

7th AFRICA EDUCATION LEADERSHIP ROUND TABLE **EDUCATION LEADERSHIP FOR HUMAN FLOURISHING BEYOND THE 21ST CENTURY**

**Modelling school principals' soft skills with
sustainable administrative effectiveness**

By

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Introduction

- Sustainable school leadership is pivotal to the success of educational institutions. While traditional leadership models have emphasised technical skills and administrative competencies, the significance of soft skills in educational leadership has gained increasing attention in recent years.
- This study explores the relationship between principals' soft skills and sustainable administrative effectiveness.
- The study identified a comprehensive set of soft skills essential for sustainable educational leadership, including communication, emotional intelligence, empathy, adaptability, problem-solving, and conflict resolution.

Principals' soft skills

- The soft skills possessed by school principals cover a range of non-technical proficiencies, interpersonal aptitudes, and emotional competencies. These skills enable them to effectively lead and manage their educational institutions in post digital era (Awodiji & Katjiteo, 2023; Naidoo & Potokri, 2021).
- According to various studies (Goolamally et al., 2014; Lestari et al., 2023; Ismail et al., 2020; Lin et al., 2021; Marcel, 2012; Muchaje, 2020), it is imperative for school principals to possess a range of essential soft skills. Soft skills include emotional intelligence (EI), effective communication, adaptability, conflict resolution, team building, empathy, decision-making, problem-solving, time management, resilience, networking, and cultural competence.

Sustainable administrative effectiveness in schools

- The notion of sustainable administrative effectiveness in educational institutions refers to the capacity of schools to consistently and efficiently achieve their goals and objectives over an extended period of time, while also maintaining their ability to adapt to changing circumstances and challenges.
- The concept of sustainable administrative effectiveness pertains to the long-term viability and resilience of school administration practises and leadership (Khasanah et al., 2023; Malocre, 2013).
- The key components and determinants that contribute to the understanding and achievement of sustainable administrative effectiveness in educational institutions include educational outcomes, efficient allocation of resources, effective leadership and governance, active involvement of stakeholders, data-driven decision-making, curriculum and instructional practises, adaptability and innovation, inclusivity and equity, continuous improvement, community collaborations, fiscal responsibility, and long-term planning (Khasanah et al., 2023; Malocre, 2013).

Research Objectives

- To examine if soft skills have significant direct effect on secondary school principals' sustainable administrative effectiveness.
- To assess if soft skills have significant indirect effect on secondary school principals' sustainable administrative effectiveness.

Hypotheses

1. Soft skills have no significant direct effect on secondary school principals' sustainable administrative effectiveness.
2. Soft skills have no significant indirect effect on secondary school principals' sustainable administrative effectiveness.

METHODOLOGY



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- Research methodologies employing quantitative approaches (Watson, 2020).
 - For quantitative analysis, the population used in this study were all instructors from across
 - Namibia. A sample of 432 teachers were randomly selected.
 - Data collection technique was adapted questionnaire.

The process of generating items

A comprehensive examination of the literature was conducted in order to identify pertinent issues, vocabulary, items, and scales from previous research that may be utilised to evaluate the many aspects of a principal's soft skills. The questionnaire was designed based on information derived from existing literature in order to gain a deeper understanding of the difficulties related to the two construct variables (school principals' soft skills and sustainable administrative effectiveness). The study revealed five distinct components associated with the soft skills of principals, namely communication, empathy, critical thinking, adaptability, and leadership. This list has 50 items that pertain to concepts that are deemed crucial and encompass the theoretical aspects of soft skills possessed by principals.

The scale for measuring administrative effectiveness consisted of a total of 20 elements. The survey consisted of 50 statements regarding the principal's soft skills. Respondents were instructed to indicate their degree of agreement with each statement using a five-point Likert scale ('1 = Neutral', '2 = Strongly Disagree', '3 = Disagree', '4 = Agree', and '5 = Strongly Agree'). Again, the study employed a five-point Likert scale to assess the administrative effectiveness, consisting of a total of 20 items. ('1= Neutral', '2 = Strongly Disagree', '3 = Disagree', '4 = Agree' and '5 = Strongly Agree').

Reliability

Table 1: Reliability Coefficient of the Instruments Used for the Study

Instrument	Cronbach Alpha Coefficient	Remark
Communication Skills	0.887	High
Empathy	0.703	Moderate
Critical Thinking	0.913	High
Adaptability and Innovation	0.947	High
Leadership Skill	0.938	High
Sustainable Administrative Effectiveness	0.95	High

Table 1 shows the Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficients of the instruments used for the study; the result revealed that most instruments are highly reliable except the empathy scale, which is moderately reliable.

