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The corruption bogey in South Africa: Is public education safe?

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Corruption is a constant global phenomenon, which is becoming more complex and intense as competition for resources increases. It is even more so amongst those living in developing countries, particularly emerging economies such as South Africa. Acts of corruption directly contest the basic principles of South Africa's Constitution, which aims at establishing freedom and security for everyone and a democracy 'for the people, by the people'. The aim of this article is to determine whether South African public education is safe from the corruption 'bogey', where reflection is made on professional public school management, which is the responsibility of school principals. Our objectives include designing an education-specific definition of corruption to advance accountable and transparent leadership; establishing the degree to which corruption has infiltrated the public education sphere; and making recommendations to fight corruption in public schools at professional public school management level. Among other findings, we found that even though some principals actively advocate upholding high morals, their conduct proves differently.

Keywords: corruption; decentralisation of power; education corruption; maladministration; misappropriation; mismanagement; moral leadership; professional management

Introduction

Various authors (De Gruchy, 2011; De Villiers, 2011; and Warner, 2011) indicate that South Africa generally finds herself on a bumpy road. Reports on economic greed, major organizational changes, retrenchments and poverty, crime, mismanagement and inefficient government, environmental degradation and corruption are flourishing in this country (Faull, 2007). Although party-political point-scoring founded on accusations and not on empirical findings, and sensational journalism, make it difficult to determine the scope of South African corruption, Baqwa (2001) points out that his experience as past Public Protector confirms that corruption is occurring at unacceptable levels.

In reporting to the South African Parliament, Hofmeyr, Head of the National Investigation Unit 6, admitted that a veritable flood of new corruption cases was being received daily, and that the only document of the Public Service Commission (2001) that reports statistics, indicated that 102 of the 238 employees (42.8%) were already dismissed from public service as far back as 2001, due to corruption-related transgressions. Corrupt practices among state officials (Zikhali, 2005), municipalities (Manala, 2010; Vyas-Doorgapersad & Ababio, 2010), police officers (Faull, 2007; Staff reporter, 2012) and prominent sport players (SAPA, 2011) are regularly reported to such an extent that Thuli Madonsela, the current Public Protector, refers to South Africa as having reached a breaking point concerning the corruption epidemic in both public and private sectors (in Gould, 2012; in Krige, 2012). Archbishop Ndungane (Reuters, 2012) similarly refers to corruption as *a cancer that is eating up the South African nation.* Moreover, Justice Minister Radebe (SONA, 2012) cautions that once corruption has been accepted as a new way of life, South Africa will have lost the battle.

Focusing on corruption in public education, we recognize that its prevalence in South Africa is no unique event. To different degrees, it pervades all countries (Warner, 2011) and has been part of the human experience for centuries (Kessler, 2010; Mello, 2007; Nathan, 2004; Webb, 2005). Nevertheless, corruption in public education has become more complex and intense, especially in the developing world, with emerging economies and developing education systems (Doh, Rodriguez, Uhlenbruck, Collins & Eden, 2003; Yamakawa, Peng & Deeds, 2008) as competition for resources increases (Kaufmann, 1997), hence the urgency argued here for its investigation. On-going research is crucial to assist everyone concerned in realising that corrupt behaviour needs exposure and understanding, so as to counteract the damage that ensues (Lewis, 2011), and therefore, this article aims at determining whether South African public education is safe from the corruption 'bogey'.

Objectives of the Article

By means of examining relevant literature, case law and media reports[i], the aim is to: (1) signpost concepts that relate both to corruption in general and education specifically; (2) design an education-specific definition for corruption to advance accountable and transparent leadership; (3) establish to what extent corruption has infiltrated the South African public education sphere; and (4) make recommendations to fight corruption in public schools at professional management level.

Research Method and Design

This article followed a documentary research design (Green & Browne, 2005), where an investigative standpoint was maintained while the selected documentary texts (also newspaper articles as they hold great potential for academic analysis and selected Internet material (Rapley, 2007)) and case law (Kotzé, Du Plessis & Barnard-Naudé, 2012), were examined.

The article therefore provides results through an exploratory study. The important *ratio decidendi* of the Constitutional Court in *Glenister v President of the Republic of South Africa,*[ii] was used as starting point, taking corruption as a constitutional issue affecting human rights. Since the State is hereby afforded the obligation to take all reasonable measures to create an independent body to fight corruption directly from the Constitution (Republic of South Africa, 1996a), fighting corruption in education is implicated, since the right to a basic education (including adult basic education) is guaranteed by section 29.

