



## Supporting Behaviour Management in Schools : Strategies Deployed by Head-Teachers

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**Abstract** *The head teacher's (hereinafter to be written HT) role is to foster a positive learning environment, essential for high-quality education. This qualitative research examined strategies used by HTs in three high schools in the Manzini region of Eswatini to promote effective behaviour management. One-on-one interviews were conducted with HTs from Mavalela (MV), Sidlamafa (SD), and Lomawa (LM) high schools, using pseudonyms for confidentiality. The analysis is based on the Transformational Leadership and Rogers' Decisive Discipline Model frameworks, which explain leadership strategies and insights for creating respectful learning environments. Findings indicate that HTs prioritize respect, adherence to school policies, attendance, accountability for learner behaviour, teacher training, parental involvement, and providing necessary resources for teachers.*

**Keywords** : Discipline, Distributed Leadership, Management, School Leaders, Stakeholders

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Effective HTs are vital in shaping the behaviour of both learners and educators, significantly impacting outcomes such as behaviour, attendance, and achievement (Grissom, Egalite & Lindsay, 2021; Leithwood & Louis, 2011). Tedla and Kilango (2022) emphasize the importance of establishing a strong culture of good behaviour in schools, with HTs leading this effort to align with the school's vision. This study is based on the belief that effective leadership behaviours and strategies by HTs enhance teacher effectiveness and learner behaviour. In Eswatini, HTs should demonstrate transformational leadership skills that focus on learner achievement and promote collaboration among stakeholders. As the educational landscape changes, school leaders must adapt to new challenges to ensure effective behaviour management.

#### Statement of the problem

Although HTs have been shown to be essential in helping learners change their conduct, less attention has gone into the strategies these leaders use to effect behaviour management in the Kingdom of Eswatini. The current study aims to ascertain the strategies used by HTs to support and improve the management of learner conduct in schools.

#### Significance of the Study

The study aimed at understanding the strategies employed by HTs for successful behaviour management in schools, at MV, SD and LM High Schools in the Manzini region of Eswatini. Effective leadership in schools plays a significant role in behaviour management,

academic performance, and overall school climate which in turn translates to positive school culture. HTs, teachers and education officials should develop strategies to improve the learning experience and encourage good conduct.

### **Research questions**

- a) How do HTs characterize and explain the strategies that support behaviour management in schools?
- b) What can be learnt from HTs' perspectives regarding the strategies that support successful behaviour management in schools?

## **2. MATERIALS AND METHODS**

Learner behaviour is closely tied to academic success, safety, and overall well-being, serving as the foundation for school activities (Bennett, 2017). In this context, "behaviour" encompasses how learners engage with their work, communicate, and navigate transitions between tasks, making effective behaviour management strategies essential. Management involves planning, organizing, directing, and controlling school activities to achieve goals through optimal resource allocation. HTs utilize various strategies to manage learner behaviour and encourage self-regulation within educational guidelines. This literature review examines HT management practices, emphasizing empirical studies and best practices. Common strategies include clear behaviour management frameworks, parental involvement, shared leadership, and teacher development. The subsequent sections will outline the tactics HTs employ to improve behaviour control in schools.

A key strategy for improving behaviour management in schools is to implement clear and consistent methods (Kern & Wehmeyer, 2021). Effective behaviour management is crucial for creating positive learning environments (Darling-Hammond & DePaoli, 2020). Bennett (2017) emphasizes that headteachers should develop clear behavioural visions that outline acceptable and unacceptable behaviours, reflecting the school's values. The vision creation process can include gathering feedback from stakeholders, including learners which may help address their needs and expectations. Parents should also be involved to ensure alignment with community values, fostering a respectful atmosphere where learners feel valued and accountable (Sulthani & Thoifah, 2022). Clear communication of these values is essential for effective behaviour management.

Another strategy headteachers use to improve behaviour management is to establish clear behaviour policies and codes of conduct, including procedures for addressing violations. Following the Ministry of Education and Training's recommendations, headteachers should

involve relevant stakeholders in creating these guidelines (Mbagwu & Okeke, 2023). The policies should clearly outline expectations, rewards for positive behaviour, and consequences for misconduct (Ramaphakela & Mdhlalose, 2021). Community involvement ensures the policies reflect shared values, and training sessions help everyone understand and accept them. Consistent rules across classes enhance learner compliance and clarify behavioural standards (Simonsen et al., 2020).