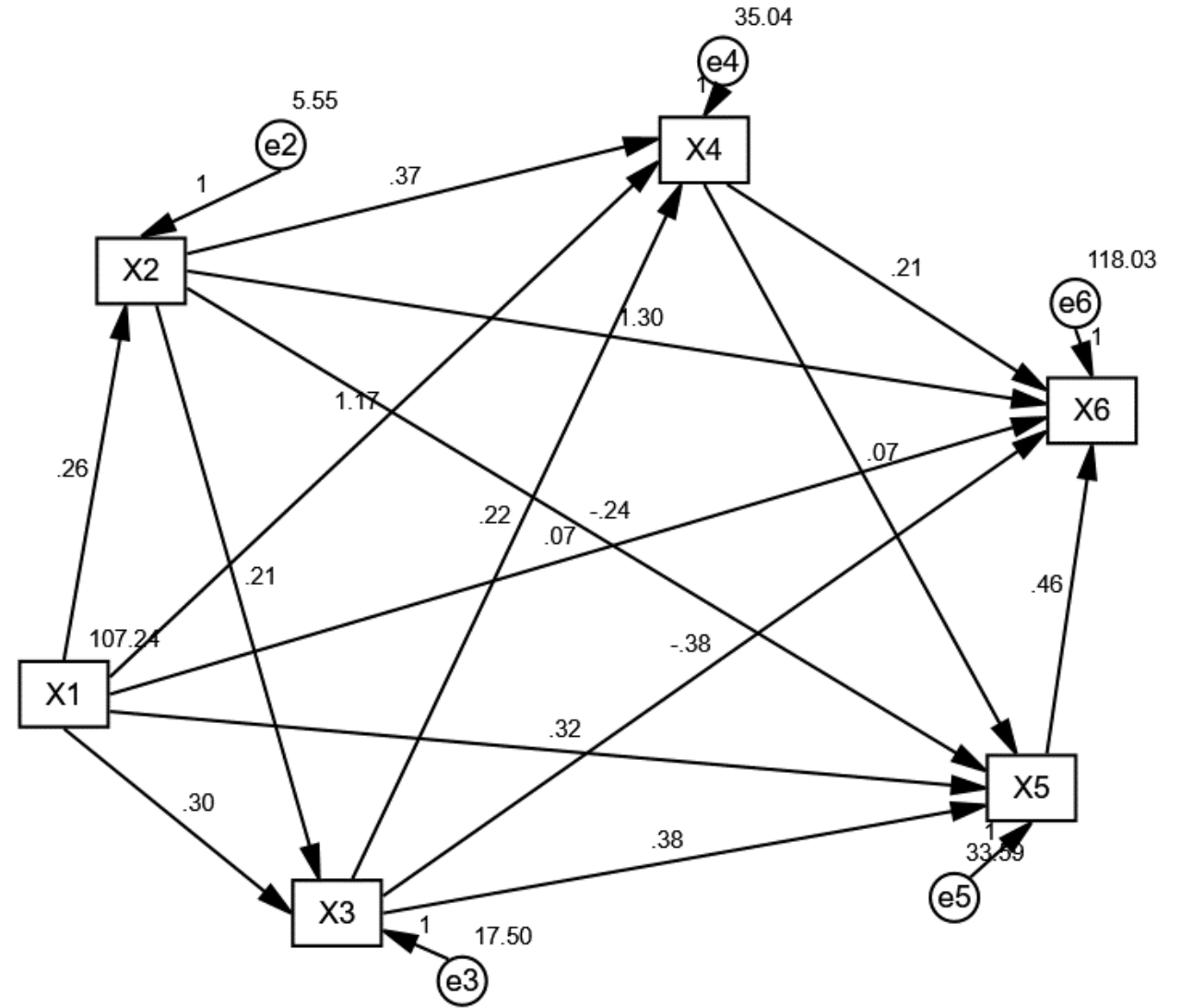
Analytical Procedure

- **Path analytical procedure of Structural Equation Modeling (SEM)** was used to analyse the data collected for the study. This entails building the hypothesised model, model validation and estimation of model parameters to determine the direct, indirect and total effect of exogenous and endogenous variables on the dependent variable. The procedures were presented as follows:

Hypothesised Model

- The study hypothesised that the study variables would follow the specified pathways in the model in Figure 1.
- X_1 =Critical Thinking
- X_2 = Empathy
- X_3 = Communication Skills
- X_4 = Adaptation
- X_5 = Leadership
- X_6 = Sustatinable Administrative Effectiveness

Hypothesised model for the relationship between principal's soft skills and sustainable administrative effectiveness.



