Intercessory Personal Attributes of Traditional Leaders in Handling Conflicts: Influence on Zimbabwe School Education.

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Abstract:

The study was undertaken to establish essential personal intercessory attributes of traditional leaders in Zimbabwe in handling conflicts and their influence on Zimbabwe School Education. The Descriptive Survey Design was employed. The study employed both quantitative and qualitative approaches in data collection. The five point Likert scale type of tool was used. Respondents were asked to rate the personal attributes listed against the scale. The tool had an open ended section where respondents would add any attributes which they thought had been omitted in the questionnaire. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyse data. Any personal data which had a mean rating of 4.00-5.00 was considered important. The study revealed that the traditional leaders in Zimbabwe possessed a diverse range of personal attributes in handling conflicts. The personal attributes included those in the cognitive domain, those associated with morality,attributes aligned to deportment, ethical personal qualities, intrinsic virtues and social attributes.With respect to influence on school education, the more the traditional leader became supportive to school programs, especially during conflicts, themore wasthe positive influence he or she had on school education. It was also observed that those traditional leaders who were more educated tended to play a positive role on school education. It was thus, recommended that there was need to train traditional leaders in matters of conflict handling to empower them to handle conflict matters which involved members of their community from diversified backgrounds.

Key Terms*: traditional leaders, intercessory, personal attributes, handling conflicts and influence on school education.*

I. INTRODUCTION

There has been a growing recognition of the role of traditional leaders in resolving conflict in the world and Africa in particular. Among the countries which now constitutionally recognise the existence and role of traditional leaders in resolving conflicts are the United States of America, New Zealand, South Africa, Namibia, Kenya and Zimbabwe.(Mijiga:2011) As cited by MacGinty (2008), in recognition of traditional conflict resolution styles, the World Bank produced a video entitled "Building Social Capital Through Peace Making Circles."MacGinty continues to explain that this video consists of "an indigenous traditional mechanism for communication and building shared values, consensus and resolving conflicts." In Zimbabwe, the role of traditional leaders is even more magnified as it includes responsibilities in school education. Lederach (1995) in MacGinty (2008) strongly argues that external wisdom should not dominate conflict resolution and advocates for the importance of local inputs in peace building. In support of this view, Brock-Utne (2001) stresses that inorder to effectively address conflicts in Africa, "values, beliefs, suspicions, interests, needs, attitudes, actions and root causes of conflicts of the indigenous parties have to be established." One of the proponents of traditional styles of resolving conflicts is Adejo (2004) who strongly argues that "it is quite dangerous to relegate culture to the background in conflict resolution." Edossa et al (2007) add to this argument by pointing out that "neglect of these norms and laws may have negative consequences for development."

The role of traditional leaders in Zimbabwe is magnified by their additional responsibility in education. The Education Act (Chapter 25:04) and the Traditional Leaders Act (Chapter 29:17) give the following responsibilities in education to traditional leaders in Zimbabwe:

- Establishment of schools in areas under their jurisdiction.
- Allocation of land and setting boundaries within which schools should be established
- Enforcing that every child should have access to primary education.
- Enforcing the payment of school fees and levies.
- Articulating the needs of schools and generally supporting school progress.
- Ensuring that public properties (schools included) are not damaged or misused by their livestock.
- Promotion of good standards of education in their areas.
- Promotion of good morals and social conduct among members of their areas.
- Mediating in local disputes.

The occurrence of conflicts is inevitable in human interpersonal relationships. The United Nations Manual on Skills Development for Conflict Transformation (2001:1) aptly observes that "whether at home with our families, at work with colleagues or in negotiations between governments, conflict pervades our relationships." The role of traditional leaders in Zimbabwe is thus, compounded by this realisation.

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Conflict can either be constructive or destructive. This is echoed by similar observations by a number of scholars.

A study by Rukuni et al (2015) in Bikita District of Zimbabwe on the role of traditional leaders in conflict resolution, revealed that there were "serious gaps in qualities to maintain sound public relations and little knowledge of the law." In the same article, they pointed out that by the nature of their role in resolving conflicts, traditional leaders were a subject of public scrutiny-hence there was need to examine those personal attributes which were expected of them in handling conflicts.

