

Instructional Leadership in Inclusive Secondary Schools of Zimbabwe: Balancing Multiple and Competing Expectations

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Abstract This article explores school heads' enactment of instructional leadership practices in inclusive secondary schools in Zimbabwe. It provides answers to the central question: How do school heads enact instructional leadership practices in inclusive secondary schools and how does sense-making by school heads explain instructional leadership practices in this instructional environment? The article forms part of a larger study on the challenges of and opportunities for instructional leadership in inclusive secondary schools of Zimbabwe. The study employed a qualitative multiple case study research approach and was informed by the enactive sense-making theory. The cases comprised three secondary school heads purposively sampled in line with the extent to which they embraced inclusivity in terms of serving differently abled learners. Data were collected using a combination of semi-structured interviews on instructional leadership thought and practices, non-participant observation and documents analysis. The data were analysed using the interactional narrative analysis approach and presented using the case-by-case method. The study revealed that participants understood instructional leadership in their schools in the morphed sense of the concept as a multidimensional and stakeholder-based social activity built on equity principles. However, the concept of "equity" and purpose of education in society seem to be understood differently by different stakeholders across the social divide. As a result,

instructional leadership practices by the school heads were characterised by struggles to balance competing expectations from stakeholders as the school heads sought to protect personal identity and guarantee self-legitimacy. Our findings have implications for policy and practice and contribute to scholarship by adding new insights into growing literature on instructional leadership for inclusive education.

Keywords Case-By-Case Method, Inclusive Education, Inclusive Instructional Leadership, Inclusive Secondary Schools, Stakeholder Expectations

1. Introduction

The call for schools to embrace an inclusive approach to education continues to dominate academic discourse and educational policy internationally [1]. This call coincided with results-oriented accountability systems that have also been widely accepted by most countries globally [2]. Although there are variations in the way inclusive education is understood within and across nations [3], its common ideal elements, as also embraced in the present study, involve the right to education for all, giving prominence to the notion of equality, and a curriculum that is responsive to the needs of all learners [4].

According to Haug [5], regardless of the sound ethical and policy foundations upon which inclusive education is grounded, full inclusion in most countries internationally has remained unfinished business. The reason for this discrepancy is still a subject for debate [5], more so in the secondary-school department.

It is clearly understood that school leadership, in particular, instructional leadership, is the key to the success of any school programme that is meant to improve student learning [6], and that sense-making is the key to human action [7]. Nonetheless, it is not clear how school heads enact instructional leadership in inclusive secondary schools and how this enactment explains instructional leadership practices in this school setting. Although a number of studies have been conducted on inclusive education and instructional leadership, as stand-alone areas for research, very little research has been conducted focusing on instructional leadership by school heads in inclusive secondary schools [8].

Where related studies have been carried out, for example by Choi et al. [9] and Rigby [10], the focus seemed to be on elementary and not secondary education. Furthermore, such studies seemed to focus more on developed than on developing countries. Therefore, the present study seeks, in part, to bridge this gap. Our study provides answers to the central research question: How do school heads enact instructional leadership practices in inclusive secondary schools and how does sense-making by school heads explain instructional leadership practices in this instructional environment? This study is considered relevant at a time when inclusivity and secondary school education are increasingly becoming key components of basic education internationally.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Conceptualising Inclusive Education

Inclusive education has become a central issue of the mainstream and special-education dichotomy in most progressive countries internationally [5]. The call for education systems to embrace an inclusive approach first appeared in special education literature in the 1980s [9]. This call first appeared as an effort to provide a learning environment with the lowest possible restrictions to learners with disabilities. The origin of inclusive education and related concepts such as mainstreaming and integration is associated with quasi-resistance movements arising in response to increasing exclusion of learners identified for special needs education in such countries as the USA and Canada [11, 12]. Canada is credited as the first country to coin the term inclusive education. Since its introduction in special needs education literature, to date, the term inclusive education appears to be more appealing and generally more preferred to such terms as

mainstreaming and integration, commonly used terms in the USA [13] to refer to similar educational practices.

At an international level, inclusive education is built on the foundation of such key conventions as the Jomtien Convention (1990), the Salamanca Statement (1994) and the UN Conventions on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) (2006) [14]. In Africa, inclusive education is supported by the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) (1999) [14, 15]. In Zimbabwe, this is supported by the New Constitution (2013) [16] and the People with Disability Act (1992) [14].

Of all the international regulations and conventions upon which the inclusive framework is anchored, the Salamanca Statement constitutes the most important document that has ever been promulgated in the field of special needs education [3]. This framework portrays a global consensus on future directions for special education needs and tied inclusive education to the Education for All (EFA) agenda (1990). The Salamanca Statement enjoins governments throughout the world to adopt as a matter of policy the inclusive framework, enrolling all children in regular schools, unless there are compelling reasons for doing the contrary [17].

Since its inception in the 1980s, the inclusive framework has been embraced by a number of progressive countries internationally [14] and has also grown to include other forms of exceptionalities, rather than a focus on disability alone. In Southern Africa, countries that embraced the inclusive framework include South Africa, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Namibia, Zambia and Malawi [18].

Regardless of its widespread adoption [14] and the central role that it has occupied in the education dichotomy of many countries internationally [19], successful practice of inclusive education seems to have remained a mirage. Haug [5] thus confirms that “[i]n all countries [internationally], there is a gap between formulations and realizations of inclusive education”. The gap between formulations and realisations of inclusive education has been observed in such countries as Australia, Italy, United States of America, South Africa, Zambia and Malawi [1, 5, 14, 17, and 19].

It is not clearly understood why, regardless of sound ethical foundations [5] and a supportive policy and political environment [14], inclusive education still remains a mirage in most developing countries internationally more than 25 years after the Salamanca Statement. However, it is often believed that leadership, in particular instructional leadership, is the key to successful implementation of any policy programme that is meant to improve student learning [6], and that sense-making is the basis for human action [20]. For this reason, this study seeks to establish school heads’ understanding of what instructional leadership for inclusive education means to them and how this understanding explains their enactment of instructional leadership practices in the settings of

inclusive secondary schools. This is an area which has not been fully explored.