Concept Clarification

Corruption manifests itself as bribery, embezzlement, fraud, extortion, abuse of power, nepotism, conflict of interest, insider trading/abuse of privileged information and favouritism (Lewis, 2011; Oosthuizen, 2010; Webb, 2005). Corruption is therefore an umbrella term for "not following accepted standards of behaviour; displaying impairment of morals; [and] showing improper conduct" (Merriam-Webster, 2003:294; Pearsall & Hanks, 2006:261). With this in mind, other concepts that are mentioned as corrupt financial acts later in the article are the following:

- Maladministration: "corrupt administration of duties" (Merriam-Webster, 2003:720); dishonest management of money (Pearsall & Hanks, 2006).
- Mismanagement: not showing skill in handling finances (Merriam-Webster, 2003); badly or carelessly handling money (Pearsall & Hanks, 2006).
- Misappropriation: "using someone else's money wrongly, at times to one's own benefit; stealing money" (Pearsall & Hanks, 2006:743); "theft or embezzlement" (Merriam-Webster, 2003:758).
- Misuse: incorrect, improper or misapplication of money (Merriam-Webster, 2003); using money in a wrong way or for a wrong purpose (Pearsall & Hanks, 2006).

A general definition of corruption as the abuse of entrusted power for private gain, which hurts everyone whose life, livelihood or happiness depends on the integrity of people in a position of authority (Lewis, 2011), highlights the following important concepts that also need clarification:

- Power (*dynamis*) and authority (*exousia*):
  While *dynamis* entails the ability to act, *exousia* refers more closely to legitimation to act on behalf of others. In giving effect to co-operative governance between education authorities and school communities (participative democracy), the South African Schools Act (Republic of South Africa, 1996b; hereafter Schools Act) redistributes powers to local school level (devolving authority and responsibility to schools; Botha, 2004) and removes centralised control over certain aspects of education decision-making.
- Abuse of entrusted power:
  Russell (2004) indicates that, although authority is a legitimate means, the desire for power is problematic, as it is then often misused for personal gain. Authority used in bad faith, fraudulently or dishonestly is prohibited by law (Hoexter, 2008). Power abuse, as set forward by Makumbe (1999) encapsulates the malicious, unaccountable, deceitful exercise of power. In this regard, Roane (2013) reports that some School Governing Bodies and principals are the main culprits in reported corrupt activities, as they use their positions of power to abuse both funds and resources allocated by the provincial education department towards projects to improve public education. Corruption is widely reported concerning principals' channeling state funds to their personal accounts, and abusing their power to conceal such corrupt acts (Roane, 2013). It was, accordingly, recognised in both *Bula v Minister of Education*[iii] and *Kimberley Junior High School v Head Northern Cape Education Department*[iv] that a reasonable balance must be upheld between the need to protect individuals from decisions unfairly arrived at by education public authorities and the opposing appeal of avoiding undue judicial interference in their administration. In the matter of *Bula,* it was stated that the *audi alteram partem*-rule (hear the alternative party too) must especially be adhered to when dealing with serious offences such as corruption during a disciplinary hearing to ensure fairness. In the *Kimberley Junior High School*-case it was held that, from an administrative-law view, the Head of Department's power to appoint a school principal was subjected to a recommendation by the School Governing Body without which he acted *ultra vires* (beyond delegated power) and unfairly towards the candidates who had applied for the post.
- Influence of power on others:
  Zaaiman (2007) indicates that power influences the lives, actions and opinions of others. Abusing authority, in the sense that power-holders violate their concomitant responsibilities (Malan, 2009) persuaded by rewards for own advantages (Webb, 2005), violates "civil order and hurts public interest" (Makumbe, 1999:12). The constitutional right of learners to a basic education on section 29(1)(a) (Republic of South Africa, 1996a) is moreover infringed upon when funds are misused or misappropriated, learners are bribed to do favours in exchange for better marks, nepotism occurs in staff appointments, and exam papers are sold. A survey conducted in this regard indicated the prevalence of selling exam papers, especially in Mpumalanga (23%), and the misuse of school money or property in the Free State (30%), [as well as] the North-West provinces (31%). The majority (47%) of the participants who participated in this survey indicated the school principal as the

foremost person behind such corruption (Corruption Watch, 2013). Corruption at school level does, however, not only influence current learners, but also future generations, since a lack of quality education increases skills gaps already hampering economic growth in South Africa (Molteno Institute for Language and Literacy, 2014).