Hypothesised model for the relationship between principal's softs skills and sustainable administrative effectiveness Cont.

- From Figure 1, it could be observed that principals' soft skills in terms of critical thinking could influence the manner of principals' empathy and principals' empathy could go a long way to influence it communication skills vis-à-vis principals' adaptation and leadership, and consequently influence principal sustainable administrative effectiveness.

Hypothesised model for the relationship between principal's soft skills and sustainable administrative effectiveness Cont.

Path	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P
X2 <--- X1	.263	.012	21.559	***
X3 <--- X1	.298	.033	8.976	***
X3 <--- X2	.208	.095	2.180	.029
X4 <--- X2	.371	.136	2.732	.006
X4 <--- X1	1.169	.052	22.440	***
X4 <--- X3	.218	.076	2.869	.004
X5 <--- X3	.383	.075	5.091	***
X5 <--- X1	.323	.080	4.039	***
X5 <--- X2	-.243	.134	-1.810	.070
X5 <--- X4	.072	.053	1.365	.172
X6 <--- X5	.463	.101	4.603	***
X6 <--- X4	.210	.099	2.123	.034
X6 <--- X1	.065	.153	.425	.671
X6 <--- X2	1.297	.253	5.123	***
X6 <--- X3	-.382	.146	-2.613	.009

Table 2: Causal relationship (direct effects) between principals' soft skills and sustainable administrative effectiveness

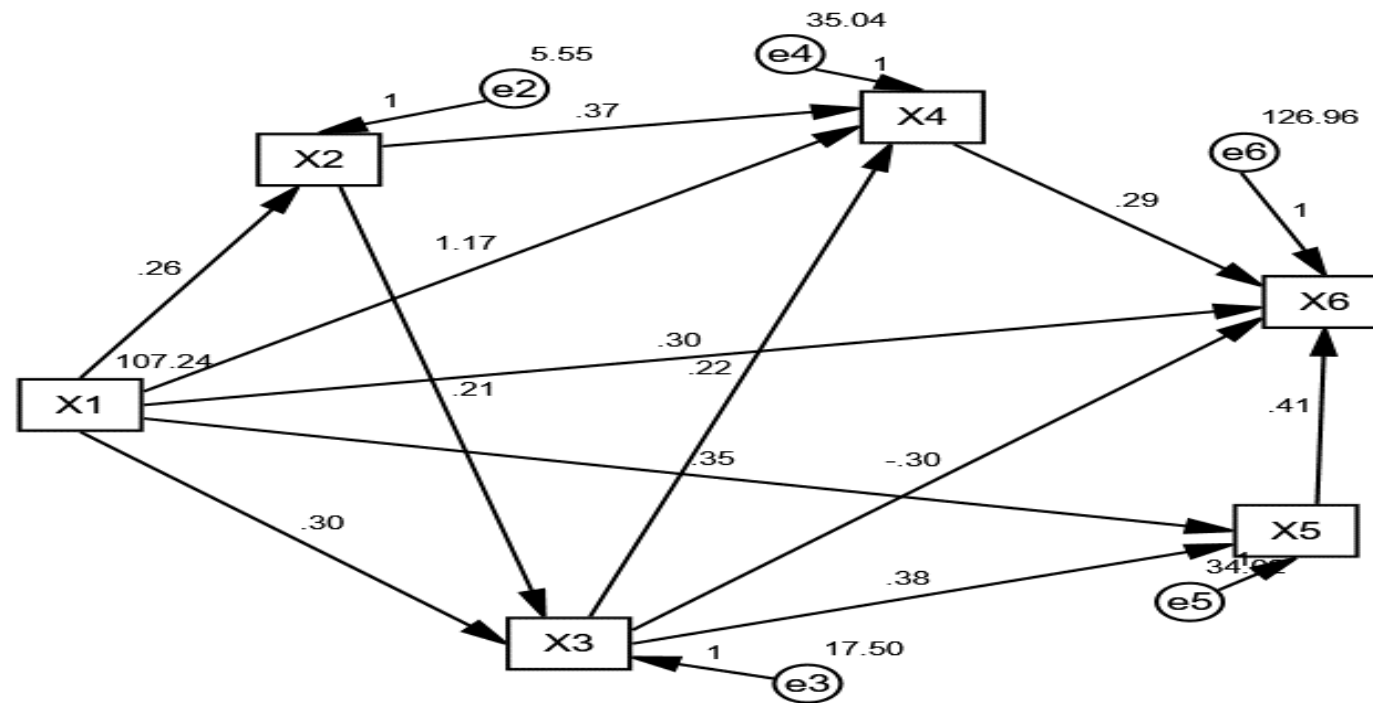
The hypothesised model was tested at 0.05 level of significant and the result was presented in Table 1 as follows: Chi-square = .000