For one to gain more insights on the subject of traditional conflict resolution, it was felt that a review of literature on traditional conflict resolution in Zimbabwe was important.

II. STUDIES ON TRADITIONAL AND COMMUNITY CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN ZIMBABWE

Although focussed on one district (Bikita) of Zimbabwe, the study by Rukuni et al (2015) provides some relevant background data on personal attributes expected from traditional leaders in resolving conflicts. Rural communities attached great importance to the role of traditional leaders in conflict resolution. On personal attributes expected from traditional leaders in resolving conflicts, respondents cited the following:

- Traditional leaders were expected to be "impartial, patient, knowledgeable, sympathetic, of integrity, trustworthy, understanding, having the ability to consult transparently and to avail themselves when needed."
- There was need for traditional leaders to keep abreast with trends in resolving conflicts.
- Traditional leaders were observed to be egocentric and lacked participatory principles.
- The traditional leaders were also observed to be lacking leadership skills.
- Traditional leaders were observed to be biased in their judgements.

It was observed that the above study omitted a number of dimensions of personal attributes which were called for from traditional leaders in handling conflicts. The study was also undertaken in one district out of 66 in Zimbabwe.   In addition, the study was not done in the context of education.

III. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of the study were as follows:

- To identify personal intercessory attributes of traditional leaders in handling conflicts.
- To establish the influence of the intercessory personal attributes on Zimbabwe school education.

IV. METHODOLOGY

The Descriptive Survey Design was adopted for its convenience and economy in collecting wide ranging data in the shortest possible time. As articulated by Kothari, (2011) Descriptive Surveys aim at narration of facts of a phenomenon and its characteristics. Conclusions are then inferred from the data gathered. (Iravo 2012).The study employed a combination of both qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection being guided by the pragmatist paradigm that the combination of approaches yields more comprehensive dataas the methods complement each other. (Myers and Haase: 1989). The qualitative methods included interviews and focus discussion groups.

Research instruments included the Likert type questionnaire and the interview schedule developed and standardized by the researcher. The respondents were asked to rate the importance of personal attributes listed against a five point scale where 1 meant that the attribute was not important and 5 very important.

From, the two districts which consisted of 150 traditional leaders, only 90 of them were selected (30%) on random basis.

For data analysis, Mean ratings for the listed attributes were used to determine which of those attributes of traditional leaders were considered as essential. Any item which had a rating ranging from 4.0-5.0 was considered to be important. Additional attributessuggested by the respondents were also considered.

V. RESULTS

INTERCESSORY PERSONAL ATTRIBUTES OF TRADITIONAL LEADERS AS RATED BY RESPONDENTS.

The intercessory personal attributes which are listed in the table below were rated as important by respondents, those attributes which are having the mean rating of 4 and above are considered.A closer analysis of the attributes listed in the tables was also attempted to determine whether there were emerging patterns within the groupings of those attributes.
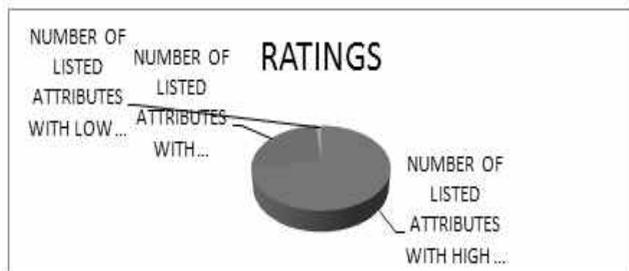
PERSONAL ATTRIBUTES RATED AS IMPORTANT.