With regard to the abuse of public funds, Rabin (2011) alludes to the fact that it is the poor who suffer the most, and she refers to the statistics of the U4 Anti-Corruption Resource Centre (2006) that report on, among others, poor quality teaching due to corrupt appointment practices and sub-standard educational material being purchased due to mismanagement of funds as [typically] increasing as the level of poverty rises. Looking at education from another perspective, the South African government must toughen governance control at provincial and school levels to safeguard the use of education budgets. The necessity of such control stems from the government's obligation to provide quality education for future generations of South Africans, making immediate steps to fight corruption urgent (Mokeki, in Transparency International Secretariat, 2011). Corrupt practices lead to derailing quality public services delivery and causing inequalities (Lewis, 2011) especially within the sphere of education (Damania & Bulte, 2003). To overcome this, Vodacom (Pty) Limited (2013) recommends a separation of financial duties among staff members in order to reduce the chances of corruption, fraud and error.

- Integrity of people with authority:

Since leadership does not exist without power, leaders should be held accountable to those who gave them authority, as well as to those affected. Only once leaders act in an accountable manner, can power be exercised with earnestness grounded in responsibility (Kessler, 2010). It is in this regard that Stefkovich and O'Brien (2004), and Webb (2005) accentuate the fact that school leaders should mirror exemplary ethical behaviour by acting with integrity. In her budget speech in 2010, the Minister of Basic Education, however, referred to poor accountability mechanisms in different spheres of the education system: poor planning, monitoring and evaluation [along with] poorly designed institutional structures, [which make] it difficult to deliver on the key mandate of the department; [as well as] disturbing safety levels at schools (Motala & Dieltiens, 2010). De Klerk (2005) agrees by indicating that several South African schools are characterized by a total lack of morality leading, [including] non-accountability and an increasing ethical illiteracy.

Steyn, De Klerk and Du Plessis (2008) indicate that allowing public officials to escape accountability and/or evade liability for their actions paves the way for corruption and dilutes democracy. Corruption thus poses a fundamental threat to South Africa's constitutional democracy promising participation, freedom and security to everyone (Staff reporter, 2012).

An Education-Specific Definition of Corruption

Under the heading *Serious Misconduct,* indicating the transgressions that, if proven, *will* lead to educators' dismissal, the Employment of Educators' Act 76 of 1998 (s. 17(1)(a)) (Republic of South Africa, 1998) refers to an act of corruption as being related to examinations or promotional reports. The Act names theft, bribery and fraud separately from the specific mentioning of corruption in section 17(1)(a). This separation of terms may wrongly be taken to indicate that corruption is different from stealing, being bought off/paying off someone, or being part of/involved in deception. Moreover, under the heading *misconduct* which indicates the transgressions that, if proven, *could* lead to educators' dismissal, the Act (s. 18) names corruption-relevant manifestations of a collapse in the employment relationship as having been caused.

Both sections 17 and 18 were examined by the Court in *Despatch High School v Head, Department of Education, Eastern Cape,*[v] in which the principal was charged for stealing a cell phone belonging to the applicant. The applicant claimed that the principal ought to be charged with serious misconduct (s. 17) and not merely misconduct (s. 18). The High Court indicated that section 17 deals with transgressions of a more serious nature than a common law or statutory offence, or acts of dishonesty. As a result, the High Court found the principal correctly charged with misconduct and not requiring of a charge of serious misconduct. The *Despatch*-case serves as an example of case law in which so-called *white-collar* or non-violent crime is approached *softly,* as it was referred to in *S v Sadler,*[vi] thus leading to the belief that committing corruption has less serious consequences.

