

Unhu/Ubuntu theory as the basis of administrator-teacher relationship: A grounded theory approach

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Keywords

Unhu/Ubuntu theory
Professional good relationship
Supportive relationship
Complicated and bad relationship
Grounded theory

Article History

Received 2024-03-20

Accepted 2024-06-07

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Abstract

The teacher's functionality depends on the working environment he/she is operating in and, in some ways, depends on the relationship with the headmaster. The relationship may be due to, but not limited to, leadership styles, personalities, and other attributes of both the teacher and the school management system. Workplace relationships influence the performance of employees in any organization. This grounded theory study aims to get an understanding of the basic social processes in administrator-teacher relationships and come up with an explanation of that kind of relationship. Eleven ($n = 11$) participants in the study were all qualified teachers, teaching at the two rural-based Catholic-run schools. Data collected through interviews were audiotaped, memoed, and transcribed. The results from this study showed that teachers classified their relationship with their administrators as professional/good, complicated and bad, selective treatment, supportive and indifferent, or no relationship; and all linked to having unhu/ubuntu or lack of it. It is the recommendation of this study that administrators should be trained, and have unhu/ubuntu philosophy when dealing with their teachers and students.

INTRODUCTION

The relationship between administrators and teachers plays a crucial role in the success of any educational institution (Erturk, 2021, Khaleel, Alhosani, & Duyer, 2021, & Mulford, 2003). Research on administrator-teacher relationships has focused on professional aspects, communication, trust, and collaboration (Kolleck, Schuster, Hartmann, & Grasel, 2021). The teacher's functionality depends on the working environment he/she is operating from and that has to do with the relationship with the administration.

Administrators provide support, resources, and guidance to teachers to help them achieve their goals and improve student outcomes (Mulford, 2003). They also play a key role in creating a positive school culture that promotes collaboration and professional growth. This professional growth and collaboration between the administrator and the teachers are ideal for teachers to provide the best education for students. Research has pointed out that this is not easy and as such there is a need for all parties to work together to achieve this (Reddy, Hua, Dudek, Kettler, Arnold-Berkovits, Lekwa, Crouse, Kurz, & Hu, 2021).

Some studies have focused on the administrator-teacher relationship as based on collaboration. Parker (2019) argues that Kolleck, et. al., (2021) found that collaboration among teachers was of benefit to schools, but was not linked to having trust. The idea of having a trusting relationship

did not translate to having a collaborative working environment. The existence of a trusting relationship was dependent on reciprocity and transitivity. This is in contrast to other studies (Vangrieken, Dochy, Raes, & Kyndt, 2015) that found that teachers who collaborate have a trusting relationship. This also translates to the administrator-teacher relationship.

ADMINISTRATOR'S LEADERSHIP STYLE

Various scholars have used different terms to label the positive leadership styles practiced by the headmasters of schools that led to the creation of a good working environment. Positive relationships in educational institutions can be participatory (Huang, 2011; Koskei, Sang, & Ngeno, 2020), transformational (Khan, 2018), democratic (Zahrah, Rokhmat, & Baehaqi, 2019), instructional (Othman & Hamzah, 2023), instrumental and supportive (Huang, 2011). The administrator-teacher relationship has been articulated in terms of the leadership style employed by the headmasters.

Some studies (Koskei, et al., 2020) found that headmasters who employ a participatory leadership style are likely to have good working relationships with their teachers. Khan (2018) found that school leaders who employed a transformational leadership style created a positive school climate. The creation of a positive school environment resulted in reduced teacher stress levels. The democratic leadership style used by the headmasters resulted in a positive performance of teachers (Zahrah, et al., 2019) leading to increased productivity and efficiency in the school (Al Ulfa, Ambiyar, & Refdinal, 2019; Koskei, et al., 2020).

Headmasters who exhibited participatory, transformational, and democratic leadership styles tended to involve teachers in decision-making (Koskei, et al., 2020) and had open communication that resulted in the building of trust (Babaoglan, 2016). When teachers perceive the leadership style of their headmasters as positive, it was found that it is likely that the teachers trust their headmasters. Babaoglan (2016) also found that positive leadership behaviors of the headmasters led to an increase in teachers' level of trust in their students, colleagues, and the community at large.