2.2. Walking the Boundary Lines for Instructional Leadership

The general assumption amongst many writers and policymakers in the field of school leadership and curriculum issues is that the primary responsibility of a school head is instructional leadership [21]. However, according to Rigby [10], although “twenty first century principals are considered to be instructional leaders, conceptualisations of this role and associated practices differ significantly among different writers and practitioners”. This discrepancy becomes an important research issue in the backdrop of the general assumption amongst many implementation scholars [22] that the way policy-implementing agents make sense of a policy programme brought before them (instructional leadership included) shapes their actions in relation to the implementation of that policy programme.

According to Fowler and Walter [23], instructional leadership as a form of school leadership practice is understood both narrowly and broadly through time and space. The narrowness or broadness can be viewed from two angles, that is, the content and the actors (players) involved. From the perspective of actors, Fowler and Walter [23] define instructional leadership as “a concept drawn from the literature of educational leadership to describe the role that a school principal plays in helping to create a culture of instruction and assessment in a school, placing student learning at the centre of the instructional process, and fostering professional growth of teachers as classroom instructors”. Clearly, Fowler and Walter’s [23] view places instructional leadership wholly in the hands of the school head as a venerable or “heroic” leader.

Viewed from the perspective of content, instructional leadership is purely a classroom-based activity that strictly involves supervision and inspection of teaching/learning activities in order to improve learner learning. A common characteristic amongst the different views of instructional leadership as reviewed in this section is its focus on promoting learning. This focus made Hallinger [24] to define it as “leadership for learning”. In the same vein, Dimmock and Tan [21] see it as “learning centred leadership”, a view also embraced in the present study.

Using a different criterion from the content-or-actors dichotomy as discussed in this section, Hallinger [24] and Mestry [25] categorise instructional leadership into the traditional and reincarnated or morphed forms. The central issue here is that, at some point, instructional leadership as originally envisaged was seen to have died a natural death. This follows spirited criticism from some writers and practitioners who perceive it as a practice grounded on autocratic assumptions that no longer have a place in present-day democratic systems.

However, in recent years, instructional leadership is seen to have reincarnated [24] in a morphed version. In this morphed and broader version, instructional leadership is seen to comprise the activities that school heads engage in insofar as to create a satisfying and productive working environment for teachers and necessary conditions for learners to excel [24,25]. The focus in this reincarnated version of instructional leadership, as literature shows, is now on creating an environment that promotes learner learning and not on direct supervision or inspection of classroom activities by venerable school heads only.

A common feature amongst all variants of instructional leadership as reviewed in this section is its emphasis on learner learning. However, the meaning of learner learning and what comprises learner achievement in public schools seems to be contested, especially in relation to inclusive instructional environments. The main argument in this study is therefore that it is undoubted that school leadership is the key to successful implementation of any policy programme that is meant to improve learner learning, and that sense-making is the basis for human action. However, it is not clear how school heads as public professionals and individual sense-makers enact instructional leadership in inclusive secondary schools. It is also not clearly understood how sense-making by school heads explains instructional leadership practices in inclusive secondary school settings. The present study therefore seeks, in part, to close this gap.

3. Theoretical Framework

The current study was informed by the enactive sense-making theory [20, 26]. Brock et al. [27] define sense-making as a process of “building schematic mental models for decision-making by integrating different pieces of information in terms of individual emotions, projected outcomes, individual goals, and expectations”. We preferred enactive sense-making as a social lens for our study because of its power to explain human action or lack of it in terms of the relationship between cognition, emotions and the environment as building blocks for action [7]. The explanatory power of this theory concerning issues in the current study rests on its acknowledgement of the idea that policy implementers’ actions are situated in institutional systems that provide norms, rules and definitions of the environment that either constrain or enable action [28]. For this reason, Maitlis [29] sees sense-making as creating “rational accounts of the world that enable action”. Di Paolo et al. [30] thus say that people think through and act in terms of the way they interpret (make sense) of their environment. Clearly, the present study, which seeks to explore the enactment of instructional leadership practices by school heads, naturally lends itself to a sense-making perspective.

4. Research Methodology

We employed a qualitative research approach and a multiple case studies research design. The cases involved three secondary school heads who were nominated by the district office in terms of the extent to which they had embraced the inclusive framework ahead of other schools in the same district. For ethical reasons, pseudonyms were used to identify both research sites and research participants for the study. The schools were named Open Gates High School, Holy Ghost High School and All Souls High School. The school heads were respectively named Mr Simango, Mr Sithole and Mr Moyo. All three schools were run by churches as responsible authorities (RAs), in line with government policy which allows churches to do so. Data collection involved a combination of semi-structured interviews on school heads' enactment of instructional leadership practices, non-participant observation and document analysis. The data collection procedure involved the first researcher, after agreeing on the research approach with the second researcher, visiting schools, asking questions, tape recording interviews and making notes on what research participants were telling him and what he observed in the field. Our study, which uses an interpretivist epistemology and the sense making theory to explore school heads' enactment of instructional leadership practices in inclusive secondary schools in Zimbabwe naturally, lends itself amenable to a qualitative research approach and a multiple case studies research design.

The data were collected after permission had been granted by the University of the Free State (UFS) and the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (MoPSE) in Zimbabwe. The UFS ethical clearance number for the present study is UFS-HSD2017/0531. This clearance was granted after both the university and the MoPSE were satisfied that ethical issues had been fully observed. Informed consent was also sought from research participants. In addition, research participants were informed that they retained the right to withdraw from the study if at any point in the study they felt compelled to do so. Data in this study were analysed using what Harding [31] defines as the interactional narrative analysis approach and presented using a case-by-case approach [32].