Yet, the Sadler-case sounds a warning to also public education that corruption is indeed a serious offence that needs to be punished more harshly, with the Supreme Court of Appeal pointing out the danger of too lenient sentences not combatting, but rather encouraging white-collar corruption deeds, and then making *the* [corruption] *game seem worth the candle*. Bearing in mind all *Sadler's* counts of corruption, forgery and fraud as part of senior management at NBS Corporate Bank, Marais J declared the trial judge's sentence of a wholly suspended prison term, the 100 hours' community service and the R500,000 fine, to be *a strikingly inappropriate response.* In upholding the Attorney General's appeal on 26 of the original 29 counts, the *Sadler*-Appeal Court handed down a sentence of four years' imprisonment, with all three judges concurring. A warning has thus been sounded: the falsification of identity in white-collar crimes has been exposed, foreshadowing grim consequences

for such perpetrators in future. This is regarded as a major step forward in combatting corruption, which Kaufmann (1997) recognises as flourishing in the absence of effective legal systems and regulations that serve productive social goals.

In defining corruption as it would be relevant to education, the above-mentioned general definition of Lewis (2011) and the two sections from the Employment of Educators' Act 76 of 1998 (s. 17 & 18) (Republic of South Africa, 1998) were scrutinized. The following definition is consequently proposed: *In the field of education, corruption includes any wilful, wrongful, abusing or disgraceful conduct that is connected to the educator's employment position; and any involvement in financial matters and/or other peoples' property for private gain*.

Corruption in the Public Education Sphere

Public schools are unfortunately not excluded from the corruption epidemic which was referred to above (Gould, 2012; Krige, 2012). Since a governmental instrument to counter corruption, Corruption Watch, introduced its campaign to focus on corruption at schools in January 2013, more than 600 allegations of school corrupt activities have been received (Corruption Watch, 2013). The categories of corruption indicated misusing school money or property as the most reported; then followed pillaging the national feeding scheme, favouritism concerning staff appointments and procurement practices, and selling test and examination documents (Corruption Watch, 2014). Moreover, incidences of irregularities in school management are mounting daily when looking at the three latest sets of figures of the South African Council for Educators (SACE): from 413 complaints in the first report to 525 complaints in the last one (SACE Annual reports, 2009/2010; 2010/2011; 2011/2012; 2012/2013). These SACE reports point out that complaints are mostly reported in the Western Cape and Gauteng; followed by those in Mpumalanga and KwaZulu-Natal. Concerns reported include the misappropriation of public funds allocated for maintaining school buildings, upgrading learning materials and feeding learners. Financial mismanagement, theft of goods and corruption in procurement, including ghost educator salaries, bidding chains for school supplies and construction work are also reported (Brooks Spector, 2014).

As if to safeguard schools from any financial mismanagement or maladministration of funds, the Schools Act (1996b:s. 16A(2)(i)) gives public school principals the responsibility of taking all the practical steps to prevent it from occurring. Moreover, public school principals must act as members of the committees or delegations that manage matters with financial implications and must report any financial mismanagement or maladministration to the head of the education department (Schools Act, 1996b:s. 16A(2)(j) & (k)).

In this regard, the Public Finance Management Act (Republic of South Africa, 1999:s. 2) aims at securing accountability, transparency and sound financial management at institutions. Pointing to the general duties of accounting officers, the same Act calls, among others, for the effective internal control of finances under the auspices of an audit committee, and applicable cost-effective and fair procurement systems (Republic of South Africa, 1999:s. 38(a)(i) & (iii)).

Contrary to expectations, practical examples of corruption at schools include a principal's dismissal for mismanaging approximately R5-million of school funds (Republic of South Africa Department of Basic Education (DBE), 2013); principals indirectly stealing food intended for impoverished learners through tenders with education departments (Jansen, 2012); 30 principals being currently investigated by SACE for misappropriating school funds, and a principal suspended pending an investigation into alleged mismanagement, maladministration and provocation of parents and the community (SACE Annual Report, 2011/2012; SAPA, 2012c). Bergman, Bergman and Gravett (2011) and Steyn et al. (2008) add further examples of rule-bending that are reported and related to school norms (educators fabricating learner marks; chronic tardiness/absenteeism; favouritism in hiring or promotion practices; fraudulent cheques by a deputy-principal); inability to make sound decisions because of vested interests; and the inability to communicate effectively with parents/caregivers, staff and community leaders. These examples indicate that not all school leaders' actions at schools always send positive ethical messages.

