School leadership role reflections: teachers living with HIV/AIDS

Zvisinei Moyo

Department of Educational Leadership and Management, Faculty of Education, University of Johannesburg, South Africa

Abstract

Introduction: Good leadership has become recognized as important requirement within all sectors addressing human immunodeficiency virus (HIV)/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS)-related issues, as the epidemic approaches its fourth decade. The study aimed to explore the school leadership role reflections in the context of teachers living with HIV/AIDS.

Material and methods: To obtain qualitative data, narrative inquiry rooted in a social constructivism paradigm was used, along with narrative interviews. Theoretical framework was made up of transformational leadership and ethics of care theories. Data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis method.

Results: Key findings showed that South African school principals face several management challenges, resulting directly from of HIV/AIDS-related issues concerning teachers living with HIV/AIDS who lack support to deal with the challenges. There is need to empower principals' knowledge and skills to deal with the challenges faced by HIV/AIDS-positive teachers.

Conclusions: Department of Education should establish a support structure providing principals with a forum to share experiences and access support. Further research is necessary to conduct among school principals to determine the leadership and management strategies, which empower principals to deal with managerial challenges in the context of HIV/AIDS amongst teachers.

Introduction

As the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV)/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) epidemic reaches its fourth decade, effective leadership is increasingly regarded as a critical necessity within all sectors addressing HIV/AIDS-related challenges [1]. In sub-Saharan Africa, HIV/AIDS has long been regarded as a major evil and the cause of unprecedented human suffering that has yet to show any signs of abating. In South Africa, human lives are lost to HIV/AIDS every day, while limited improvement in the management and perception of HIV/AIDS is not sufficient to control the disease's ever-worsening spread. Despite improvement in the prevention and treatment measures since the start of the pandemic, stigmatization and discrimination continue to haunt those affected and infected by HIV/AIDS. HIV transmission is still widely associated with people's lifestyles and moral values. In South Africa, voluntary and

Address for correspondence: Zvisinei Moyo, Department of Educational Leadership and Management, Faculty of Education, University of Johannesburg, PO Box 524, Kingsway Campus, Auckland Park 2006, South Africa, phone: +27-785-627-722, e-mail: zvisinei.moyo@gmail.com

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free HIV counselling and testing are essential in shattering stigma around HIV/AIDS and breaking the associated taboo. The government urges everyone to get tested for HIV; if many individuals do so, even if they are not sick, this will contribute to a reduction in stigma related to testing. Additionally, if a person learns about HIV-positive status at an earlier stage of the infection, there are medications available, which attempt to prevent the virus from multiplying in the body. Even though these medications do not treat HIV/AIDS, they can prolong health of those infected.

It is now commonly acknowledged that leadership has a significant role in determining how effective a school is [2-4]. Since principals should set an example, it is critical they comprehend how to affect every stakeholder involved in the South African education system's organizational structure. Since the current situation has altered the way of working between local school districts and schools, the function of principals has evolved gradually. As a result, some tasks that were formerly managed by district office are now managed by school. Eventually, this de-centralization of accountability has resulted in principals' roles being more expansive. The fact that schools now bear the main responsibility of providing education, is one of the biggest changes. Therefore, the growth of principals' duties is the ultimate result of de-centralizing responsibility.

The school system is becoming increasingly complex, thus, principals must demonstrate distinctive leadership. Bush [2] reported that school leaders need to understand the importance of efficient management of schools and handling education-related issues. It is therefore vital that principals employ creativity in their leadership strategies. They must enhance their capability to adapt to the change of circumstances, and keep abreast of new contexts in a transformed South Africa. Accordingly, it will be necessary for school leaders to understand their own competence levels and to realize how they can develop themselves to be efficient leaders. They must recognize how special their circumstances are, and only then will individuals be able to use the range of abilities, qualities, and skills at their disposal to take suitable action for their circumstances [5].