5. Research Results

Case 1: The Story of Mr Simango: A Disenchanted Team Captain Loving without Expectations

Mr Simango, the head of Open Gates High School, holds a certificate in Education, a bachelor's degree and a master's degree in Education. He is 54 years old, with teaching experience of 25 years, 9 of which as school head. Concerning what he viewed as his most important

responsibilities as an instructional leader in his school, Mr Simango expressed: "I see myself as the torchbearer for my school. As such, I am expected to make sure that the school has a well-defined vision and purpose which is shared by all the people who matter." He added: "I am therefore expected to make sure that the school has a well-defined vision and purpose which is shared by all our key stakeholders." Clarifying how the vision statement for the school was defined, Mr Simango explained as follows:

Issues of the school vision involve all key stakeholders, rather than being my private preserve as the head of station. ... On my part, as the school head, I should be seeing to it that the school vision and goals agree with public policy, expectations of the RA and the needs of the people for whom the school was built. These are the targets for education and therefore the main clients for the school.

Data as presented above show instructional leadership thought by Mr Simango to be a multi-stakeholder-based social activity. Clarifying further what he viewed as the most important objective for his instructional leadership practices and what he meant by "target of education", Mr Simango explained as follows: "As head, I should be creating an environment in which all children from the community we serve are given the chance to learn, each according to his or her needs. I mean, I should be providing every student with the best education possible. *These are the target for education*" (emphasis added). Undoubtedly, Mr Simango viewed instructional leadership in its reincarnated sense as a stakeholder-focused activity.

Consistent with this reincarnated view, instructional leadership practice at Open Gates High School involved a number of activities and stakeholders trying to achieve the common goal of educating all learners. The first strategy-setting activity of instructional leadership at the school involved defining and communicating the school vision and purpose to stakeholders. The school vision, "To be the best provider of high quality inclusive education to the needy, using both conventional and part time methods," was displayed on all noticeboards in the school. The vision statement was also captured in all school magazines dating back to five years ago. The school's vision statement showed a close relationship with the MoPSE's vision: "To be the lead provider of inclusive quality education for socio-economic transformation by 2020." Both statements talk to inclusive education. This commonality seems to confirm the stakeholder-based and coupling character of school visioning at the school, for which Mr Simango explained:

Although the church has not provided us with a written vision statement, from its very beginning, this school was built with the disadvantaged in mind. ... It was built at the end of the war of liberation in order to accommodate children who had been disadvantaged by the war, including returning

refugees and children who were injured during the war and were returning home following the end of the war in 1980. ... As we define our purpose, we therefore stand guided by this original vision and original purpose

The verbatim quotations above confirm the observation that the instructional leadership task of school visioning at Open Gates High School was approached from a stakeholder perspective. The vision of the school was derived from higher up the hierarchy and only refined at school level. Even as Mr Simango did not have a written vision statement for the church, his practices were guided by the original purpose for which his school was built, from the perspective of the church. Talking about how his school selected learners for enrolment, Mr Simango expressed:

In selecting and admitting learners, our primary qualification is the mere fact that one is a human being. Whilst some school authorities admit children on the basis of what they expect them to do for the school when they finally write examinations, here, our focus is on the child and not the school. ... I believe that schools are built for children. They should therefore never be managed for anybody's fame. ... Schools should not be about the school head or his teachers, but about the child. ... At Open Gates, we *don't aim to benefit from the children we admit, but children benefitting from us* (emphasis added).

The verbatim excerpts above show that inclusive education at Open Gates High School incorporated a broad perspective. The aim was to provide access and equal opportunities to all children regardless of varying life circumstances, without focusing on a specific form of exceptionality. As a result, the school admitted includable children with physical disabilities, orphaned and vulnerable children (OVC) and children with low ability to learn. Mr Simango further revealed: "Once we admit our learners, our goal as school leadership is to make sure that no child should be allowed to leave school empty-handed." He explained:

On getting new students, we assess their potential. When we realise someone has potential for Maths and Science, for example, we place him or her in Science classes. ... Those with low ability to handle Maths and Sciences subjects, we advise them to follow the non-Science route, where they learn subjects in the categories of humanities, commercials or Voc-Tech. ... Our best classes at junior level and O level do pure Physics, Chemistry and Biology as we prepare them for hard Sciences at A level. Those that cannot handle Sciences, we prefer them do practical subjects, including those offered by HEXCO [Higher Education Examination Council]. ... *They too should not go out*

empty-handed (emphasis added).

The verbatim expression above seems to show that instructional leadership practices by Mr Simango were shaped by his subscription to the multiple-intelligence and differential-intelligence [33] hypotheses. As a result, inclusive education at Open Gates High School seems to be based on principles of equity in the context of fairness as opposed to equality in the sense of sameness. Once, in the school, children were exposed to a differential curriculum, each according to their individual needs. Mr Simango explained his practice thus: "At this school, we group our children by ability without marginalising low-ability learners by shutting our doors behind them. Once admitted, we offer them a wide curriculum, which includes sports, theatre arts and practical subjects in a serious way. We are being realistic here." He added: "Strictly theory- and intellectual intelligence-based subjects are not meant for every child. What we should understand as people is that not every child is university material. Whilst we should also prepare our children for university, it is not every child who should be expected to get a degree." Clearly, data as presented in this section show that inclusive education at Open Gates High School is not restricted to political inclusion or disability education only. Talking about his assessment of the school leadership environment, Mr Simango explained:

The five O-level-subjects syndrome affecting the country today is making people lose focus on the purpose of education in society. Since independence, most children have always found it difficult to pass the required five O levels, including English and Maths. I see a serious need for educators to rethink over this five O-level thing, wherever it came from. People should make education relevant to every child and not a race for certificates. There is need to appreciate that some of our children can do well in life, even with only a few subjects but relevant skills. ... This is why, at times, I ask myself, "When will we learn?"

The verbatim extract above suggests that Mr Simango was disillusioned by conditions in his school leadership environment. In particular, he was disenchanted by an academic- and examination-oriented education system that has failed more than 80 percent of learners who have written examinations in the country since independence in 1980. The Student Christian Movement of Zimbabwe [SCMZ] [34] describes this high failure rate as "the manifestation of a neglected generation". Mr Simango also seemed to be disillusioned by the fact that school performance was assessed and rewarded in terms of the performance of learners in public examinations only. Experience also seemed to have taught Mr Simango to understand that not every child is capable of passing the five O-level subjects. However, society seems oblivious of this reality and hence his question, "When will we

learn?”