Hypothesised model for the relationship between principal's soft skills and sustainable administrative effectiveness Cont.

- The result from the Table 2 shows that it is only Critical thinking ($X_6 \leftarrow X_1$) that has no significant causal relationship with principals' sustainable administrative effectiveness. However, the indirect causal relationship of Empathy (X_2) and Adaptation (X_4) on principals' sustainable administrative effectiveness (X_6) were not significant.

Validated Model for Relationship between Principal's Soft Skills and Sustainable Administrative Effectiveness

- Based on the three non-significant paths, the model in Figure 1 was trimmed in order to arrive at a more parsimonious model by removing the non-significant path. The validated model was presented in Figure 2 as follows:



Validated Model for Relationship between Principal's Soft Skills and Sustainable Administrative Effectiveness cont.

- The validated model contains the model parameters including errors of estimation, the fit indexes of the model is presented in Table 3

Table 3: Fit Indexes of Validated Model

Model	Chi Square (χ^2)	df	Sig	CFI	NFI	GFI	RMSEA
Hypothesised	0.00	0	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.341	0.543
Validated	4.668	3	0.198	0.999	0.997	0.996	0.040

Validated Model for Relationship between Principal's Soft Skills and Sustainable Administrative Effectiveness cont.

- Table 3 presents the fit indexes estimated for the two models to check whether the pattern of response in the data fits into the pattern specified by the model. The Chi-square value of the hypothesized model is $\chi^2 (0) = 0.00, p < 0.05$.
- This indicates that the value was not only a computer but also significant. The values of other fit indicators were also poor, which shows that the model is unfit.
- The non-significant Chi-square of the validated model indicates that the difference between the hypothesised model and the data is insignificant.
- Hence, the validated model is fit. This inference is made based on the affinity goodness of fit estimate. Normed fit index (NFI) = $0.90 < 0.952$ and Comparative fit index (CFI) = $0.999 > .90$. According to Chau (1997), a CFI equal to or greater than 0.90 is acceptable, indicating that 90% of the covariation in the data can be reproduced by the proposed model.
- Thus, the validated model can reproduce 99.9% of the covariation in the data. The direct effect of variables in the model on sustainable administrative effectiveness is presented in Table 3.

Result

- Hypothesis 1: Soft skills have no significant direct effect on secondary school principals' sustainable administrative effectiveness.
- Table 4: Direct Effects of Principal's Soft Skills on Sustainable Administrative Effectiveness

^{1*}

Path	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P
X6 <--- X5	.463	.101	4.603	***
X6 <--- X4	.210	.099	2.123	.034
X6 <--- X1	.065	.153	.425	.671
X6 <--- X2	1.297	.253	5.123	***
X6 <--- X3	-.382	.146	-2.613	.009



Results cont.

- The results in Table 4 show that critical thinking (X_1) has no significant causal relationship ($\beta=0.065$, $p>0.05$) with Sustainable Administrative Effectiveness (X_6), which implies that a unit standard deviation in critical thinking, which accounted for 0.065 change in sustainable administrative effectiveness of the principal is not significant enough to produce a result. However, empathy (X_2) has a significant relationship ($\beta=1.297$, $p<0.05$) with sustainable administrative effectiveness (X_6). The result further revealed that the coefficient of the causal relationship of empathy is more than one. A phenomenon termed statistical suppression. This implies that empathy could go a long way to confer sustainable administrative effectiveness irrespective of the status of other principals' soft skills. Moreover, the result revealed further that communication skills (X_3) have a negative significant relationship ($\beta=-.382$, $p<0.05$) with sustainable administrative effectiveness. This implies that a unit standard deviation change in communication skills accounted for a -0.382 decrease in sustainable administrative effectiveness. This indicates that communication skills if not judiciously used, can potentially decrease principals' sustainable administrative effectiveness. The direct causal effects of Adaptation (X_4) ($\beta=.210$, $p<0.05$) and Leadership (X_5) ($\beta=.463$, $p<0.05$) on sustainable administrative effectiveness were also significant.