Galdames-Calderón (2023) highlights that headteachers use distributed leadership to enhance behaviour management in schools by sharing leadership responsibilities among staff rather than relying solely on the headteacher. Ibrahim (2022) notes that this delegation fosters a supportive learning environment. This collaborative model encourages teamwork and empowers all staff, emphasizing that leadership skills can be developed by many (Dacholfany et al., 2024).

In Eswatini, this approach enables teachers to collaborate on behavioural issues, bringing diverse perspectives for more effective solutions. Additionally, distributed leadership strengthens staff relationships, making teachers more inclined to seek support when addressing challenging behaviours (Ucar, 2021).

Haßler, Bennett, and Damani (2020) emphasize that teacher development is crucial for improving behaviour management in schools. This systematic approach enhances teachers' skills through various training methods and collaborative learning (Sims & Fletcher-Wood, 2020; Lazarides et al., 2020). By equipping teachers to engage all learners, it helps reduce disruptive behaviour, fostering a safe and productive learning environment (Stevenson et al., 2020). Moreover, regular skill refinement allows for learner-centred lessons (Meesuk et al., 2020), and programs like Positive Behavioural Interventions and Supports (PBIS) effectively enhance proactive behaviour management techniques (Simonsen et al., 2021). There is a consensus that educators must continuously adapt to the evolving educational landscape in Eswatini and globally to remain effective.

Another strategy headteachers employ is involving parents in their children's education, which is vital for behaviour management. This entails communicating with teachers, participation in school activities, and support with homework (Yulianti et al., 2022). Research indicates that such involvement improves both academic performance and behaviour (Anastasiou & Papagianni, 2020; Kelty & Wakabayashi, 2020; Berkowitz et al., 2021; Matere & Nyakundi, 2023).

In Eswatini, headteachers work with parents to create a positive home-school relationship, often organizing workshops to explain school policies and promote healthy

behaviours (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002). Transformational leaders stress the importance of parental engagement, fostering collaboration among parents, teachers, and learners to enhance the learning environment (Thapa et al., 2013). Regular communication reinforces positive behaviours, underscoring the need for headteachers to actively involve parents in their children's education (Goodall & Vorhaus, 2011).

### **Theoretical Methodology of the study**

This section defines "leadership" within the study and explores two theoretical frameworks: transformational leadership theory and Rogers' discipline model. Leadership is characterized as a purposeful influence on stakeholders to achieve organizational goals (Saeidi et al., 2021). It focuses on collaboration to meet shared objectives through interactions between leaders and followers (Makhasane & Chikoko, 2016). In these interactions, leaders motivate, encourage cooperation, and communicate long-term goals for the school (Hashimy et al., 2023).

### **Transformational leadership theory**

Hashimy et al. (2023) emphasize that strong leadership and capacity building are vital for sustainable success that transform schools. Transformational leadership is particularly effective for enhancing problem-solving skills during school changes and is relevant for behaviour management (Liu, 2015). This approach motivates followers to exceed expectations while aligning with organizational goals (Sarros et al., 2008). Transformational leaders redefine missions, revise roles, and reorganize systems to meet school objectives (Altinay et al., 2017), characterized by a clear vision, role modelling, high standards, and personalized support (Sarros et al., 2008).

Burns' transformational leadership theory promotes collaboration among teachers, headteachers, parents, and learners to reshape school culture and school discipline (Sarros et al., 2008). Effective stakeholder cooperation is essential for a positive school environment. Research indicates that transformational leaders engage stakeholders in change processes, fostering new practices and positive relationships (Sarros et al., 2008; Liu, 2015). If leaders do not embody the school vision, it cannot be realized (Liu, 2015). This model aids in understanding school changes and managing behaviours, ultimately transforming the school culture (Quin et al., 2015).