Reiterating how principals' duties are evolving is crucial, especially considering their primary responsibility as community leaders. Schools play a major function in identifying and supporting teachers, who are infected with or affected by HIV/AIDS [6]. It is imperative for principals to acknowledge the requirement of improving their skills and increasing productivity inside their schools. As transformational leaders, principals embraced new and exciting roles in response to the constantly evolving nature of education. They apply their expertise to forge new paths both inside and outside the school system [7]. Their evolving positions require the highest level of innovation [8]. The focus is to discover how principals should manage problems faced by HIV/AIDS-positive teachers and what are the complications for school leadership.

A narrative inquiry design situated within the qualitative research, supported by constructivist paradigm principles was used to answer the following research question: What are the school leadership challenges that principals face in the context of teachers living with HIV/AIDS? Through purposive sampling, ten principal participants were chosen to obtain data via narrative interviews. This study was framed within the transformational leadership and ethics of care theories. The theoretical framework supporting this study was presented in the next section, followed by a review of relevant literature. Subsequently, the study design, methodology, findings, and discussion were presented, and the study was concluded.

Theoretical framework

Transformational leadership and ethics of care were employed in this study. Two theories formed the framework for articulating the research problem and for data producing and analyzing, and discussing the results. Transformational leadership was selected because it offers followers a compelling vision by acting as a strong, trusted role model [9]. The way in which HIV/AIDS-infected teachers see their situation influences their capacity to lead with empathy and the degree to which principals are willing to support them in overcoming these challenges. Principals can establish a supportive environment for teachers living with HIV/AIDS because they are leaders, who take individual needs into consideration [10]. This makes it perfect for the new paradigm that requires principals to perform more than just carry out their assigned responsibilities; they also need to become deeply involved in sensitive HIV/AIDS-related matters. Several scholars agreed that transformational leadership is inclusive, and that high productivity is associated with job satisfaction and an environment, where employees are seen as valuable contributors to the success of the entire organization (e.g., [7, 11]). The basic principle of transformational leadership is the belief that decisions are made by consensus and problems are resolved by agreement [9]. Everyone in the organization must be involved in the transformational leadership approach to have any potential value in managing HIV/AIDS. By focusing on higher goals and values, such as liberty, justice, peace, and humanitarianism, instead of negative feelings, including fear, greed, jealously, and hatred, leaders aim to elevate the consciousness of their followers [12].

Notwithstanding, the normative style of transformational leadership approach has been considered appropriate, since it leverages several techniques, which see subordinates as important contributors to the success of organization [13]. According to Bush [9], the objectives are to provide individualized support, set an example of best practices and significant organizational principles, show that high performance standards are expected, create a positive school climate, and establish mechanisms, which encourage students' involvement in decision-making. Under the premise that supporters follow leaders who inspire them and that leaders care about their subordinates, the transformational leadership encourages leaders to inspire a collective vision

by constantly bringing enthusiasm and energy into their interactions [2]. According to Noddings [14], the ethics of care highlights the importance of caring relationships to human existence and consciousness. Because caring is a basic human need, it should therefore serve as a foundational concept for ethical decision-making [14-16].

The ethics of care, according to Ratliff [16], is a normative ethical theory that establishes what constitutes acceptable and unacceptable behaviors. The ethics of care approach, rooted in responsiveness, relatedness, and receptivity, should be the foundation of caring [17]. According to Noddings [14], caring connections are fundamental to human existence and consciousness, and involve two parties: the carer and the person receiving care. The ethics of care theory places a strong emphasis on the kind of relationships that would allow individuals to co-exist happily from diverse cultural backgrounds [16]. Taking care of HIV/AIDS-positive teachers is the principal's responsibility. The ethics of care contends that human beings require care to survive, addressing issues of oppression and abandonment that occur in daily life. Basically, to pursue their diverse interests, all people require care and depend on one another. Educators who are HIV/AIDS-positive, require special attention. Consequently, the two theories presuppose those principals in their capacity as leaders to establish a nurturing atmosphere, in which teachers living with HIV/AIDS feel free to reveal expectations grounded in relationships of trust and compassion.