Faull (2007) and Mavuso and Balia (1999) argue that, despite making headway through policy, regulatory control and anti-corruption strategies – especially in developing countries – corruption remains particularly difficult to prevent or manage. With regard to a dearth in anti-corruption measures being undertaken at schools, Williams (2011) refers to the survey of Corruption Watch, as called for in 2013. Having polled 3,284 participants between ages 13 and 34, fewer than 50% who were aware of corruption, would report it. Yet, the participants indicated that arranging anti-corruption meetings and starting anti-corruption groups, as well as using social media, were steps that could effectively lead to combatting corruption at school level. Although the National Anti-Corruption Forum (NACF) has called for the school curriculum to include whistle-blowing in order to make learners in particular aware of corruption (Gadebe, 2007), only 14% of

the Corruption Watch survey participants indicated the education regarding corruption as being effective (Corruption Watch, 2013).

Madonsela (in Krige, 2012), on the other hand, urges that corruption must be combatted by providing unselfish, transparent and accountable leadership processes that allow democratic participation, rather than establishing anti-corruption campaigns. Alongside various authors (Botha, 2004; Hoberg, 2004; Steyn, 2002) who propagate that corruption at schools ought to mainly be fought by school principals themselves, acting professionally, this article places emphasis on school management by school principals in the specialized field of education (Schools Act, 1996b:s. 16 & 16A).

Public school principals are regarded by the DBE not only as the key delivery agents of the professional management of their schools (Schools Act, 1996b:s. 16(3)), but also concerning the preparation of plans to improve schools' academic performances (Schools Act, 1996b:s. 16A(1)(c)(i)). Moreover, the link between schools' organisational culture and academic performance is identified by Le Roux (2005) and Van der Westhuizen, Mosoge, Swanepoel and Coetsee (2005), underscoring the fact that especially low- and non-functioning schools suffer from poor management and weak leadership. While Greenfield (2004), Mncube, Harber and Du Plessis (2011) and Steyn (2012) indicate that the contexts within which principals operate, play a major role at effective schools, Bergman et al. (2011) describe principals as being either vehicles for positive change, or at the core of the problems experienced by their respective schools.

Potential Corrupt Acts by School Principals and the Consequences thereof

Highlighting the value of education in influencing children, Glenn (2011) and Wilson (2007) indicate that the youth can only become advocates for creating mind-shifts through the transformation of values, cultural beliefs and prejudices. Because of the immense importance of education for a society's future, Steyn et al. (2008) point out that a democratic society demands openness and honesty, specifically from school principals.

With reference to the amplification of corruption at schools, De Gruchy (2011) refers to defects in character or cultural values. He accordingly cautions that even well-meaning human actions can ultimately be self-serving. As such, he proposes the sharpening and promotion of a new South African humanist consciousness through nurturing human insights, values and commitments. Such an undertaking has the potential of encouraging people to recognise an ethical commanding and accountability beyond human self-interest and manipulation.

Contrary to this approach, which calls on moral leadership to combat corruption, Makumbe (1999) argues that corruption is brought about by the social system that rewards people with unconditional power, wealth and fame. Because of this discrepancy, the potential of principals becoming corrupt is depicted, by taking note of both views below.

Potential Corrupt Acts by Principals due to a Lack of Moral Leadership

To fulfil their role as school managers, principals are bestowed with specific statutory authority, empowering them to make broader decisions which must be carried out accountably, transparently and diligently (Dempster, Carter, Freakley & Parry, 2004; Mbatha, Grobler & Loock, 2006). Principals are thus held in higher regard than are educators, who are not in managerial positions.

In line with common law principles, principals should act in the best interests of schools and ensure that professional standards are set and adhered to (Naidu, Joubert, Mestry, Mosoge & Ngcobe, 2008), therefore placing their schools' interests ahead of their own. Their tasks should thus transcend their own self-interests (Steyn et al., 2008). In order to act in the best interests of schools, Van der Merwe (2006) highlights the importance of moral or ethical leadership based on the creation of relationships around mutual needs, shared aspirations and values, rather than around power. This is, however, a daunting task as principals are expected not only to operate in a community which includes a plurality of values and beliefs, but they are also required to make a broader range of localized ethical decisions (Dempster et al., 2004).

According to Senge (2006), principals should act in a transformative manner to satisfy higher needs and convert followers into leaders. This entails steering schools in a new direction, making adaptations, setting new goals, articulating shared visions and motivating other education role-players within a democratic paradigm (Steyn et al., 2008). Such leaders should share managing responsibilities (De Villiers & Pretorius, 2011) and embrace a paradigm of open, transparent and deep democratic leadership, and thus also combat corruption, forming environments to which the core values of democracy, such as respecting and tolerating diversity, valuing equity, equality and team-spirit (Mncube et al., 2011) are both essential, and sustained. In this regard, Steyn et al. (2008) visualise school settings that provide ample opportunity for participation through dialogue, sharing and deliberation between all education role players.