The type of relationship that exists between the headmaster and teachers has an impact on students' academic achievement (Khan, Khan, Rehman, Khan, Khan, Rauf., & Yar, 2014). In that regard, the success of any institution of learning is largely influenced by the type of relationship that exists between teachers and their leaders. In addition, an instructional leadership style that may be practiced by the headmasters may lead to the motivation of teachers who will spur academic excellence in schools (Othman & Hamzah, 2023). Huang (2011) found that various leadership styles (instrumental, supportive, participative) practiced by the headmasters had a positive influence on teachers' commitment to work.

ADMINISTRATOR-TEACHER RELATIONSHIP AND UNHU/UBUNTU PHILOSOPHY

There has not been exclusively much literature found on the administrator-teacher relationship and its link to unhu/ubuntu philosophy. The available literature is on the relationship, and the type of that relationship may then be connected to the philosophy of unhu/ubuntu. A study by Osborne and Hammond (2017) found that teachers valued administrators who communicate effectively with them. Effective communication as exhibited by the administrators is evidence of a leader with unhu/ubuntu. Unhu/ubuntu philosophy has been defined differently, but the central notion is that it emphasizes the importance of community and relationships. The existence of effective communication that is clear and concise enables both the administrator and teachers to understand each other's perspectives, concerns, goals, and expectations (Ertürk, 2021).

Central to unhu/ubuntu philosophy is treating people as equally fellow human beings who deserve to be treated with warmth, dignity, empathy, respect, kindness, and understanding (Hapanyengwi-Chemhuru & Makuvaza, 2014). When administrators treat their fellow teachers with unhu/ubuntu philosophy in mind, there is likely to be the creation of oneness of humankind leading to the successful implementation of the desired goals at the institutional level. The gap in the available related literature has not shown the views or perceptions of teachers on the relationship they believe they have with their administrators.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this grounded theory is to develop an explanatory theory of basic social processes (Starks & Brown Trinidad, 2007) occurring at two rural Catholic-run high schools. The social processes relate to the relationship that exists between the Administrators of the schools and the teaching staff as seen by the teachers. In trying to understand the relationship that teachers view they have with their Administrators, the following research questions were used to guide this study:

1. How does the basic social process of the administrator-teacher relationship happen in the context of rural Catholic boarding schools?
2. What is the theory that may help explain the process of the relationship between administrators and teachers at rural Catholic boarding schools?

METHODS

Research Design

This study utilized a grounded theory research design to discover the kind of relationships between administrators and teachers by examining how they relate in a bid to develop an explanatory theory of those social processes. Grounded theorists seek to inquire and get an understanding of how social systems influence how issues are accomplished in a given environment. The research methodology is originally from sociology and is aimed at developing an explanatory theory of social processes (Mohajan & Mohajan, 2022). The theory is developed through interacting with those people who have experienced the phenomenon. The explanation that is common to participants (theory) might be "simple, new [or old], and powerful" (Age, 2011) which may be used to explain the kind of relationship that exists between teachers and administrators. The explanation given by the participants builds a theory that is grounded (Strauss & Corbin, 2007) in the views of the teachers. The theory that emerges is a substantive one focusing on explaining world processes; in this case that of the teachers.

Participants

The participants were eleven qualified teachers (6 males, 5 females) with a mean age of 40.64. The oldest teacher participant was aged 55 and the youngest was 33 years old. The teachers' experience in the profession ranged from seven years to 28 years. All the teacher participants taught at two rural Catholic high schools in the Midlands Province of Zimbabwe. Through convenience sampling (Creswell, 2007) and snowballing method, I managed to come up with my sample of 11 teachers. After identifying about three teachers through convenience sampling, the teachers then referred me to other teachers whom they felt would help in answering my research questions. The key component in selecting the participants was to make sure that all teachers were qualified and had gone to college to train as teachers. I had 11 teachers for my data analysis.