Impact of HIV/AIDS-infected teacher on school leadership

In the context of teachers living with HIV/AIDS, there is still a lot to learn about the reflections of the school leadership position. However, there is a substantial corpus of studies to draw from. Principals have a significant role in how effective schools are. But when it comes to putting official rules into practice, school leaders must abandon autocracy [2]. They are positioned carefully, enabling them to significantly aid in the grassroots prevention of HIV/AIDS in schools [6]. The issues faced by school principals when dealing with teachers who are HIV/AIDS positive are not well understood. This study brought to the fore unknown information about the school leadership role elections.

Evidence from research conducted by numerous researchers has revealed that school principals play a crucial role in the successful development of the schools they lead (e.g., [18-25]). They are the major players in enabling school effectiveness as well as setting the school tone and working climate [4]. Evans and Mendez Acosta [26] and Hallinger [27] have conducted comparable research on the effectiveness of schools in developing countries, concluding that strong school leadership is essential for the success and efficacy of schools. School principals have the potential to mitigate effects of HIV/AIDS on teachers [3, 18, 19, 28]. In South Africa, principals need to improve their existing leadership and management skills to address challenges posed by HIV/AIDS. Ndlovu and Potokri [6] indicated that

a particular form of leadership is required to enable school leaders to function in the face of the HIV/AIDS crisis. As a result, educational institutions must contribute to the fight against HIV/AIDS. As leaders are currently carrying out their duties in several of HIV/AIDS-related challenges and complications, schools are expected to take the lead. It is still very difficult to deal with sensitive topics related to HIV/AIDS, particularly the stigmatization of and discrimination against teachers, who are infected or affected by the virus.

The absence of support for the implementation of policies poses challenges for school leaders. Since teachers are responsible adults, it is important to gently discuss these topics with them. Since they have already too much of burden to carry, principals' requirement for sensitivity may function as a barrier to their willingness to support teachers. When it comes to decision-making and achieving changes in schools, principals have the most influence [23, 24]. Furthermore, Bass and Bass [10] showed that the quality of leadership is frequently regarded as the main factor influencing the success or downfall of organizations. Consequently, the effectiveness of the whole school programme is significantly impacted by school leadership. But to spread knowledge about HIV/AIDS, principals must modify their institutions. Teachers address the misconceptions and false assumptions that the community has regarding HIV/AIDS.

It is imperative for principals to cultivate a leadership culture pertaining to HIV/AIDS-related issues. Given that formal education is considered the main source of community information, school principals face a huge task in helping to eradicate the taboo around HIV/AIDS [6, 29, 30]. Principals have a significant role in the effectiveness of their schools. But when it comes to putting official rules into practice, school leaders must abandon autocracy [2, 19-21]. They are positioned carefully to enable them to significantly aid in the grassroots prevention of HIV/AIDS in schools.

When trying to coordinate and supervise school-based HIV/AIDS committees, principals are essential in developing leadership abilities. Relationships built on reciprocal support and encouragement have the power to transform followers into leaders and to transform leaders into moral beings [2]. School principals not only play a critical role in fulfilling social expectations, but have also been called ambassadors for change in education. Despite this, Cheng [28] stated that principals have no control over many crucial components needed to assist school progress. School leadership in South Africa has undergone remarkable transformation. Changing South Africa's education system depends on a vision for the transformation of the day-to-day realities of people working within the system [13]. Therefore, approaches based on moral foundations and keeping teachers informed about the goals of the school are ideal for principals to use.

However, because more individuals have access to helpful HIV/AIDS prevention, diagnosis, therapeutic care, and antiretroviral therapy (ART), most HIV/AIDS patients are now manageable chronic health conditions [31]. ART has been shown to reduce HIV transmission and save lives. Suc-

cessful care and support services run by the school administration seem to be what is needed. For teachers living with HIV/AIDS to achieve their responsibilities as educators, they too require a great deal of care and support. Because of this, school administrators need to possess additional abilities, which are rarely included in courses on educational leadership and management. A study revealed that, despite substantial evidence that HIV/AIDS has become a major cause of negative impacts on various aspects of school life, not enough studies have been done in South Africa on school leadership [30]. Therefore, this research was necessary because HIV remains prevalent, and is still a massive problem.