As managers in official positions of authority, school principals are required to be held accountable, not only to the State for satisfying

wider educational needs, but also to their communities (Mansfield, 2003). Principals therefore need to balance individual school needs with legislative provisions which, in turn, depend on the unique culture and context of each school (Van der Mescht, 2008). For this, a complex mix of skills relating to school management is crucial (Van Deventer & Kruger, 2005). Research conducted by Vos, Van der Westhuizen, Mentz and Ellis (2012) however indicates that principals are not yet successful in creating open school climates.

As values underpin organizational school behaviour, Naidu et al. (2008) argue that leadership has a fundamentally moral nature. In distinguishing schools as *moral communities* and education as *a moral undertaking,* Goldring and Greenfield (2002) propose that schools require principals to adopt distinct leadership styles based on moral authority. This view is shared by Solomons and Fataar (2011), stating that morality must navigate principals' interactions with members of society. For the latter to realise, Kokt and Lategan (2011) holds that it is essential for school leaders to commit themselves personally to moral leadership, since compiling ethical codes alone would be unsuccessful. Dantley (2003) submits that purposive leadership is needed, while Furman (2004:216) explains that moral or ethical leadership entails the guiding of schools to achieve their vision based on shared values, as it has the potential to "inspire the kind of commitment, devotion, and service that will make schools unequalled among society's institutions."

By placing emphasis on moral and ethical leadership in the best interests of schools thus far, it becomes evident that the quality of the authority exercised by school principals, which in itself is neither good nor evil, is determined by the person who exercises it (as supported by Kessler, 2010). Although aware of the fact that school principals in general strive to manage schools effectively (Stefkovich & O'Brien, 2004), it must be recognised that their increased powers leave them more vulnerable to extraordinary temptation (Lusenga, 2010). Principals should, accordingly, be aware of their own gendered, cultural and social attitudes with regard to their profession (Snodgrass & Haines, 2005). Greenfield (2004) concurs by acknowledging that the personal qualities, sensitivities, background, subjective understandings and past experiences of school principals influence the exercising of their powers within a particular school culture and community context.

A study by Lusenga (2010) revealed principals as indicating having strong moral orientations, and apparently unwilling to sacrifice them. On scrutinising principals' acts in a survey of the literature, however, the opposite was found. Examples were found of principals being prepared to act contrary to their moral convictions to survive professionally, to show sympathy and to maintain sound relationships with others. SAPA (2012b), for example, reports on a principal suspended for abusing his powers by assaulting a learner, while SAPA (2012a) refers to learners striking against the maladministration and corrupt behaviour of their principal. It therefore seems as if principals may easily be observed to have two kinds of morality: one which they preach, but do not practise; and one which they practise, but seldom preach.

Now that the view has been presented that a lack of humanist consciousness and therefore a lack of moral leadership can lead to corrupt acts by principals, the focus turns to another view of corruption as brought about by a system that rewards people with unrestricted fame, wealth and power.

Potential Corrupt Acts by Principals due to the Social System

In line with democracy, decentralised decision-making is also undertaken at school level, aiming towards the regulation of schools through the direct application of expertise by local leaders (Van der Mescht, 2008), in order to meet unique local needs effectively (Dipholo, Mafema & Tshishonga, 2011). In their Report of the Task Team, the South Africa Department of Education (1996) accordingly stresses the need for participative and democratic management, and, importantly, site-based school management. According to Minister Trevor Manuel, corruption can also only be fought successfully if the interest of future generations is advanced, which should inform decision-making in the world today, starting with the need for more multi-stakeholder partnerships and the renewal of institutions and processes to make them more open (Bitzer, 2014).

Notwithstanding the optimistic, positive aims behind the decentralisation of power and the concomitant idea of shared decision-making related to a move toward institutional autonomy, the so-called school-based management of schools, its practical realisation portrays a more pessimistic and negative picture. Luo and Junkunc (2008) indicate that decentralisation is often accompanied by heightened economic deregulation, which gives rise to suspicions of patronage, bribery and favouritism in almost every emerging economy where well-functioning and corruption-resisting legal and political institutions are still lacking.