Case 2: The Story of Mr Sithole: Coupling and Decoupling Expectations to Guarantee Legitimacy

Mr Sithole, the head of Holy Ghost High School, is aged 53. He has a bachelor's degree in Religious Studies, a certificate in Education and a master's degree in Curriculum Studies. Concerning his teaching experience, Mr Sithole revealed: "I joined Holy Ghost High School in 2010 when I was promoted to the post of deputy head." "I assumed headship of the school in 2012 when the incumbent head moved to another school run by our church. Up to now, I am still the acting head for the school", he emphasised. Talking about what he viewed as his most important responsibilities as an instructional leader in his school, Mr Sithole revealed: "I see my most important role as being a policy implementer." He further explained his view as follows: "I think you are aware that every school is built for a purpose and ours is no exception. To be seen to be worth my salt, I should act as the policy implementer and foot soldier for both the church and the MoPSE. As the man on the ground, I should see to it that teachers are effectively supervised and properly resourced."

Clearly, Mr Sithole viewed instructional leadership in its morphed sense as being multidimensional and stakeholder focused, with him adopting the role of agent. The agency view is evidenced by his use of the terms "policy implementer" and "foot soldier" to refer to himself, and by his desire to be seen to be worth his salt, something he said very often during the interview discussion. Talking about school visioning and the role he played in this respect, he remarked:

It is not like I come up with my own vision out of the blue and start to pursue it blindly. As a public school, obviously, the church and the ministry play a pivotal role in determining what we set our eyes to achieve. My duty as a policy implementer is to work from the ministry and the church's blueprints to come up with a school vision which speaks our own school purpose. Remember, I should represent the ministry 100 percent and the church 100 percent if I should be seen to be worth my salt.

Clearly, Mr Sithole exhibited an external locus of control in which his work effort was centred more on meeting the expectations of key stakeholders in order to be seen to be worth his salt than on an internal drive to make a difference to humankind. This external locus of control is evidenced where he said, "It is not like I come up with my own vision out of the blue and start to pursue it blindly", and "My duty is to work from the ministry and the church's blueprint". Mr Sithole's motivation to represent the MoPSE 100 percent and the church 100 percent and to be seen to be worth his salt, further points

to a feeling of being controlled externally. In line with this external locus of control, the multidimensionality and stakeholder-oriented character, instructional leadership at Holy Ghost High School comprised a number of activities and a desire to please both ministry and church. Talking about ownership of the inclusive vision embraced at his school, Mr Sithole explained, however:

Inclusive education practised in this school is more a project for the church than anyone else. From the church's viewpoint, this school was built as an evangelical centre and to provide for disadvantaged children, both within the church and beyond. ... The bishop is fully behind inclusive education as we practise it in this school. It is his baby through which he demonstrates practical Christianity. As the man on the ground, I am only supporting this founding vision of church leadership. ... *I am a tool in his hand. My purpose in this school is to promote the inclusive vision of the RA* (emphasis added).

The verbatim excerpt above shows that Mr Sithole saw inclusive education practised at All Souls High School as a project for the RA. Concerning the influence of the MoPSE on the adoption of an inclusive framework by the school, Mr Sithole expressed the following opinion:

Whilst this is the key ministry in terms of education in this country, the MoPSE seems not to have a genuine interest in full inclusion beyond the regulation it has put in place. There is nothing on the ground by way of practice to show its interest. The ministry appears to be interested in examination results and inclusion of black children in former whites-only schools, something like what happened at X High School (pseudonym – a secondary school formerly reserved for white learners, prior independence). For the ministry, inclusion as we practise it here is only a paper thing.

It is clear that Mr Sithole believed the MoPSE had put in place the necessary regulatory framework to enable inclusive education to take root. He even showed us a collection of government policy instruments that spoke to inclusivity, which he kept in his office. The instruments included the following: the Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment (No. 20) Act, 2013; the Education Act (Ch. 25:04); the New Curriculum Framework (2015–2022); the Disabled Persons Act (Ch. 17:01); and the Secretary's Policy Circular (No. P36) of 1990. All these data suggest that the MoPSE and the church were the two most important stakeholders in defining the school vision for which there was supposed to be a balancing act if Mr Sithole were to be seen as worth his salt. This balancing act is also reflected in the three vision statements that were displayed in the head's office (Table 1).

Table 1. Vision Statements at Holy Ghost High School

Institution	Vision Statement
MoPSE	To be the leading provider of inclusive quality education for socio-economic transformation by 2020
Church	To be the best school that provides inclusive, academic, spiritual, social, and physical education to all children thereby bringing transformation to mankind in a Christian environment
School	To be the best inclusive education centre in Masvingo province and beyond, which offers a holistic education to the Zimbabwean youth for social and economic transformation

Source: Primary data in the head's office

Table 1 shows a strong correlation amongst the vision statements for the MoPSE, the RA and Holy Ghost High School. All three statements speak to inclusive education. This relationship suggests that in defining the school vision, Mr Sithole was guided by the desire to achieve the goals of the RA and the MoPSE all at once. This finding point to the coupling desire that Mr Sithole referred to when he said: "I should represent the MoPSE 100 percent and the church 100 percent if I should be seen to be worth my salt." Starting with his learner selection practices, Mr Sithole further explained on how he implemented instructional leadership strategies at his school in line with this coupling desire. He elaborated his practices as follows:

Here, we use a combination of selection procedures. In doing so, we are guided by ministry policy, church policy and trends in the market. ... Whilst like all boarding schools, we are expected to select students into Form 1 through the e-mapping platform, here, we also get some of our students through referrals from the church and the Department of Social Welfare. However, it is through the e-mapping platform that we get some of the best brains we admit.