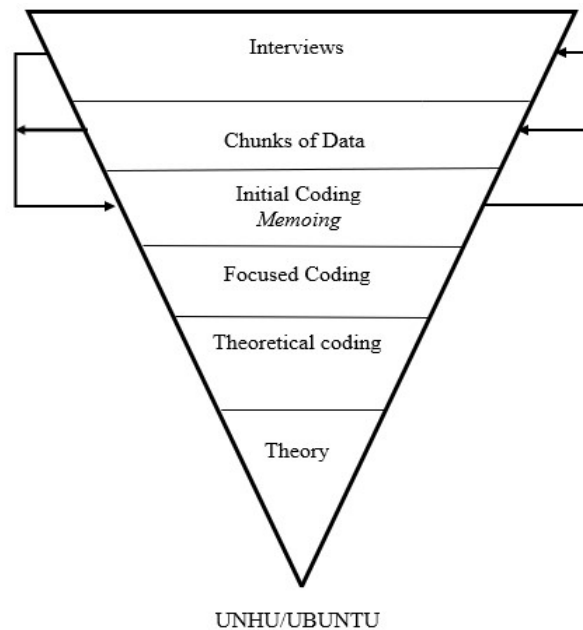
Table 1. Participant demographics

| Name | Gender | School Name | Age-group | Qualification |
|---------|--------|-------------|-----------|---------------|
| Abel | Male | School A | 30-35 | Bachelor |
| Bridget | Female | School B | 30-35 | Bachelor |
| Clive | Male | School A | 30-35 | Bachelor |
| Dorothy | Female | School B | 35-40 | Diploma |
| Eliza | Female | School A | 55-60 | Diploma |
| Faith | Female | School A | 35-40 | Bachelor |
| Gloria | Female | School A | 40-45 | Bachelor |
| Herbert | Male | School B | 35-40 | Bachelor |
| Isaac | Male | School B | 50-55 | Master |
| John | Male | School A | 35-40 | Bachelor |
| Kenneth | Male | School B | 45-50 | Bachelor |

Data Collection

In the grounded theory research approach, there is concurrent data collection and analysis (Tie, Birks, & Francis, 2019). Multiple data collection processes are intertwined with the refinement of categories and interrelationships among them (Corbin & Strauss, 2007). A core category, that is central and appears frequently in the data, must be identified and that is key to building a substantive theory. Although there are many methods of collecting data both elicited and extant, the study derived its data mainly through interviews that were done repeatedly among all participants. In grounded theory research study, the researcher or the investigator is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis and has to assume an inductive stance to derive meaning from the data. The gathering data process stopped after the researcher had reached saturation level when gathering new or additional data no longer yielded new insights or properties (Charmaz, 2006).

Data Analysis

**Figure 1.** Grounded theory research design process adopted

The study utilized the constant comparative strategy in analyzing data. Marriam and Tisdell (2016) posit that the method is widely used in all kinds of qualitative studies and is not unique only to

grounded theory research. The inductive comparative nature of data analysis in grounded theory provides a systematic strategy for analyzing any data set (Tie, et. al., 2019). Analysis of data in the grounded theory approach is done in systematic steps (Corbin & Strauss, 2007). In analyzing data, I used the constructivist genre in coding (developing categories of information) the data following three steps namely, initial coding, focused coding, and theoretical coding (Birks & Mills, 2022). The systematic process I used is depicted in Figure 1.

I engaged in the simultaneous gathering of data and analysis, which has been hailed as the hallmark of grounded theory (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021). I engaged in line-by-line coding to enable myself to understand participants' worldviews and also at the same time memoed the codes developed while posing questions I had about them. The systematic strategy of simultaneous data collection and analysis helped me focus on developing ideas (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021) about the data leading to the creation of categories and themes. This process resulted in the creation of categories rooted in data.

RESULTS

The results of the analysis of (a) interview transcripts, (b) notes from my journal, and (c) memos, yielded themes that helped me to answer the research questions on how teachers view their relationship with administrators at their schools. The description of the relationship varied greatly and as such the themes that emerged from the data analysis were: professional good relationships, complicated and bad relationships, selective treatment of teachers, supportive relationships, and indifferent or lack of any relationship. The central explanation from the analysis was of people exuding unhu/ubuntu or lack of it.

Professional Good Relationship

One theme that emerged among the participants is that teachers view their relationship with the administrators as a professional one. Owing to the nature of the closed community, since the schools are located in rural areas, the teachers consider the relationship with their administrators as having some element of being personal. The teachers were also quick to admit that they sometimes have problems, but that did not mean that they had a frosty relationship. For them, it is a kind of relationship that is expected at work. To the teachers, the relationship, although not all rosy, was good and professional, showing people "vakabva kuvanhu" [who are well groomed]. In terms of professionalism, Dorothy, at School B had this to say about the relationship with the administrators:

It's professional. I get what I want from them in time. I don't have any problem with my administrators. They create a conducive environment to teach. The administrators are professional. They are friendly ... vanhu vane unhu, who show that nesuwo takabva kuvanhu. Vanhu hamungatadzi kumaranawo ... its not always rosy.

