2,400 students in secondary schools had no desks or tables on which to write. Instead, they resorted to bending on the floor, or use their knees as desks. On the availability of textbooks, the study found that over 3,000 students in secondary schools had no individual textbooks.

Further research needs to be conducted before attempts are made to manipulate the variables explored in the present study to improve teacher commitment to work and quality of teaching materials and facilities.

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