The verbatim quotation above shows that Mr Sithole admitted learners mainly on the basis of examination results. He explained his practices, saying: "Most of the children with special needs who may not compete for places on the open market are referred to us by the church and at times by the Department of Social Welfare. Otherwise, we admit most of our *best brains, cream of the cream* (emphasis added), through the e-mapping platform in line with government policy." He explained: "By best brains, I mean brilliant children who are assured of passing their exams at any cost." Evidently, Mr Sithole showed bias in favour of high-ability learners. He also referred to such learners as "cream of the cream".

His learner admission practices revealed coupling the covert expectations of the MoPSE with the overt expectations of the RA. In the process, he decouples from policy as written statements (overt policy expectations). The covertness is explained when he expressed: "For the ministry, inclusion as we practise it here is only a paper

thing" Decoupling is explained when he said: "Inclusive education as we practise it in this school is more a project for the church than anyone else." An analysis of Grade 7 examination-result slips for new entrants into Form 1 and report books for learners who transferred into the school confirmed that Mr Sithole enrolled mainly learners with high intellectual ability. His appetite for high-ability learners is also spotlighted in his use of the terms "best brains", "cream of the cream" and "brilliant" to refer to high-ability learners. He reaffirmed his practice, saying: "I pride myself in admitting brilliant students." Concerning his assessment of the effect of the inclusive brand embraced in his school on the performance of the school, Mr Sithole explained his view as follows:

Our O-level pass rate is not bad since we also attract a lot of academically gifted children in this school. ... Children with physical disabilities and OVC that we admit do not necessarily have any effect on our pass rate. ... In any case, they are normally a very small fraction of our student population. In addition, some of the OVC we admit are so brilliant that, given the learning environment we create for them, some of them will obviously fly. ... Even the ministry is very proud of the high pass rate that has become our trademark at Holy Ghost High School. That is why I say I am proud to associate myself with intelligent children.

The verbatim excerpts above show that although Mr Sithole embraced inclusivity, he still had an appetite for high-ability learners. He supported his position, saying: "You should be aware that, as a school, we also have a name to protect." Mr Sithole's appetite for high-ability learners became even more evident when he said, "I am proud to associate myself with intelligent children." Typically, admission registers in the school showed that inclusion by Mr Sithole focused on children with physical disabilities and OVC only, apparently in line with expectations of the RA.

Talking about how he grouped learners for instruction once admitted at his school, Mr Sithole narrated: "When we admit children, say, at Form 1, we allocate them to classes according to their subjects of interest and our assessment of their academic potential." He did not call his practice ability streaming. He clarified his position by saying: "There is no need for ability streaming here. As I told you, most of our students are very brilliant. ... Only the few children referred to us by the church tend to give us headache. In most cases, they are not even enough to fill a class of their own. At times, we send such special needs learners to resource units where they get specialist assistance." Concerning the school-based curriculum afforded to learners at his school, Mr Sithole explained:

To come up with the school-based curriculum, we are guided by the new curriculum framework. I think you are aware that all schools are expected to

implement the new curriculum to its fullness. We can vary on the optional subjects we offer to some specific classes as we see it fit, but without any deviation, all our classes take seven cross-cutting learning areas as dictated by policy.

Data as presented above show that Mr Sithole strictly adhered to the new curriculum policy as contained in the Secretary's Circular No. 2 of 2017. Use of strong terms such as "to its fullness", "without any deviation" and "as dictated by policy" shows his conviction to follow the new curriculum religiously. The curriculum chart displayed in the head's office confirms this position. The school also used Zimbabwe School Examinations Council (ZIMSEC) examinations only to assess student learning. Mr Sithole explained his practice as follows: "Currently, we see no reason to use any other examination board beyond what is required by policy." Clearly, Mr Sithole offered his learners an undifferentiated curriculum.

Data as presented above also show Mr Sithole's desire to appease the RA 100 percent and the ministry 100 percent. However, this coupling of expectations seemed difficult to achieve in situations where real goals and expectations of the MoPSE and those of the RA were sometimes misaligned. In addition, the policy as written statements (covert policy) of the MoPSE also seemed to be misaligned with its policy as manifested in practice (overt policy). This misalignment made Mr Sithole describe the ministry's written policy as "only a paper thing and nothing more".

Case 3: The Story of Mr Moyo: A Multiple Inclusionist and Advocate for Children with Special Educational Needs

Mr Moyo, the head of All Souls High School, is aged 55, with 24 years of teaching experience, 8 of which as a school head. Responding to questions on what he understood as his most important responsibilities in his capacity as an instructional leader at his school, Mr Moyo expressed: "I see my most important role as an instructional leader as to make sure that every child admitted in this school feels a sense of belonging, loved and accepted. My purpose for life is to give hope to the hopeless." He explained his position as follows:

As a person living with a disability myself, I feel ... I should help people in similar circumstance to develop and live their own independent life as healthy, responsible and productive citizens who own and control their destiny. You know what? At times, what some of these children need is a community of love and respect ... as fellow human beings I therefore am convinced beyond any doubt that the purpose of my life is to bring hope to the life of people in similar circumstances as mine. Through embracing a non-selective approach in which we afford education to all children regardless of varying life circumstances, I feel I am responding to the

needs of the community that I serve. This is the community to which I belong.

Undoubtedly, the verbatim excerpts above show that Mr Moyo viewed himself as an advocate for the welfare of children with exceptionalities who faced discrimination in the mainstream-school system. His understanding of inclusive instructional leadership seemed to stem from his own lived experiences and fellow feeling as a person living with a disability and what he viewed as societal expectations on him as a school head. In further elaborating on his perceived roles, he expressed, "I also see it as my responsibility as an instructional leader to improve the school name so that it becomes attractive to every parent." He explained his position in detail as follows:

Originally, this school was meant to cater for children of mission workers and those from the surrounding community who could not afford fees in boarding schools. This includes children that fail to get the required Grade 7 passes for acceptance in boarding schools. When I joined the school, we, of course, started to enrol children from X School for the Deaf (pseudonym), our primary school, just across the road. In addition, we also target to attract and rope in parents of high-ability children, who, under normal circumstances, may send their children to boarding schools. Such parents and their children may also help to improve the name of our school when the children do well in examinations.