At School B, some of the teachers described their relationship with the administrators as cordial. The teachers who stated that they view their relationship with their administrators as good and professional would always say that they do not have any problems at all. The teachers stated that one of the reasons they are still teaching at their particular schools is because of the treatment they get from their administrators. They stated that they are valued as fellow human beings. Kenneth had this to say about the way he makes meaning of the relationship with the administrators at his school:

I don't have any problems with the administration, with my supervisors. We have a cordial relationship. No problems at all. We treat each other with respect ... they regard us, me personally as a fellow human being. In fact, one factor that made me continue teaching at this school is the treatment that I get from the administrators. It is superb

Other teachers, especially those at School B said they are happy with the relationship that exists between them and their administrators. However, they admitted that like any other working environment, they might have some problems here and there. The teachers argued that those difficult moments they encounter make them stronger as a school working community. Herbert explained this:

The relationship with the administrators is ok, but as an HOD [Head of Department] sometimes you engage in fighting because if you produce a request for chemicals, sometimes they resist. Although I like them [the administrators] ... I respect them and they respect me. The relationship is fine.

Complicated and Bad Relationship

Some teachers at School A labeled their relationship with the administrators as complicated and in some cases very bad. The teachers said that the administrators victimize them for being vocal or for challenging them openly if they feel something is not being done the way it is supposed to be done. Some of the teachers complained about how the administrators ran their schools to such an extent that they victimized the teachers. In simple terms, some teachers viewed the relationship that exists with the administrators as not professional at all. Eliza had this to say about the relationship:

I think our administrators they just want someone who is subordinate ... not criticize them. Being vocal makes you unpopular. We are also human beings, and they must treat us likewise. They must have respect and see that the way they treat us, is the way we will treat them. They do not like that.

In viewing the relationship with the administrators as complicated and bad, some teachers consider that the administrators do not take them seriously when they present their problems. The teachers said that the relationship they have is not a reciprocal one, and they are tired of presenting their problems. The problems they cited had to do with the purchase of books for their use in the classroom. Gloria had this to say about this:

The purchase of textbooks is a problem and when I tell them we need books, they do not act. I think they feel it's not necessary ... or they might not have money to buy the books. It is an assumption I am making. ... so they need to talk, they need to communicate to show that we know their position.

In addition, Isaac also complained bitterly that what they ask their administrators to do is just ignored. He showed me a chalkboard (blackboard) that he asked the administrators to replace, but nothing was done. Below is the picture of the blackboard.



Figure 2. Chalkboard (blackboard) with holes used at one of the schools

The chalkboard shown above has holes and is hung with wire on a plank nailed to the wall. The teacher who took me to the classroom stated that he asked to have the chalkboard and children's desks replaced. He also stated that he asked the administrators to repair the doors to one of the classrooms but was ignored and labeled "a nuisance" and an "attention seeker."

In addition, some teachers labeled their administrators as unprofessional and did not know how to run a school. John complained that some of the "so-called" administrators were taking the school business as their own. Some of the teachers seemed to agree with him in that the administrators are no administrators since they had no qualifications at all and hence referred to them as "so-called administrators." According to these teachers, the "so-called" administrators served at the mercy of the headmaster (principal). John who teaches at School A had this to say:

These guys [so-called administrators] simply are unprofessional ... they terrorize you again and again. These are people who would go to take school business as if they were running their tuck shop. But that's with some of the guys in the administration ... at some point, you may see some undesirable elements, or some undesirable behavior being done by the so-called administrators.

Selective Treatment of Teachers

The teachers also talked about the selective treatment that is exhibited by their administrators and it is a type of relationship that they label as demoralizing. Some of the teachers stated that the treatment they get at the hands of the administrators is not fair at all as some teachers have their way while they are ignored. Isaac reminisced:

I however see some kind of segregation by the administrators like for instance if you request for materials, you are not fully backed up while others are fully backed ... different treatment of teachers. An ideal administrator must not be discriminative because of attitudes of certain teachers. We must be treated fairly. Kiss goes with favor.