Material and methods

The school leadership role reflections were examined in the context of teachers living with HIV/AIDS using a narrative inquiry, founded in qualitative research to address the research question. When examining people's behaviors, emotions, and experiences in relation to a certain occurrence, qualitative methods are employed [32]. As stated by Lichtman [33], nothing in a qualitative researcher's careful approach to description is overlooked or taken for granted. Qualitative research can shed light on underrepresented, stereotyped, and unknown populations. It can also reveal a tale that not many people are aware of [34].

The decision to select the narrative inquiry was based on its appropriateness for investigations into subjective and perceived experiences [35]. Because narrative inquiry provides a rich range of meanings, it is essential to human social life [36]. One approach with complete access to the lives and experiences of research participants is through narrative inquiry. The author stayed committed to being sensitive to ethical issues with principal participants, supporting his moral integrity [35]. Huber *et al.* [37] emphasize that narrative inquiry gives voice to the experiences of marginalized individuals, whose voices are often unheard. The basis of the study was the social constructivist paradigm, which is well-known for its central claim that knowledge is socially constructed. Qualitative research methods are developed in the social sciences to enable researchers to study social and cultural phenomena [38].

Sampling and site selection

In this research study, data were obtained from ten purposefully selected principals of schools in the Gauteng province of South Africa. Cohen, Manion, and Morrison [39] emphasized that in purposeful sampling, researchers carefully choose participants, whom they feel have the greatest potential to yield information rich enough to satisfy their requirements. Purposive sampling facilitates the in-depth interpretation of data sources, which are systematically selected [40]. Hence, ten principals were chosen on the basis that they were information-rich [38]. The nature of the research was aligned to purposive sampling that lends greater depth into the study.

Data collection

Narrative interviews extract lived experiences and produce stories with a distinct structure, social interaction, and temporal unfolding, therefore, they are used to collect data [41]. Semi-structured interviews were conducted face-to-face with each participant. The author related to the participants with consideration, sensitivity and genuineness, establishing a good rapport and ensuring trust to facilitate relaxed communication [39]. Freda *et al.* [42] demonstrated that the power of narrative interview is its capacity to extract the distinct understandings and implicit knowledge, which are ingrained in and serve as the foundation for the stories we tell. The goal is to substantiate broad claims by drawing inferences from small but highly detailed facts [34]. The author interacted with participants in a relationship within which, data were extracted from them by virtue of shared humanity. Interview questions were sufficiently open-ended to allow participants to narrate their own stories fully. Interviews were distributed over a scheduled timeframe, and they were done more than once. Participants' views, ideas, beliefs, and attitudes about the management of challenges regarding teachers living with HIV/AIDS were explored.

Data analysis

Qualitative content analysis method was employed to analyze data. All primary narrative interviews were digitally recorded, and then verbatim transcribed. Verbatim transcripts were numbered line by line, while data were coded using process, descriptive, and emotion codes. Themes were developed through clustering the codes into categories [43]. The forms provided insights into the school challenges faced by principals in the context of teachers living with HIV/AIDS.

Trustworthiness

In an endeavor to achieve trustworthiness in this study, Tracy's [44] model for qualitative research was used. Written consent from each participant was obtained, and the obligation to protect them throughout the research and thereafter was honored [45]. Records, including raw data, analysis records, and data reduction used in the study as well as the author's personal attitudes regarding these over time, were properly documented. Verbatim transcripts were numbered line by line. Self-reflexive commentary on feelings and meaning making were done [46]. There was enough time spent with interviewees to access tacit knowledge [44]. In addition, participants with first-hand experience were sampled [40].