Table No. 1: Mean ratings of personal attributes of traditional leaders

Personal Attributes	Mean Ratings
Confidentiality	4.22
Dignified	4.16
Fair	4.26
Courageous	4.03
Respectful	4.14
Patriarchal	4.03
Objective	4.15
Integrity	4.32
Commitment to pursue conflict resolution	4.32
Acceptable to the community	4.21
Credible	4.17
Shows concern for the people	4.22
Having a genuine interest to address conflicts	4.29
Good interpersonal relations	4.33
Truthful to oneself	4.18
Inspiring	4.06
Conscientious in striving to resolve conflicts	4.18
Seeing good in others	4.03
Reliable	4.24
Genuine	4.13
Accountable for his/he own actions	4.07
Frank	4.24

Genuine in his love for people	4.1
Able to control own feelings	4.03
Creative in suggesting alternative solutions	4.12
Knowledgeable in the culture of his own people	4.34
Perceptive in understanding conflict issues	4.11
Knowledgeable in general causes of conflicts	4.13
Alert in detecting early signs of conflict	4.13
Wise	4.17
Having general knowledge of law	4.04
Analytical	4.05
Knowledgeable in social matters	4.06
Trustworthy	4.18
Ethical	4.08
Emphasizes morality as the bases for adjudication	4.07
Truthful	4.33
Just	4.26
Transparent	4.32
Advocates high ethical standards	4.24
Morally upright	4.15
Credible	4.35
More focused on reconciliation	4.24
Impartial	4.31
Exudes values and virtues of African culture in dealing with conflicts	4.19

Figure 1 Pie chart showing percentages of Personal Attributes Rated in the Categories shown

Personal attributes which were highly rated ranged from 4.0 - 4.35. Out of 75 personal attributes listed in the questionnaire, 45 had a high rating suggesting that they were important. This constituted 60 % of the items.

As per the additional attributes listed by respondents, this suggests that the spectrum of personal attributes of traditional leaders in handling conflicts is quite extensive.

VI. FINDINGS

1 Clusters of personal attributes which emerged

From the illustrations highlighted below, the clusters of personal attributes which emerged fell in the following categories – those which were cognitive, those associated with being moral, those aligned to deportment, attributes aligned to being ethical and intrinsic virtues. Refer to the categories given below.

Cognitive attributes
- Socially intelligent
- Emotionally intelligent
- Creative in suggesting solutions
- Perceptive in understanding conflict issues
- Wise
- Analytical

Moral attributes
- Emphasizes morality as the basis of adjudication
- Truthful
- Just
- Morally upright
- Exudes values and virtues of African culture in dealing with conflicts

Attributes associated with deportment
- Dignified
- Patriarchal
- Acceptable to the community

Attributes aligned to being ethical
- Confidentiality
- Fair
- Integrity
- Transparent
- Genuine
- Impartial

Intrinsic virtues
- Commitment to pursue conflict resolution
- Truthful to oneself
- Compassionate
- Conscientious in striving to resolve conflict

Social attributes
- Accepts criticism
- Inspiring
- Seeing good in others
- Trustworthy

2 Additional personal attributes suggested as critical by respondents
- Being democratic-not forcing to admit guilt when they are innocent.
- Has love for people.
- Knowledgeable about life styles of people in his/her community.
- Understanding
- Not unnecessarily argumentative
- Principled.
- Accepts advice. One respondent remarked that "the traditional leader needs to listen to his assessors and not just to consider his decisions as final."
- Kind. Not being ruthless.
- Sympathetic. Being a sympathetic listener.
- Respects people's culture.
- Not being spiteful.
- Humble.
- Not corrupt.
- Being approachable

- Avoids too much familiarity with people in his community.
- Firm
- Educated
- Transparent.
- Accountable to his actions.
- Not personalising issues
- Consistent.
- Having a mind-set that nobody is above the law.
- Needs to have charm.
- Knowledgeable about acceptable moral standards.
- Not being too talkative.
- Not being too greedy

3 The positive influence of the intercessory attributes on school education

The following was the influence of the intercessory positive attributes of traditional leaders on Zimbabwe school education

- When traditional leaders became generally supportive to school programs, there were reciprocal positive attitudes towards school programs from the community.
- Amicable resolution of conflicts resulted from the conciliatory disposition of the traditional leader.
- Unity of purpose also resulted from the supportive nature of the traditional leaders.
- There was general respect for property resulting from the traditional leaders' value for education.
- Enrolments increased in school as a result of the traditional leaders' value for education.
- When traditional leaders appreciated the value of education there was a corresponding respect of teachers- this raised teachers' motivation towards their work.
- Enhanced teacher motivation resulting from the respect they received from the community led to better teacher performance thereby improving academic standards.
- The knowledge and use of praise poetry raised the self-esteem of influential members of the community thereby motivating them to do unique initiatives like modernising schools and facilitating new phenomenon of philanthropy in the rural areas.