It is evident from the excerpts above that Mr Moyo was uncomfortable with his school being associated with low-ability children and those from poor family backgrounds only. Instead, he felt pressured to also attract parents of high-ability children. His narrative seems to suggest that such parents and their children were not easily attracted to schools with poor academic results. Talking about the level of support he enjoyed from the MoPSE for embracing the inclusive framework, Mr Moyo remarked:

It is clear that there is nothing much for non-selective schools in support or appreciation of inclusive practices by the MoPSE. When you practise inclusive education ..., and you are getting good examination results, it is fine, but if you cannot get good results, surely, you will be frustrated to the bone marrow The system will never recognise you if your school is not doing well academically because of your inclusive philosophy. If you cannot reach the mark [in terms of your pass rate,] then you cannot be counted, no matter how much you can try to justify your situation.

In clarifying his view, Mr Moyo explained:

I think you are aware that in this country, schools are assessed on the basis of the performance of children in public examinations only. When your school takes

in children who cannot pass, you will be judged as a poor performer and treated accordingly. *If you are fainthearted, you will be frustrated, I tell you* (emphasis added). In order to survive, you may be tempted to follow the tide.

Clearly, Mr Moyo practised his leadership for learning in an amalgam of empathy, love and frustrations. In his view, he felt he was not receiving the deserved support from policymakers who seemed to assume that every child is capable of passing O-level examinations when reality speaks otherwise. Although Mr Moyo was convinced that it was not every child who is capable of passing O-level examinations in their current form, he still felt that every child should be given a chance to learn, each according to his/her own needs. However, he also felt that his key stakeholders were not supportive of the inclusive vision embraced in his school. He further explained the situation in his school leadership as follows: "People fully support our non-selective practices in cases where they stand to benefit directly only, such as, when someone has a child with special educational needs who cannot be accepted in some selective schools in the community. *Otherwise they don't*" (emphasis added). Clearly, Mr Moyo was not happy with the level of support he received from the community, for embracing his version of inclusive education, even as he also felt he was responding to the needs of the same community.

He shared with us on how he carried out his instructional leadership responsibilities in the prevailing situation. Beginning with his first direction-setting task, Mr Moyo described his practices as follows: "In coming up with the vision statements you are seeing on the noticeboard (pointing to the noticeboard in his office), I was guided by public policy, the vision statement of the church and my personal conviction to make an impact to humanity." Table 2 shows the vision statement for the MoPSE, the church and the school.

Table 2. Vision Statements at All Souls High School

Institution	Vision Statement
MoPSE	To be the leading provider of inclusive quality education for socio-economic transformation by 2020
Church	To be the best inclusive education centre in Masvingo province and beyond, which offers a holistic education to the Zimbabwean youth for social and economic transformation
School	To provide high quality education to differently abled students in an inclusive school environment in order to prepare them to fit into the community to which they belong and participate in it fully

Source: Primary data in the head's office

The school vision statement for All Souls High School, as shown in Table 2, evidently shared similarities with that of the MoPSE and the church. The key similarity amongst the three statements was that they all spoke to inclusive education. This similarity points to an influence

of public policy and the church on school-level visioning, and Mr Moyo's attempt to strike a balance between the expectations of his key publics.

Concerning how the school vision and purpose were communicated to the school's publics, Mr Moyo explained: "I make sure everyone of us is tasked with the responsibility to articulate the vision and purpose of the school to its key publics in order to establish a common purpose." Consistent with this statement, the school's vision statement was displayed on noticeboards in the head's office, the deputy head's office, HOD (head of department) offices, the staffroom and the reception room. This practice suggests that communicating the inclusive vision of the school was viewed as valued and shared responsibility amongst internal stakeholders and that the inclusive school vision embraced in the school was acceptable to internal stakeholders for the school.

Focusing his attention on student selection and admission practices at All Souls High School, Mr Moyo explained: "All Souls is an inclusive school in the true sense of the concept. Here, we don't select. We admit children as they come until we are fully enrolled." An analysis of Grade 7 examination-result slips for new entrants into Form 1 and report books for learners transferring from other schools confirmed the non-selective nature of the school. Turning his attention to how he grouped learners for instruction once they were admitted into his school, Mr Moyo described his practice in the following way:

When we get students into Form 1, we put them into classes as they come. I mean, we use the first-come-first-served type of approach. ... When children get to Form 3, we assume that they will be in a position to appreciate their passion and abilities. Even ourselves as school authorities and advisors to our students, we now will be aware of the potential and interest of each individual child and better placed to give proper career guidance. At this point, we group children in terms of whether they should follow a Voc-Tech, Sciences, Commercial, or Humanities curriculum.

This discussion with Mr Moyo suggests that he did not make learners do what he wanted. Instead, he guided them to choose what they needed. In doing so, he also worked contrary to current policy as he seemed to pursue the recommendations of the Nziramasanga Commission report, which he also availed to us for analysis. Mr Moyo offered his learners a differentiated curriculum according to their needs. He explained his practice as follows:

In coming up with the school-based curriculum, we combine the curriculum as recommended by the MoPSE with the HEXCO curriculum. The aim is to come up with a balanced school curriculum that speaks to the varying needs of our learners. We try to respond to the needs of all our children and the community we serve by providing Voc-Tech and

academic education under one roof I think HEXCO courses provide more authentic learning to some of the children we take in this school.

Following a pregnant pause in the interview discussion, which he aptly interpreted as asking for more, Mr Moyo rhetorically asked, "You know what, sir?" as he prepared to explain in detail:

Some of the students we admit in this school may never pass a theory-based examination, even under open-book conditions. I feel it is illogical to subject such learners to a purely academic and examination-based learning, even if this seems to be the norm. I believe, if they are exposed to a practical and skills-based curriculum, even the so-called slow learners will excel in their own way, even without a full O-level certificate. Relevant education for such children should be more vocational than academic. I see it as my duty to ensure that as a community, we move away from theory-based learning to more authentic learning which yields tangible results for all.