Ethical considerations

The University of South Africa's College of Education Research Ethics Committee accepted an application for ethical clearance. Following the study's acceptance by the Research

Ethics Committee, the Gauteng Department of Education granted approval via an application form outlining the objectives, research schedule, and proposed data collection methods. Subsequently, permission was obtained to access principals and their respective schools. Declarations of consent, which guaranteed anonymity, voluntary participation, and freedom to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence, were signed by participants. Duplicate copies of data were saved on an external hard drive and a flash drive, while the original data was preserved on a password-protected personal computer. Data were carefully handled, and participants' privacy and anonymity were maintained throughout the study.

Results and discussion

The study aimed to explore the school leadership role reflections in the context of teachers living with HIV/AIDS. The findings of the study were presented in themes: 1) HIV/AIDS-related issues complicate school leadership; 2) principals are expected to model effective leadership; and 3) schools as centers of community life. The findings were discussed in relation to the previously provided theoretical framework and literature review.

Theme 1: HIV/AIDS-related issues complicate school leadership

There were similarities on the views, perspectives, and comments expressed by the principals about the school leadership challenges they experience in the context of teachers living with HIV/AIDS. Noddings [14] asserted that it is a threatening experience when people who need care are treated as they do not exist. Moreover, Tian and Huber [8] reported that the increasing range of the complexity of leadership and management responsibilities in schools means that it is no longer possible for the principals to be sole leaders. They cannot avoid the responsibility because they are in charge. Whether on purpose or accidentally, teachers bring their problems to the classroom [30]. There is no training for the principals to deal with HIV/AIDS-related issues.

The principal participants indicated that they were aware of their roles regarding teachers living with HIV/AIDS under their jurisdiction. One of the principals stressed out the following:

"*It is good when principals are placed on a pedestal. They must act; accordingly, they must act. They do not have to abdicate the responsibility to themselves. I enhance [their] position as principal; it educates people to trust. If I do not act, people get disappointed.*"

The teachers look up to principals, and this places certain responsibilities on principals. In addition, Bush [2] asserted that leaders are expected to ground their actions in clear personal and professional values. School principals are assigned the task of handling sensitive issues, including HIV/AIDS amongst their teachers. As noted by Evans and Mendez

Acosta [26], school principals are essential to the prosperous growth of the schools they lead. Despite their complaints about the pressure involved, the interviewed principals acknowledged that they were expected to provide direction to schools in their capacity as leaders. One principal expressed the following sentiments:

"*Society ascribes roles to us, even in health. Society assumes that teachers are good. It has made the teachers to be secretive to keep the good image. As role models, they are put in a situation whereby they are regarded as pure, healthy, and innocent. They are custodians of knowledge. It will be awkward to see teachers selling vegetables; society has its own expectations from teachers. It would not be appropriate for teachers to come out about their HIV status.*"

The expectations placed on teachers by society increase their feelings of inferiority when they discover that they are HIV/AIDS-positive. This negative impact on teachers impedes their ability to fulfil meaningful roles in education. Once more, the above responses showed that the principals are worried about the health of their teachers. It is impossible to overstate the amount of work principals apply to assist their teachers. Their actions were consistent with the care ethics principle, which states that the person providing care should show motivational displacement and engrossment, and the person receiving care should show some sort of response [17]. The principal's leadership and/ or management responsibilities include a caring role [4]. Consequently, Noddings [14] suggested engrossment, which is the process of thinking about other people to comprehend them deeply. In this context, Bush [2] acknowledged that the principal's responsibilities include providing individualized support, setting an example of the best and most significant original values, exhibiting high performance standards, fostering a positive work environment, and creating a framework that encourages parental involvement in school decision-making. Traditionally, in contrast to this current trend, principals used to follow the Department of Education's instructions without much initiative expected from them. Principals' roles have shifted to coordinating, planning, directing, delegating, communicating, and motivating [12]. Although principals are responsible and accountable for everything that happens in their schools, they cannot do it alone. Nevertheless, a principal can make or break his/her school, and is accountable for all failures and conflicts [10].