The decentralisation of power to schools has altered the power basis in the education sphere, bringing about major changes to the social milieus in which schools are required to operate (Vos et al., 2012). Adapting to such changes is, as indicated by Hoskisson, Johnson, Tihanyi and White (2005), no easy task in emerging economies, as decreased government involvement necessitates schools re-focusing their actions.

Huber (in Lumby, Crow & Pashiardis, 2008) emphasizes that schools are no longer static institutions, but rather learning organizations that ought continuously to be developed or supported to develop themselves. The consequence of this is that education role-players are burdened with increased tasks/accountabilities, putting principals under severe pressure (Steyn et al., 2008) and making the role of the school principal even more pivotal in providing excellence, alongside the professional leadership required to provide positive learning environments (Botha, 2004). The latter entails environments that are transparent and honest, in which keeping to policy, controls and protocols are regarded as critical (Vodacom (Pty) Limited, 2013).

Parents, educators and learners now have to work in democratic power-sharing and co-operative partnerships with the State (Schools Act, 1996b:Preamble). This is a role for which the public in developing countries are not empowered (Webb, 2005). They often lack interest, literacy levels and knowledge in the activities of leaders, thus not holding them accountable for their actions and, in turn, opening the door for corrupt behaviour (Manala, 2010). To combat corruption, Kamper and Mampuru (2007) propose that reciprocal partnership between schools and the State need to be founded on shared visions of excellence, commitment, active participation, accountability, mutual respect and trust. Trust – instead of hierarchies of demand and collective and collaborative forms of management within a framework of holistic leadership – is thus becoming a crucial issue (Covey & Merrill, 2006). A holistic approach includes several dimensions, such as the creation of a professionally inviting culture; effective communication; an ethical foundation; empowerment of followers; personal mastery and collaboration (Grobler, Bisschoff & Beeka, 2012).

As the decentralization of power allows for wider participation, greater levels of intimacy and discretion (Berning & Montesh, 2012), Vyas-Doorgapersad and Ababio (2010) pronounce that it creates more ethical problems at grass roots level. Webb (2005) further indicates that it often opens the door for excessive use of discretion, which constitutes fruitful ground for corrupt practices. In explaining the latter, Luo and Junkunc (2008) indicate that institutions such as schools providing a vital public service, hold powerful positions. Such institutions often abuse their power to control rather than to engage others, to dictate rather than to try to understand and neutralise institutional sources or processes.

It is in this regard that Hoskisson et al. (2005) urge governments to be involved, as it is often suggested that they seldom monitor the performance of institutions in which they are substantial shareholders. Kaufmann (1997) equally indicates that governments in emerging economies often lack a true commitment to eradicate corruptive acts and thus contribute to macro-economic crises as foreign investors are discouraged from investing in countries where corruption flourishes. Luo (2005) incidentally indicates that if the government's regulatory systems lack institutional transparency, fairness and impartiality – which is often the case – a level of difficulty and uncertainty is set in place for others in coping and adapting to regulatory systems and socio-cultural environments. According to Agesa (2000) and Pillay (2004), corruption flourishes around institutional weaknesses. Van der Merwe (2006) accordingly refers to statistics, claiming that the occurrence of corruption is especially prominent in the domain of public services such as the DBE.

Research conducted by Chacar and Vissa (2005) specifies that poor institutional performance persists longer in emerging economies when compared to developed economies, and even more so if institutions are connected to government structures. It is moreover due to uncertainty regarding the exact role schools play in emerging economies that undergo such institutional transition, calling for them to be regarded as instruments (agents) instead of products of transformation (Yiu, Bruton & Lu, 2005). Dugmore (2011) similarly indicates that an underinvested interest in increasing school principals' accountability has thus far led to the work ethic in education becoming deplorably low. Luo (2005), conversely, cautions that regulatory control in most emerging economies tend to be either too excessive or too meagre, and is often non-transparent and unstable.

In this regard, Hoskisson, Eden, Lau and Wright (2000) indicate that institutions delivering public services in emerging economies, such as South Africa, should develop unique strategies to manage the broad scope and speed of economic and political changes. Such strategies ought to include transparency in economic reporting, stable management, and a strong legal system, so as to provide for the aggressive enforcement of rights; and by doing so, placing constraints on opportunism, selfishness and corruption (Hoskisson et al., 2005).