4 Personal intercessory attributes of traditional leaders which impacted negatively on Zimbabwe school education

The following attributes of traditional leaders were cited to be impacting negatively on school education:

- Misperceptions on matters of discipline-this made some traditional leaders to wrongfully side with communities when there were disputescentred on discipline of students.
- Keeping grudges on the part of traditional leaders-this made them to be biased when interceding in conflicts.
- Ignorance on the part of the traditional leaders concerning their limits of involvement in school matters.
- Keeping aloof to school needs on the part of traditional leaders.

- Lack of firmness in deterring communities from meddling in school affairs.
- Corrupt practices on the part of traditional leaders.
- Autocratic leadership styles
- Lack of tact in dealing with conflicts.
- Cultural rigidity-this led traditional leaders to be on a collision course with more urbanised members of their communities,
- Being unsympathetic to the plight of teachers.
- Being unappreciative on the value of education
- Being lowly educated or illiterate.
- Being untrustworthy.

VII. DISCUSSION

The diversity of personal attributes picked as important for the traditional leaders in handling conflicts suggest that the traditional leaders need to be quite comprehensive in the type of expected personal attributes for them to be acceptable intercessors. The multifaceted types of the attributes depict the personality expected of the traditional leader. From the variety of the attributes, the traditional leader is expected to be morally upright, respectful, quick in grasping issues and socially divergent.

The association of certain attributes with the variables of gender, position in school, highest level of education and age provided interesting revelations on what intercessory personal attributes are expected by various groupings of people. For example, position in school was associated with the attributes of being courageous, committed to resolving conflicts, selfless, analytical and impartial. Such attributes are usually highly regarded by those in school administration.

From the comments of the respondents ,the more the traditional leader became committed to the needs of the school, the more his/her influence was felt.

The educated traditional leader and one who was appreciative of the value of education tended to play a more positive role in conflicts which were experienced between the schools and their communities. This repeatedly became a common feature of what the respondents cited.

The negative mind-set of a traditional leader created an atmosphere of dis-interest to develop schools among both communities and school personnel. Lack of involvement in the affairs of schools by the traditional leaders led to demotivation on the part of school staff which resulted in high staff turnover in the affected schools.

VIII. CONCLUSIONS

From the findings in this study, the researchers were persuaded to make the following inferences:

- Knowledge to persuade on the part of traditional leaders was still an important personal attribute.
- Traditional leaders needed a broader knowledge base on handling of conflicts.
- The level of education of a traditional leader was fast becoming an important matter. There is need for a paradigm shift on this matter. There tended to be more conflicts where traditional leaders had little or no education.

- Being conciliatory was still an important attribute in interceding by traditional leaders.
- An appreciation of cultural dynamism was important for traditional leaders to be able to handle members from diverse backgrounds in times of conflicts.
- Result oriented traditional leaders were more highly regarded.
- Change of attitudes in the communities was of the significant positive developments resulting from positive attributes of traditional leaders.
- A new phenomenon of philanthropy in rural communities was a welcome development.

IX. RECOMMENDATIONS

In view of the findings in this study, the following recommendations are given:

- Since traditional leaders get to position of leadership through hereditary means, there is need to provide them training in handling conflicts to empower them to handle conflicts in a diverse socio-cultural context.
- If the traditional leaders are to enhance their appreciation of the value of education ,that will encourage them to give more support to school education, there is need to orient them on school curricula.
- Educational qualifications are fast becoming a critical factor in determining the functional effectiveness of traditional leaders. There is, therefore need for a paradigm shift on who should be a traditional leader on the basis of minimum educational qualifications.

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