Theme 2: Principals are expected to model effective leadership

Proponents of the transformational leadership approach have produced a list of actions, which are invaluable to school principals in dealing effectively with their subordinates: the cultivation of charisma/inspiration/vision, development of goal consensus, and provision of intellectual stimulation [9]. As stated by Noddings [14], we consider other people's needs, expectations, and points of view when providing care for them. In addition, Bush and Anania [13] stated that leaders must consider all aspects of their subordinates' lives,

including their physical health as well as their emotional and intellectual growth. In their responses, the principals indicated that they were aware of being regarded as role models:

> "*I have felt the extra load, but it is exceedingly difficult to pull away. I am prepared to go an extra mile, although the government does not pay for that. We need to go out of our way. Society perceives principals as having answers to the HIV/AIDS issues. I know there are responsibilities laid on principals because of their role model status. We cannot retreat. Leadership is especially important in influencing people to understand HIV/AIDS issues.*"

There is evidence of the principals' commitment to take on their status as role models. Principals feel overwhelmed by their increased responsibilities, but acknowledge they cannot avoid them. As the literature reveals, principals need to inspire their school communities to keep informed about the changes caused by HIV/AIDS, in addition to setting an example of effective leadership behavior for teachers [24]. Teachers can be motivated to concentrate on shared objectives by their principals [18]. Beginning with organization to leadership, principals make sure that their schools function smoothly [28]. Teachers are accustomed to regard their principals as key players. However, since HIV/AIDS became a concern, they have had to be more approachable and compassionate for the purpose to foster an atmosphere where teachers feel comfortable sharing their status. It is agreed upon by Ndlovu and Potokri [6] that democratic, participatory, and consultative methods are promoted in schools.

In this study, the principals described increases in their workloads due to the existence of HIV/AIDS amongst their teachers, as mentioned by one principal:

> "*I am prepared to take extra load of my demanding job to help teachers with their personal problems. They look up to me, I know, but then if they do not disclose, then how they can get help. They choose to keep quiet until they die. I even approach them personally to no avail.*"

The principals are willing to take on the necessary extra duties and feel betrayed when teachers fail to disclose their status. The literature repeatedly reported that principals, in their capacity as leaders, have a duty to acknowledge the issue of HIV/AIDS, and address it with the same commitment and care that they give other aspects of school life [23]. Bush [2] observed that good leadership and management is displayed by someone who is an analytical person and manages conflicts. Given that caring is a fundamental human need, it ought to be the fundamental basis of ethical decision-making [15]. In this context, one of the principal participants shared the following explanation:

> "*I have the responsibility of protecting teachers, but I cannot explain to other school management team members and teachers. I even protect teachers who have not disclosed to me because I know how they feel. Those extra duties are part of my responsibilities. Everything starts with me and ends with me, as a leader. I must help teachers to do their work effectively.*"

These comments exposed an empathic and caring attitude towards teachers living with HIV/AIDS. The principal has a responsibility to protect teachers and cannot discuss the issues openly, regardless of whether teachers disclose their status. The ethics of care emphasizes the significance of caring connections to human existence and consciousness, as noted by Noddings [14]. Teachers come from diverse social backgrounds. They speak multiple languages, have been raised in diverse cultural contexts, and are members of many traditions. As a result, it is principal's responsibility to establish an organizational culture, where all participants understand and uphold the same standards and values, and share the same vision [10]. An organizational culture that treats all its members equally can be used by principals [19]. To compensate for the extra roles that HIV/AIDS has forced them to assume, they require assistance. Not every principal has the knowledge and experience needed to complete this enormous undertaking. The literature confirmed that determine how best to influence mind-sets and perspectives is important, and the bottom line is that HIV/AIDS will continue to exist until a cure is found.

Theme 3: Schools as centers of community life

School principals have been referred to as torch bearers for change in education as well as major community role players [4]. The ethics of care theory speaks to the primal human fears regarding oppression and abandonment, stressing that human beings need care for survival [47]. The transformational leadership shows that the ability of leaders to change followers depends on the acceptability of the leader's own behavior as well as the ability to stimulate their followers intellectually [10].