Data as presented above show that for Mr Moyo, instructional leadership also involves providing an inclusive curriculum for all learners. An inclusive curriculum, according to him, should place emphasis on practical skills and competencies usable in life rather than on theory and examinations only. Instructional leadership for inclusive education, according to Mr Moyo, therefore focuses on creating an environment that promotes effective student learning and not practices that focus on direct supervision and inspection of classroom activities by a heroic school head only. Concerning supervision of classroom activities, Mr Moyo thus said: "This is a shared responsibility among the members of the school management team." Accordingly, lesson supervision reports found in the headmaster's office confirmed that inspection of lessons was carried by the school head, the deputy and HODs.

6. Discussion of Findings

It will be recalled that the purpose of this article was to explore school heads' enactment of instructional leadership practices in inclusive secondary schools and how this sense-making explains instructional leadership practices in this instructional environment. The main finding emerging from data analysis is that the participating school heads understood instructional leadership in their schools in the reincarnated and morphed sense [24] of the concept as a multidimensional and stakeholder-based social activity built on equity principles. They did not view it in its traditional sense [25], as direct supervision and inspection of classroom activities by a venerable school head only. Howley et al. [8] use the term

inclusive instructional leadership to refer to instructional leadership that is expanded to incorporate a focus on equity (inclusivity) such as witnessed in this study. Choi et al. [9] distinguish "social justice" from "legal justice" (equity-) based inclusive instructional leadership. The challenge emerging from data analysis in the present article is that the concept of equity and the purpose for inclusive instructional leadership varied across stakeholders. As a result, practices by participants were characterised by struggles to balance competing expectations from stakeholders, including from school heads themselves.

The key stakeholders in this reincarnated version [24, 25, 35] of instructional leadership, as data show, comprised the MoPSE, RAs, school heads, teachers and the communities from which schools drew their learners. Clearly, our findings show that instructional leadership in inclusive secondary schools is shaped by pressure to balance expectations from the school leadership context, as filtered through the personal characteristics of the different school heads involved [36]. Jita [37] calls such personal characteristics "resources of biography". Andrews et al. [38] use the term "technologies of self".

Consistent with this pressure and expectations from multiple stakeholders of his school, Mr Simango, for example, viewed himself as the torchbearer, promoter of education for all and as a facilitator and supervisor of teaching and learning activities. In a similar multidimensional view, Mr Sithole viewed himself as a policy implementer whose responsibilities comprised: upholding the inclusive thrust of the RA, school resourcing for inclusion, facilitating learning, supervising and protecting the name of the school through high performance in public examinations. Last but not least, Mr Moyo viewed himself as an advocate for learners with exceptionalities, responsible for giving hope to the hopeless, providing a relevant curriculum for differently abled learners, creating a school brand that sells and for promoting a culture of excellence amongst both teachers and learners.

Clearly, the research participants saw instructional leadership in their schools in the morphed sense, as a multidimensional, stakeholder-oriented and equity-based social activity. Acknowledging the complexity and pressures associated with inclusive instructional leadership as described above, Mr Simango thus professed: "My job is not as easy as people may be made to believe." In line with this complexity view, the concept of "equity" and purpose of inclusivity varied across schools.

Messrs Simango and Moyo's view of equity, for example, was that of a non-selective school that provides equal access to all includable children [14], mainly for ethical reasons. They believed that children, including those with physical disabilities, OVC and those who may not pass the required minimum number of O-level subjects, should be given equal access to education in an inclusive context, each according to his/her needs. They

also believed that once they were enrolled, learners should never be allowed to go out empty-handed.

Instead, even those who cannot afford the much-coveted full five O-level certificates should leave school with at least some artisanal skills usable in their future life. In this all-embracing and whole-schooling context [18], Messrs Simango and Moyo believed that parents would also receive value for money invested in the education of their children. It appears that Messrs Simango and Moyo's thoughts were guided more by issues of equity in the context of fairness or social justice, as opposed to equity as in legal rights or equality in the context of sameness [8]. Their version of inclusive instructional practices thus agreed with Singhal [39]. Writing from Australia, Singhal [39] views exclusion of children with low ability to learn from some schools in the country as one of the most subtle forms of exclusion, with serious ramifications on the future life of affected children, if allowed to continue unabated.

Clearly, Messrs Simango and Moyo's focus on instructional leadership, as discussed in this section, points to their subscription to the multiple-intelligence and differential-intelligence [33] hypotheses that school systems seem to ignore as they focus on examination-oriented instructional practices. Messrs Simango and Moyo's focus suggests that they were driven from within to uphold what they viewed as socially appropriate and to respond to what they viewed as the needs of the community. At the same time, they also felt pressured from outside to seek to protect their schools' names. The two envisioned an inclusive education system that meets the expectations of the social justice logics [10] without compromising the quality of education imparted to learners with high intellectual ability. Mr Simango thus asserted: "Our primary [entry] qualification in this school is the mere fact that one is a human being." He further stressed that: "I should also work to improve the examination pass rate" and that: "Once admitted ... no child should be allowed to leave school empty-handed" These assertions show a strong desire to balance competing expectations from stakeholders. This balance, though difficult to achieve, was understood to be a more appropriate system than one in which schools were entirely commercialised and education-marketised [11].

The existence of competing views and expectations was particularly evident when Mr Simango remarked: "Whilst some school authorities admit children on the basis of what they expect them to do for the school when they finally write examinations, at this school, our focus is on what the school will do for the child and not what the child will do for the school." Clearly, Messrs Simango and Moyo's narratives show that a social-justice-based inclusive education system [8, 9] is more appropriate than one in which schools blindly adhere to uncritical entrepreneurial logics that are based on equality in the context of sameness or rights assumptions as the law seems to speak.