Results cont.

- **Indirect Effects** - The indirect effect is a possible pathway of effect from a variable to a dependent variable (administrative effectiveness), as shown in Table 4.
- **Hypothesis 2:** Soft skills have no significant direct effect on secondary school Principal administrative effectiveness.
- **Table 5: Direct, Indirect and Total Effect of Principal’s Soft Skills on Administrative Effectiveness**

	Indirect (mediating relationship)						Direct	Indirect	Total
X1	→	→	→	→	→	X6	0.00	0.772	0.772
X2		→	→	→	→	X6	1.329	0.060	1.389
X3			→	→	→	X6	-0.33	0.234	-0.142
X4				→	→	X6	0.241	0.000	0.241
X5					→	X6	0.472	0.000	0.472

Direct, Indirect and Total Effect of Principal's Soft Skills on Administrative Effectiveness cont.

- Table 5 shows the different causal effects of the endogenous and the exogenous variables (Soft skills) on the dependent variable (sustainable administrative effectiveness). The result revealed that Critical thinking (X_1) has no significant direct effect (relationship), as in Table 3, but could influence administrative effectiveness indirectly through other variables in the model. The result revealed that critical thinking has the highest indirect effect ($\beta=0.772$), which implies that critical thinking could influence sustainable administrative effectiveness through empathy (X_2), communication skills (X_3), adaptability (X_4) and then leadership (X_5). The indirect effect of communication skills is ($\beta=0.234$), which is higher than empathy. This implies that communication skills could significantly and indirectly influence sustainable administrative school through adaptability and leadership. Empathy has the lowest indirect effect ($\beta=0.060$), which shows that empathy is effective and valuable when the principal directly expresses it in the course of school administration.

Direct, Indirect and Total Effect of Principal's Soft Skills on Administrative Effectiveness cont.

- Furthermore, there are no direct effects of adaptability (X_4) and leadership (X_5), indicating that a sustainable school administration demands a principal who will not act by proxy or in retrospect. The inference could be drawn from the result that the direct application of critical thinking may not result in sustainable school administration if it is not considered alongside other factors. And that school activities will go smoothly if the leadership is directly involved.

Implications for Policy

1. Professional Development Programs:

Critical Thinking: Given its high indirect effect, professional development programs for principals should emphasize critical thinking skills. These programs should integrate critical thinking with other soft skills such as empathy, communication, adaptability, and leadership to enhance overall administrative effectiveness.

Communication Skills: Policies should ensure that principals receive continuous training to improve their communication skills, as these have a significant indirect impact on administrative effectiveness through other variables.

2. Holistic Skill Assessment:

School systems should adopt a holistic approach to assess and develop principals' soft skills, considering the interplay between different skills. This means not just focusing on individual skills in isolation but understanding their combined impact on administrative effectiveness.

3. Inclusive Leadership Practices:

Policies should encourage principals to engage directly in school activities and decision-making processes rather than relying on indirect or retrospective actions. This approach promotes more effective and sustainable school administration.

Implications for Practice

1. Integration of Soft Skills:

- **Critical Thinking:** Principals should integrate critical thinking with other soft skills. For instance, they could use critical thinking to enhance empathy and communication when addressing school issues.
- **Communication and Adaptability:** Practicing principals should prioritize improving their communication skills, which will in turn enhance their adaptability and leadership effectiveness.

2. Direct Engagement:

Principals should focus on being directly involved in the day-to-day activities of the school. This direct engagement helps in creating a more sustainable and effective administrative environment.

3. Empathy in Action:

Even though empathy has the lowest indirect effect, its direct application is valuable. Principals should actively express empathy in their administrative practices to foster a supportive school culture.

4. Leadership Development:

Since leadership has no direct effect but is crucial in combination with other skills, principals should be trained to exercise leadership that enhances other soft skills. This means developing leadership styles that promote critical thinking, communication, and adaptability among staff.

Conclusion

The findings suggest that while some skills like critical thinking may not have a direct impact, their indirect influence through other skills is substantial. Policies should, therefore, be designed to foster a comprehensive development of soft skills in principals. In practice, principals should focus on integrating and applying these skills cohesively to enhance their administrative effectiveness.

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