The literature reported that principals can empower their teachers. Stronge and Xu [25] suggested that school leadership and management ought to be supportive, rather than dictatorial. The data revealed that teachers look up to principals, whose duty is to support their subordinates. One principal declared the following:

> "*My duties incline me to counsel, support, and advice. I have known teachers get some sigh of relief after they disclose to me. Teachers look up to me. I am not disappointed; I have been always available. I have led health discussions, which have led to the acquiring of first aid kit boxes to help in case of injuries.*"

The principals revealed that there are limits to how much support a principal can provide. Government policies unambiguously support care and assistance for teachers living with HIV/AIDS in addition to promoting inclusion [6]. This is in line with the ethics of care approach, as discussed by Koggel and Orme [17] that compelling moral salience is essential to attending and meeting needs of others. Principals have no option but to be initiative-taking and deal with the situation.

The principals are expected to provide quality education despite absent, sick, and demotivated teachers. Moreover, although principals are not experts on health issues, teachers expect them to provide solutions to their problems, as indicated by one of the principals:

"Teachers look up to me. Although I am not an expert in health issues, I apply my basic knowledge. I delegate teachers according to their strengths. I cannot avoid duty of advising and supporting. My duties are overlapping as compared with what principals used to do. I must do that, so that teachers can be able to perform their duties. If I take a back seat, then the unity falls apart."

Moyo and Perumal [30] described the best approach to HIV/AIDS-related issues in the workplace as requiring integrated strategy based on understanding and assessment of the impact of HIV/AIDS. School leaders need to possess some knowledge of HIV/AIDS, so that they can help their teachers.

The principals also indicated, however, that teachers need to take responsibility for their health and lifestyle choices, as the government has played its part, as conveyed by one participant:

"There have been rigorous campaigns to inform people about HIV/AIDS. It will be improper to expect more than what the government has offered. Teachers must try their best; they must take full responsibility of their health. I do not mind pastoral duty for the teachers because it is part of my job description. But I do not have to mother the teachers. I do not have to care for teachers at work. I cannot lower their duties because they are sick. They must be productive; they cannot expect other teachers to work for them."

The above sentiments revealed a long-standing trend of time of asking the teachers living with HIV/AIDS to realize that they have a role to play, and cannot simply expect principals to solve their problems. The principals expressed their willingness and ability to behave positively towards the teachers living with HIV/AIDS. From the perspective of transformational leadership approach, leaders have the potential to exert influence on surrounding conditions and transform them to achieve performance goals [12]. Furthermore, Gilligan [47] emphasized the importance of empathy and moral development in caring. Thus, many scholars agree that principals have the power to make or break the schools they lead, meaning they bear the responsibility for any mishaps and disputes that arise [18-25]. Principals' perceptions depict commitment to play a part in addressing concerns related to HIV/AIDS, and their positions have an impact on change. Similarly, school principals have the power to start initiatives that turn their schools into information-sharing platforms and front-runners in HIV/AIDS advocacy. Other researchers concluded that a specific kind of leadership is necessary for schools to serve as centers of care and support. Considering the HIV/AIDS situation, school principals can take appropriate precautions.

Limitations

The study was limited to the Gauteng province only, aiming to achieve an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon and not to obtain a general perspective. The research brought to light useful information on school leadership role reflections in the context of teachers living with HIV/AIDS, which could be useful in similar contexts. A larger sample, including other geographical areas, could have yielded a much wider spectrum.

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to explore the leadership role reflections of principals regarding teachers living with HIV/AIDS. The empirical findings were mostly consistent with the literature. Therefore, conclusion can be drawn that school principals are realizing their new roles in the face of various unprecedented challenges. With an ever-increasing number of teachers contracting HIV/AIDS, the level of absenteeism is on the rise, which causes poor academic achievement. The emergence of HIV/AIDS amongst teachers has left principals overburdened with responsibilities. This is largely because principals are not adequately equipped and trained to deal with the sensitive issues surrounding HIV/AIDS amongst teachers. The delicate nature of HIV/AIDS-related concerns necessitates individually oriented leadership approaches, such as that of transformational leadership. In South Africa, principals need to improve their existing leadership and management skills to address the challenges posed by HIV/AIDS.