Bridget also explained that her relationship with the administrators is quite complicated because of this selective treatment of teachers. She said:

They do not understand what we go through as Mathematics teachers and what we experience; the teacher-pupil relationship. They blame us for poor pass rate in Maths, not forgetting that students do not like the subject. Other subject teachers are liked because they have better pass rates than us. Selective treatment is what they do and it pains me.

Some teachers stated that although they liked working at their school, they felt that the administrators were making their stay difficult by ignoring them. The teachers stated that they would ask the administrators to have their problems solved, and would be surprised to learn that some teachers whose problems were reported later had the issues resolved first while theirs were not. According to the teachers who complained about this, it showed favoritism and selective treatment of teachers. Gloria complained saying:

I share this house with a male teacher ... we share the same bathroom. I asked them to let me share with a female teacher, but nothing has been done. The toilet is not working well right now, but I reported the issue long back and nothing was done. John who reported his problem later had his accommodation issue resolved, but I was the first to report. It is not right at all.

Selective treatment of teachers also meant that some teachers were promoted to be the deputy headmaster (deputy principal), or any other position within the administration by the sitting headmasters (principal). This alone was a source of discontent for other teachers who felt that those promoted did not have the requisite qualifications and only served or occupied those positions at the mercy of the headmaster. John explained this by calling them "so-called" administrators:

I would want to say "so-called" administrators because some of them I really believe are not qualified to be in administration. To be in administration you need to have at least a degree, especially at this school with degreed teachers. This individual in administration has a diploma and is leading degreed people ... you will not command any respect from teachers who are more qualified than you. You just need to have humility and admit that you are not qualified for the position being offered to show you have 'unhu'.

Supportive Relationship

The supportive relationship was cited by some of the teachers as the kind of relationship that exists with their administrators. The teachers stated that the administrators provided professional support as well as personal, and would go out of their way to help them enjoy their stay and work at their schools. One of the most interesting responses by the teachers was that they knew that their administrators were facing challenges but acknowledged that they were doing their best to create a supportive environment for teachers. Abel had this to say about this kind of supportive relationship:

They are [administrators] trying their best. There is nothing that we can complain about them, but yeah, it's just good. So far, I haven't encountered any problem with them, personally. They are really supportive in the face of backlash from some retrogressive elements at school. You will not support anyone if you do not have unhu..

Some teachers said that they understood that their administrators were not responsible for the scrapping of the incentive money that had cushioned them from poverty. Although this is the case, the teachers stated that the administrators are supportive in finding ways to keep their teachers motivated. Some teachers blamed the government of Zimbabwe for failing to support them and create a conducive working environment. Clive had this to say:

It's just unfortunate that the monetary incentive was scrapped off... no offense to the admins. We now have free food, free accommodation, everything ... the atmosphere is good ... generally, the administration is trying to be supportive. It is a workable environment in terms of inter-personal relations and even if you like, social needs.

One teacher stated that he wanted to transfer to another school in the urban area but realized that the administrators at the school where he wanted to go were not supportive of their teachers. Some teachers said that they would think twice if they were to transfer because the current administrators at their schools were trying their best to keep them motivated. The teachers identified the treatment they get from the administrators as one of the reasons for them not to seek transfer to another school. John commented:

Teachers do not pay any bills ... Actually, we are provided with food ... it's really motivating. ... I was actually offered a place at a sister school in the city but rejected the offer because ... the Head who is really in charge ... is a little bit hostile. She often harasses teachers. She is too strict on some issues that are not really necessary for an administrator. Because I really believe that these guys [administrators] need to be professional, or at least show compassionate feeling towards their teachers.

Indifferent/No Relationship

Very few teachers stated that they did not have any relationship with the administrators at all and labeled it as indifferent. The teachers said that they interact with their colleagues and do not want in any way to be close to the administrators. Some of the teachers said that having a relationship with the administrators would compromise their professionalism as they do not want to be seen as closer to the administrators. They claimed that the closeness might bring in favoritism and create a rift between them and other teachers who would be sidelined. Faith had this to say:

Wow, administrators. I do not interact more with administrators, but I think I have no problems with the administration. It's actually indifferent. I do receive support from colleagues because that is the reason why they agreed to team teach. Interacting with administrators will create a chasm with other colleagues, so I better stay away.