### **Rogers' decisive discipline model**

Rogers' decisive discipline model is designed to help educators, particularly headteachers, manage learner behaviour effectively (Psychological Resources, 2014). It emphasizes accountability, clear expectations, and consequences within a supportive learning

environment (Rogers, 2015). The model promotes self-control and positive behaviour recognition, encouraging stakeholders to celebrate achievements and provide support through teacher training and counseling (Huckel, 2018).

Headteachers must communicate school rules and consequences clearly and consistently (Rogers, 2020). By defining expected behaviours, they help learners understand boundaries, reducing misbehaviour. Addressing issues calmly and respectfully is crucial for maintaining good relationships among stakeholders (Rogers, 2015). A fair and transparent consequences system ensures equal treatment for all learners. This approach not only discourages negative behaviour but also fosters mutual respect and trust between learners and teachers (Rogers, 2020). By integrating transformational leadership with Rogers' model, headteachers can enhance discipline management, promoting growth, accountability, and a positive learning environment.

### **Research Method**

The qualitative method is well-suited for examining how headteachers manage behaviour in schools. I used an interpretative paradigm, which considers beliefs about reality (ontological) and learning about issues (epistemological) (Maree, 2010; Groenewald, 2004). This approach facilitated the collection and interpretation of knowledge based on participants' experiences, reflecting their diverse perspectives (Thanh & Thanh, 2015). The interpretive paradigm aligns with qualitative methodologies (McQueen, 2002; Thomas, 2003) and informed my case study design, effective for exploring the "how and why" of real-life phenomena (Yin, 2018). This design allowed for a thorough investigation using various evidence sources (Hancock & Algozzine, 2021; Ridder, 2017).

### **Selection of Research Sites and Participants**

Purposeful sampling guided the selection of sites and participants in this qualitative research (Creswell, 2007). Participants and locations were chosen for their potential to enhance understanding of the phenomenon and address research questions (Creswell, 2014). I selected three headteachers from the Manzini region of Eswatini for their expertise in behaviour management. Prior to this, I consulted the Education Testing Guidance and Psychology Services (ETGPS) to identify schools with well-behaved learners, from which I purposefully chose three. This method allows researchers to draw insights about a larger population without needing to measure every unit (Khan, 2014), effectively hand-picking cases based on relevant characteristics.

### **Semi-structured interviews (individual)**

I gathered data from the HTs through one-on-one interviews, a qualitative method where participants answer prepared and probing questions (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). Conducting these interviews in their own offices created a comfortable environment for open sharing (Palić et al., 2015). My rapport with the participants further encouraged candid expression, allowing me to collect all the necessary information.

### **Data-analysis Procedures**

I analysed the data from the individual interviews using thematic analysis, which systematically identifies and interprets patterns (themes) within a dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2012). This method is effective in qualitative research, providing essential skills applicable across various techniques and yielding reliable insights. It is user-friendly for beginners, as it is straightforward to implement (Braun & Clarke, 2012) and summarizes key aspects of large datasets, aiding in the creation of a clear final report (Nowell et al., 2017). This study followed Braun and Clarke's six-phase framework, which includes familiarizing with the data, generating initial codes, identifying and reviewing themes, defining and labelling themes, and producing the final report.

## **3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

The data collected from the three participating schools, MV, SD, and LM high schools, whose headteachers will be named, MVH, SDH and LMH respectively, showed four themes. They are addressed in this order: school's ideals, prevailing school cultures, stakeholder relationships, and leadership support in schools.

### **School's ideals**

This theme focuses on the fundamental principles, values, and goals that shape the philosophies and practices of schools. In this study, the schools' ideals reflect what the schools prioritize, including management structures and expected outcomes. The HT plays a key role in defining and promoting the school's vision and values (Ministry of Education and Training, 1988).

To the question, "what are your school's key values?" MVH mentioned teamwork, excellence, attendance, punctuality, and respect for rules. SDH highlighted excellence, love, respect, kindness, and attendance, while LMH emphasized cooperation, communication, accountability, and personal responsibility.

Across the three schools, common values included respect, punctuality, and attendance, with class attendance and excellence noted by MVH and SDH. MVH viewed excellence not

just as good results but also as fostering learners' confidence to compete nationally. SDH's values were rooted in Christian principles, reflecting the school's foundation.