On a more positive note, although the effects of corruption on the development of attitudes and value systems are often not recognised (Poisson, 2010), Oosthuizen (2010) voices the anticipation that instilling the principles and values that are typical of ethical behaviour might not only help break the nasty cycle of corruption, but may also help to turn the tide in a positive direction concerning South Africa's public sector management. Moreover, an increasing

consciousness of the counterproductive and negative impact that corruption has on individuals and society could inspire the drive for creating an ethics of corporate social accountability.

Conclusion and Recommendations

By alluding to various examples, it became evident that South African public schools are indeed not safe from corruption. The contrary was rather found, namely that some public schools are among the spheres in which corruption most frequently rears itself, especially amongst certain of their principals in particular.

Taking note of the fact that corrupt behaviour is seldom based on a singular incident, but that it is rather known to form part of an intricately interwoven performance pattern, it is concluded that corruption can only be fought if ethical behaviour is actively encouraged and corrupt behaviour is actively discouraged. Although principals need to individually ensure this by building their own characters accordingly, it was indicated in this article that corrupt behaviour also stems from different cultural values and acceptable social behaviour standards within society at large. This conclusion is in line with Kaufmann's view (1997) that the manifestation of corruption can mainly be assigned to the broader collapse of ethics and values in society as a whole.

Given the essential role of education and the pivotal role of principals as the professional managers of schools in providing role models to future citizens and thus indirectly dictating the social system of tomorrow, no unethical behaviour on their part can be tolerated whatsoever. Principals must, as a result, consistently place emphasis on openness, honesty and integrity, sound ethical practices and commitment to acting in an exemplary manner.

To fight corruption especially at public school management level, the following recommendations, based on the discussion above, are promoted here:

- The precise definition of 'corruption' for education, which we designed above, could advance Madonsela's call for transparent and accountable leadership processes towards combatting corruption. Principals, who are informed about how easily corruption can occur as schools perform their varied activities, could become conscious of acting vicariously liable in a responsible manner, by assuming the relevant legal accountability – among other instances – for delegated tasks.
- The DBE must support the annual national principals' conference, South African Principals Association (SAPA), by scheduling a plenary session, during which a presenter qualified to report on rulings could communicate the outcome of relevant education-related corruption court cases to principals, vice-principals, and School Governing Body representatives. In this manner, principals will become conversant about the consequences of being held accountable for their own and their staff's actions.
- A give-and-take partnership between public schools and the State must be established through collective notions of active participation, accountability, respect and trust. The partnership could take shape if these principals: formed part of devising strategies to combat corruption; appreciated being answerable for their actions; and became aware of being both respected and trusted. Only then will the deferred dream of holistic leadership become realised.
- The DBE must create a work ethic that thrives on a culture of effective communication, such as well-planned inclusive discussions, and preventive measures, such as procedures similar to public administration, so as to combat corruption and thereby empowering principals as their first-line employees. In this way, principals might experience not only individual mastery, but also effective partnerships with their department and other principals in leadership community, as they participate actively and perform their duties with accountability.
- Principals may also consider forming anti-corruption cluster groups in order to support one another towards integrity, sound ethical practices and commitment to exemplary conduct when managing their schools.

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Notes

i. Although it is recognised that media reports are not rigorous scientific sources, their necessity for this article lies in their efficacy in exposing acts of corruption which, due to their sensitive nature (among persons holding a high profile in public life especially), are often settled outside of South African courts or otherwise 'brushed under the carpet'.

ii. (2011) 3 SA 347 (CC) in which the applicant, Glenister, was joined by the Helen Suzman Foundation as friend of the court in challenging the constitutional validity of the National Prosecuting Authority Amendment Act1 (NPAA Act) and the South African Police Service Amendment Act2 (SAPSA Act) to disband the Directorate of Special Operations (DSO), a specialised crime fighting unit that was located within the NPA. The substance of the complaint concerns the alleged inconsistency with this country's international obligation to establish an independent anti-corruption unit. The applicant was successful in his challenge.

iii. (1992) 4 SA 716 (TK) at 725 (*Bula*).

iv. (2010) 1 SA 217 (SCA) par. 12 and 19 (*Kimberley Junior High School*).

v. (2003) 1 SA 246 (CkH) (*Despatch*).

vi. (2000) JOL 6316 (A) (*Sadler*).

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