Gloria also talked about how she had stopped bothering about the relationship with the administrators because there was no relationship at all. She said that after experiencing selective treatment at the hands of the administrators, she has vowed never to be involved with the administrators and just do her job. She explained:

There is no relationship at all with the administrators. They are selective and employ divide-and-rule tactics. It's better just to do my work and ignore these administrators since they do not want to reach out to us. It's quite difficult.

DISCUSSION

Following the findings of this study; professional good, complicated and bad, selective treatment of teachers, supportive, and indifferent/no relationships; a theory grounded in the data emerged. The findings emphasized the importance of community and relationships embedded in the unhu philosophy as the basis of explaining the administrator-teacher relationship. Unhu (humanness) is a social philosophy that embodies virtues that celebrate mutual social responsibility, mutual assistance, trust, sharing, unselfishness, self-reliance, caring, and respect for others among other ethical values" (Mandova & Chingombe, 2013: 100). Unhu is a social philosophy that encourages people to treat other people as fellow humans, with respect, warmth, and dignity (Magumbate & Nyanguru, 2013). By using the Unhu/Ubuntu theory, administrators and teachers can build strong, collaborative relationships that benefit both parties and ultimately improve student outcomes (Frempong & Kadam, 2022). Human dignity in education is important as informed by unhu philosophy.

The study found that teachers regarded their relationship with the administration as professional and good. The teachers in this category considered that their relationship with the administrators was professional, cordial, and marked with mutual respect. According to the teachers, this created a conducive environment to teach as they felt valued as fellow human beings. The finding supports the findings by Musah, Rahman, Tahir, Al-Hudawi, and Daud (2017) who stated that establishing good relationships with teachers breeds teachers' trust which is crucial in sustaining school effectiveness. The headmaster's good leadership is a pillar of student academic achievement (Wahyuddin, 2017) as teachers will react positively to the teaching process.

In addition, the teachers attributed the superb treatment they get from the administrators to them being *vanhu vane unhu*. This principle and that of respect is grounded in *unhu* philosophy. According to Subramani and Biller-Andorno (2022), respect involves treating others with dignity and recognizing their inherent worth. This aspect of respecting and valuing others, while at the same time treating them with dignity, may help create a more inclusive and equitable learning environment. Subramani and Biller-Andorno's (2022) finding resonates with the finding of this study where teachers admitted that such kind of treatment breeds a workable environment to teach.

The study also found that some teachers regarded their relationship with the administration as supportive professionally. The supportive relationship was also linked to that of people or leaders valuing them through exhibiting unhu/ubuntu. Accordingly, the teachers, labelled the environment as workable and good, thus motivating them to work. The finding of supportive relationships was also revealed by the teachers as they regarded the administrators as showing compassion towards them. This finding corroborates the finding of Sorajjkool and Chhourn (2017) who stated that administrators' support to the teachers is crucial as it enhances the quality of teaching and learning. The supportive relationship also results in student academic achievement realized through increased engagement, and trust with students (Masoom, 2021).

In terms of having a supportive relationship between the administrators and the teachers, the teachers argued that one cannot be supportive or compassionate without having unhu. The finding was that the teachers regarded the administrators as having unhu for them to offer an environment that is workable and supportive. This finding resonates with the finding by Mutanga (2023) who

argued that having unhu can help reduce teacher burnout and turnover. Cruickshank and MacDonald (2018) stated that teachers are likely to stay, making a positive impact in their professions when they feel valued and supported. These are the basic tenets of unhu/ubuntu philosophy.

The study also found that some teachers characterized their relationship with their administrators as demoralizing. What demoralized the teachers was the favoritism and unfair treatment of some teachers by the administrators. The teachers stated that they are no longer committed to their work due to the demoralized conditions they are exposed to by their administrators. This finding corroborates the finding by Mupa and Chinooneka (2015) who argued that a demoralized teacher is not an effective teacher. This finding is in tandem with previous findings that found headmasters to favor some teachers while ignoring others. Further, Yariv (2011) found that some principals favored certain teachers thereby affecting the performance of other teachers.