Participants occasionally mentioned unique values, but they generally agreed on the importance of school values in managing discipline. I believe these values significantly influence learners' moral development and behaviour. Akey (2006) notes that strong school values contribute to a secure learning environment and positively impact academic achievement.

### **Prevailing school cultures**

This theme examines the common strategies employed by headteachers in managing behaviour. I asked, "What strategies did you use for behaviour management at your school?"

Data from SD showed a traditional, hierarchical community that emphasizes strict adherence to rules, with clear expectations and consequences. They enforce a zero-tolerance policy for serious infractions and prioritize parental involvement through regular meetings and workshops on positive discipline, leading to effective behaviour management. In contrast, MVH adopts a balanced approach, combining support and discipline. They create an environment of accountability while integrating educational programs that promote positive behaviour, supported by mentorship from school prefects. MVH also uses data-driven strategies to monitor behaviour, identifying patterns for proactive intervention and employing individualized behaviour plans for learners needing extra support, moving away from a one-size-fits-all model. Comparing the three schools, LM fosters a supportive culture focused on honesty and staff development, while SD emphasizes strict rules and parental involvement. MV's hybrid model combines support with accountability and data analysis for personalized management. Each strategy has its strengths and weaknesses, highlighting the complexity of behaviour management and the need for tailored approaches in educational leadership.

### **Stakeholder relationships**

I asked the headteachers, "How do you build relationships with stakeholders in your school?" The data revealed that all participants recognized the importance of fostering supportive relationships, despite differing views on practices. They agreed that collaboration with stakeholders is essential for effective behaviour management. MVH mentioned organizing PTA meetings to discuss learners' academic performance, safety, and discipline, believing these discussions strengthen relationships. SDH shared that he arranged all-expenses-paid team-building trips for teachers to Durban, which improved teachers' relationships and boosted their confidence in his leadership. LMH emphasized consulting the school committee before making major decisions, enhancing her relationship with them and demonstrating collaborative

management. Additionally, she organized high tea for teachers to celebrate their academic successes.

### **Leadership support in the schools**

This theme examined the support school leaders provided to teachers in shaping learner behaviour. I asked the headteachers, “What type of assistance do you offer teachers for behaviour management?” The data revealed varied strategies among participants. MVH mentioned providing teaching resources and observing classroom activities, while SDH organized motivational speakers to address learners' needs. LMH discussed the school’s vision with stakeholders to involve teachers in behaviour management and set yearly objectives. When I followed up with LMH about engaging parents in managing behaviour, he noted that parents of habitual offenders are invited for discussions. In serious cases, such as drug-related incidents, the school board chairperson participates in disciplinary hearings. Parents are also consulted about their children's performance, with some situations requiring in-person meetings and follow-up calls. The diverse tactics employed by school leaders effectively contributed to achieving well-behaved learners. These variations in support reflect the distinct socioeconomic backgrounds and educational policies of each school, influencing how headteachers provide necessary assistance. Espinoza (2013) emphasizes that effective leadership focuses on values, vision, high expectations, and stakeholder support, which are key traits of transformational leaders. Ultimately, leadership should prioritize fostering a collaborative culture and optimizing resources for effective behaviour management.

## **4. CONCLUSION**

Effective behaviour management in schools requires strategic leadership from HTs who are willing to adopt evidence-based practices tailored for their unique school contexts. By establishing clear expectations, investing in teacher development, utilizing data-driven decision-making processes, engaging parents, promoting positive relationships among stakeholders, and implementing positive behaviour correction practices, HTs can significantly improve learner behaviour outcomes. In the same vein, Ngole and Mkulu (2021) affirm that the role of the HT is essential to ensure supervision and support of the teaching and learning process.

I have also learnt from this study that implementing positive strategies has a significant impact on how learner behaviour is shaped in schools because these strategies help with improving learners' attitudes, convictions, and behaviours. The positive strategies that were eloquently described by the participants during interviews promoted good learner behaviour,

something that positively impacted on their well-being and achievement. Hence it is imperative that head teachers acknowledge the significance of supporting teachers' endeavour to inculcate favourable learner conduct and scholastic success.

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