This research shows that principals are faced with challenges among teachers living with HIV/AIDS, and that they need to understand their influential positions in this regard. HIV/AIDS amongst teachers has caused widespread uncertainty amongst school principals. While principals appreciate being put on pedestal, they are expected to act out and not abdicate responsibility to themselves. Principals are viewed as role models, who can go the extra mile and perform additional duties. Moreover, principals are expected to provide quality education amid absent, sick, and demotivated teachers. Principals are not superhuman beings, but individuals who have been entrusted with responsibility to manage and lead institutions. These conclusions are consistent with other researchers' findings, reporting reasonable actions that principals can take in the face of HIV/AIDS crisis to make schools as models of care and support for teachers. Teachers will trust their principals if they provide them with deep attention, take time to find out about their problems, and list them on their agenda. When teachers are cared for, their personal well-being is enhanced, which is an indispensable prerequisite for high morale.

It is evident in this research study that, although teachers do not take responsibility and disclose their status, they look up to principals for answers to their HIV/AIDS-related problems. The principal participants indicated that they were aware of their roles about teachers living with HIV/AIDS under their jurisdiction. The literature repeatedly asserts that, as school leaders, principals have an obligation to accept the challenge of HIV/AIDS, and manage it with the same responsibility and devotion as they manage other areas of school life.

Based on the research findings, the principals described increases in their workloads due to the existence of HIV/AIDS amongst their teachers. Although principals are not experts on health issues, teachers expect them to provide solutions to their problems. There are limits to how much support principals can provide. As the literature reveals, apart from modelling effective leadership behavior for teachers, principals must motivate their school communities to stay well-informed about the changes caused by HIV/AIDS. Good leadership is indispensable to deal with HIV/AIDS-related issues amongst teachers living with HIV/AIDS effectively. The literature show that school principals have been referred to as torch bearers for change in education as well as major community role players.

In their responses, the principals indicated that they face difficulties when there is no support for policy implementation. The literature report that leaders need to consider the entire spectrum of their subordinates' lives, including their physical well-being as well as emotional and intellectual development. Teachers look up to principals, which places certain responsibilities on principals. There is dire need for approaches grounded in moral foundations, such as the ethics of care theory. Change in leadership roles is vital in the context of HIV/AIDS, which requires a shift away from traditional approaches. There is need to capacitate principals' knowledge and skills to deal with the challenges faced by HIV/AIDS-positive teachers. The Department of Education should set up a support structure providing principals with a forum to share experiences and access support.

This research study confirms that principals face several managerial challenges resulting directly from HIV/AIDS-related issues pertaining to teachers living with HIV/AIDS. This qualitative study generated empirical data, facilitating a new understanding of school leadership role reflections in the context of teachers living with HIV/AIDS. This study emphasized the need for a support structure to support schools to deal with issues of teachers living with HIV/AIDS. A stakeholder involvement is indispensable to completely resolve the challenges.

It is necessary that further research be conducted with school principals to determine the leadership and management strategies, which empower principals to deal with managerial challenges in the context of HIV/AIDS amongst teachers. In this study, a small sample of school principals was employed. A larger sample, including other geographical areas, could have increased the spectrum of views and perceptions. Repetition of the same research conducted with a more representative sample of teachers from other areas of Gauteng province as well as other South African provinces, will be useful. Further research is required among school principals to determine leadership and management strategies, equipping them with necessary skills and knowledge to deal with HIV/AIDS-related issues in more effective ways.

Disclosures

1. Institutional review board statement: The University of South Africa's College of Education Research Ethics Committee accepted an application for ethical clearance. Following the study's acceptance by the Research Ethics Committee, the Gauteng Department of Education granted approval via an application form outlining the objectives, research schedule, and proposed data collection methods.
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4. Conflicts of interest: None.

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