Having teachers relate that there was no tangible relationship with the administrators was a disturbing finding of this study. Some of the teachers pointed out that they liked the fact there is no relationship with the administrators since having any form of relationship will compromise professionalism. Other teachers felt that they used divide-and-rule tactics, engaged in selective treatment, and did not reach out to them as teachers. Some of the teachers used terms such as unfair treatment, segregation, discrimination, ignoring, and favoritism to describe the treatment they got at the hands of the administrators. This finding resonates with the finding by Musah et al. (2018) who found that there was the selective treatment of teachers resulting in two groups of teachers namely the 'in-group' and the 'out-group'. The out-group in their study did not feel a sense of belonging leading to low teacher acceptance of the headmasters leading to low performance levels. In addition, Musah et al. (2018) found that teachers requested more interaction through formal and informal means so that they achieve their organizational goals. The authors further explained that teachers who believed that they were treated unfairly tended to reduce their commitment and contribution to the organization.

The fact of not having a relationship between the administrators and some teachers shows that the teachers consider their administrators as not having unhu. The view that administrators used divide-and-rule tactics goes against the dictates of unhu philosophy which calls for the treatment of all with dignity and recognizing teachers' inherent worth (Borowski, 2021). Administrators not reaching out to some teachers also show that there is no working together to achieve common goals, leading to the creation of a sense of belonging and one shared responsibility.

Some teachers also attributed the failure of the administrators to treat them humanely because they were appointed to the position without undergoing training in administration. Failure to lead due to lack of training was also echoed by Dos and Savas (2015) who found that teachers in their study recommended administrators to be appointed to leadership positions after they qualify, for example after they write an exam and pass.

Last, but not least, the study also found that some of the teachers considered their relationship with administrators as complicated and bad. The teachers articulated that they were victimized by their administrators to such a point that their requests were ignored. This finding concurs findings by Moon and McCluskey (2018) who found that teacher victimization was prevalent leading to negative impacts on victimized teachers. Further, the teachers stated that some of the administrators labeled them as nuisance and attention seekers who were unprofessional. Clearly, such the finding shows a lack of respect between the two parties in the eyes of the teachers. Where there is no respect, it shows that there is a lack of unhu at the schools.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Teacher participants in this study described their relationship with administrators in different ways with the common finding being existence or lack of unhu/ubuntu. The finding is grounded in the data, hence unhu/ubuntu explanation has become a theory to explain the relationship that teachers believe they have with the administrators. In light of this, there are teacher participants who believed the relationship they had was positive and also those who believed theirs was a negative one. In conclusion, those who classified their relationship as positive exhibited unhu while those who considered it as negative, lack unhu.

At the school level, having unhu between administrators and teachers can build a strong, collaborative, respectful, compassionate, trustful, and supportive relationship that benefits both parties and ultimately improves student outcomes. This applied to some teachers who reported having good and supportive relationships with their administrators, hence the existence of a positive culture. A positive school culture or environment is created when both teachers and administrators exhibit unhu where everyone feels valued, respected, and supported. The teachers who considered their administrators as having unhu felt that it ultimately benefited the students as the working environment would be a workable one. Lacking unhu led some teachers to question qualifications and ultimately the ability of their administrators to lead them. An environment that is not inclusive and equitable, does not build a good learning environment.

In conclusion, the existence of complicated and bad, and the absence or lack of any kind of relationship as explained by the other teachers is a reflection of people not committed to building strong collaborative relationships. From the findings of this study, it is clear that the existence of such kind of relationships reduces student outcomes, increases teacher burnout, and does not promote a sense of belonging for the teachers concerned.

It is the recommendation of this study that administrators need to engage in continuous communication and collaboration with their teachers. Although this takes time and effort, it also requires commitment from the administrators and teachers. If the administrators and teachers come to realize that there are challenges to be overcome by both parties, they can be successful in implementing the unhu/ubuntu theory in their work environment. Having unhu in a school system may yield positive results, in terms of social, academic, and professional life circles.

As individuals, especially so in the African context, we do not live in isolation, but we are interconnected. It is the recommendation of this study for administrators and teachers alike to work together, building strong relationships that will help transform teaching and learning environments (Frempong & Kadam, 2022).

This study has been limited to two rural Catholic-run boarding schools. The study was also limited to the views of the teachers on what they perceived as the relationship that existed between themselves and the administrators. Future research may focus on the administrators' views or perceptions of the kind of relationship they have with their teachers. In Zimbabwean's education system, it is imperative to have a kind of relationship that is grounded in unhu/ubuntu theory, as it is also part of the country's culture and also Education 5.0 model.

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