For Mr Sithole, unlike Messrs Moyo and Simango, the focus of inclusive education seems to be on a narrower spectrum of special needs, with a strong bias towards entrepreneurial logics of instructional leadership [8, 10] that also centres on competition. Mr Sithole's construction of inclusivity seems to be more inclined to physical disability and OVC with high intellectual ability, than exceptionalities in the broad and all-encompassing sense of the concept [3]. However, in some cases, his school also accommodates a few OVC with low ability to learn who are identified and referred to the school by the church.

Clearly, by embracing his brand of inclusive education, Mr Sithole sought to pursue the RA's purpose for building the school. At the same time, he thought he was pursuing the MoPSE's goals and therefore was "100 percent MoPSE and 100 percent RA". However, the challenge for this coupling practice is the mismatch between the MoPSE's policy as written statements and policy as actually enforced by the MoPSE. This mismatch made Mr Sithole to conclude that: "For the MoPSE, inclusion as we practise it here is only a paper thing" Clearly, Mr Sithole's inclusive instructional practices appeared as a mere call of duty as expected by the RA for the school, whilst at the back of his mind, he felt pressured to meet the MoPSE's covert policy and guarantee self-legitimacy. This dilemma resulted from the observation by research participants that the MoPSE talks about full inclusive education, whilst in practice, rewarding exclusionary practices through its focus on examination results as the only measure of learner learning. The dilemma also seems to be aggravated by what Mr Simango defined as "the five O-level-subjects syndrome".

An unexpected but important finding of this study is that church run schools seem to have embraced the inclusive framework in a more serious way than schools that are run by non-church responsible authorities. As highlighted earlier, the research participants for this study were three secondary school heads who were nominated by the district office based on the extent to which they had embraced the inclusive framework ahead of other schools in the same district. The fact that the schools identified by the district as having embraced the inclusive framework in a more seriously way than other schools in the district were all church run schools, may suggest that church related schools were taking the inclusive framework more seriously than non-church schools. In terms of the Zimbabwean law, other responsible authorities in the education system include the central government, local councils, private individuals or corporates, such as mining and farming institutions [41].

7. Conclusions and Recommendations

The main argument in this article is that participating school heads understand instructional leadership in their

inclusive schools in the reincarnated sense of the concept as a multidimensional and stakeholder-based social activity that is built on equity (inclusivity) principles. However, the concept of “equity” and hence the purpose for inclusive instructional leadership were understood differently across schools and by different stakeholders. As a result, enactment of instructional leadership practice was characterised by struggles to balance (couple) different and sometimes conflicting expectations of stakeholders as school heads sought to protect personal identity and guarantee self-legitimacy.

This search for legitimacy seemed to be motivated by what Rigby [10] defines as logics of action. March and Olsen [40] classify these logics of action into logics of social appropriateness and logics of consequences. The operation of these logics in the participating schools seemed to be consistent with sense-making assumptions, as findings in the present study suggest. In line with these logics of action, school heads therefore acted in ways that they considered to be socially appropriate. These are ways they believed would help them avoid the negative consequences of acting in ways contrary to their role expectations as understood by key stakeholders in the education system. Nevertheless, there were differences on the meaning of equity and the purpose for embracing an inclusive approach to education across different stakeholders. These differences made the enactment of inclusive instructional leadership thought and practices by school heads to appear as a story of actors listening and dancing to different sounds from echoes of a single drumbeat.

Findings in this study seem to support the observation by Meltz et al. [42], which portrays inclusive education as “a case of beliefs competing for implementation”. This article therefore shows that inclusive instructional leadership may itself be a “marginalising” social activity within the education system. This view is seen in the context of different conceptualisations of inclusive education across the social divide, and in response to an uneven balance of power amongst stakeholders in this web of beliefs competing for implementation. This conclusion is also consistent with Howley et al. [8]. They observe that “[p]rincipals who take an interest in marginalised students confront power arrangements that structure inequity throughout society as a whole and schooling in particular”, where they may also risk marginalisation. In this particular study, we therefore conclude that by roping marginalised children through inclusive instructional leadership practices, school heads also risk being marginalised themselves. As a result, their practices may be characterised by struggles to search and guarantee legitimacy. Clearly, findings in this study suggest that the practice of full inclusion and inclusive instructional leadership remains an impossible task for mere mortals like us, unless one is willing to “answer with your [own] life”, as Kathleen Casey [43] would argue.

Without such willingness and preparedness by implementers of inclusive education policies at a school level, full inclusion may forever remain a mirage unless there is a change of mind-set on the purpose of education in society and the role of instructional leadership across the social divide.

To realise the promises of full inclusive education and inclusive instructional leadership practices, as literature shows, it is recommended that policy makers should redefine inclusive education and differentiate it from related and, at times, more emotive and politically attractive concepts such as disability education and special needs education. It is further recommended that policy makers should de-marketise and humanise education. This can be achieved by enforcing an inclusive sensitive curriculum policy that also demystifies the role of an O-level certificate in life and the assumption that every child is university material. In this new definition, inclusive education need not be based on assumptions of equality as of sameness but as of equity, fairness and ethics. At the same time, there may be need for policy makers to formerly recognise exclusion of learners with intellectual barriers to learning as a new and more subtle form of discrimination [39], which should be addressed before it is too late. This call to redefine inclusive education should not be seen as academic arrogance but an attempt to domesticate and acculturate this key concept in order to make it more relevant and applicable to local conditions. Our findings seem to answer, in part, the paradox on why full inclusive education has remained a mirage in the backdrop of supportive policy and ethical foundations. The issue here is that by embracing full inclusion, school heads risk being marginalised themselves, in a community where public education has been highly commercialised and marketised [11]. Clearly, these findings contribute to scholarship by adding new insights into growing literature on instructional leadership for inclusive education, which undoubtedly has become an important area of educational research in the twenty-first century.

Consistent with research findings as presented and discussed in this study, we also recommend that further research be carried out, focusing specifically on the situation in non-religious schools in order to compare with the findings presented herein.

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