The Impact Of Leadership Styles On The Capacitation Of Secondary School Principals: A Case Of Mogalakwena Education District

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ARTICLEINO	ABSTRACT
	The study investigated the impact of the leadership styles on the capacitation of secondary school principals. The study was conducted at four secondary schools in the Mogalakwena education district in Limpopo Province. Most secondary school principals are not adequately capacitated in the knowledge and application of different leadership styles, and this leads to poor learner performance/outcomes. The study followed a qualitative approach with a case study research design. The population in this study consisted of thirty participants that comprised of eight teachers, ten HODs, four principals, and eight SGB members. These were drawn from the four high schools selected for the study, through purposive sampling. The study used focus-group, face-to-face semi-structured interviews, and document analysis to collect qualitative data. The instructional leadership theory was used as the theoretical framework for this study, to investigate the impact of the leadership styles on the capacitation of principals in the four case study schools. A thematic approach was employed to analyse the data, by way of identifying themes emerging from the interviews. The study found that secondary school principals in Mogalakwena education district are not capacitated in so far as leadership style development is concerned. Resultantly, learner achievement is grossly compromised and evidenced by the epithets such as performing and underperforming schools. The study recommended that DBE should ring-fence financial resources, prioritise effective leadership development programmes, and do away with "microwave" or one day or few hours' workshops.

Key concepts: leader, instructional leadership, principal, leadership styles, leadership theories, effective school leadership. |

Introduction and Background of the Study

The concept of school leadership has become a catch word or buzzword in the local and international educational arena and is always intertwined with the leadership styles of the principal. The continuing underperformance or poor learner achievement in many secondary schools, especially the rural areas in South Africa, have exposed many lacunae that exist in the appointment and professional development of school principals. Principals also face unprecedented accountability pressure in many countries in what is clearly an increasingly 'results driven' business. As these environmental pressures intensify, leaders and managers require greater understanding, skill, and resilience to sustain their institutions. Principals and senior staff need an appreciation of the theory, as well as the practice, of educational management and leadership (Bush & Glover, 2014).
Christie, Sullivan, Duku and Gallie (2010) claim that "the schooling system in South Africa is not working and needs fundamental direction. The success or failure of any school is intertwined with the type of leadership, which governs the institution (Heaven & Bourne 2016). In other words, the style that the principal uses to lead is a predictor of the success or failure of the school. This suggests that there is a correlation between the principal's leadership style and learner achievement.

The declining educational standards in South Africa, especially in matric results in the Mogalakwena district, is a matter of great concern not only for the Limpopo Province Department of Education (LPDE), but also for learners, parents, teachers, and principals because as Oupa (2014) states "South Africa continues to battle the challenge of under-performance in schools that are predominantly situated in socio-economic unfavourable settings." According to Naicker and Mestry (2013), "it is worth noting that schooling has become increasingly complex in purpose and structure and therefore requires appropriate forms of leadership to address this challenge."

Given the above scenario, it is imperative for the principals to be afforded the necessary training to improve the learner achievement or results. Ahmed and Said (2013) add "it is critical that school management and leadership be strengthened and that the identification, selection, appointment, and training of school principals are done is a manner that will ensure that the right principals are appointed." Avolio (2011) sums it well "therefore, it is essential to review the literature on every aspect in order to gain a holistic picture of what kind of professional development principals really need."

Leader
According to Kumar (2018), "a leader is not a person with official designation but the person who run things." A leader is a person who by word and/or personal example markedly influences the behaviours, thoughts, and/or feelings of a significant number of their fellow human beings (Mango, 2018).

The Principal
According to the DBE (2012), the school principal is the "educator appointed as head or acting as head of a school or of any other registered learning institution." He is an overall person in charge (boss) in the school setting that focuses with great clarity on what is essential, what needs to be done, and how to get it done (Christie, 2010). The principal is the final arbiter or adjudicator in all the affairs within the school precinct or zone. The principals must put systems/strategies in place and turn the school into a well-oiled machine that achieves the set goals.

Leadership styles
Leadership styles are the approaches used to motivate followers. A principal's leadership style refers to the pattern or way of doing things in pursuit of his or her duties (Jay, 2014). Amanchukwu, Stanley and Ololube (2015) define leadership style as "the ability of a leader to get tasks done." It is considered a precondition for an effective school (Adeyemi, 2010). According to Shortridge (2015), "each leadership style encompasses a distinctive type of leadership behaviour".

The challenges that secondary school principals face.
The secondary schools differ from primary schools
In general, secondary schools differ from primary in three important ways: their size, their organisation into subject departments, and the age of their students. The typically larger size of secondary schools, nature, and age of adolescents brings particular challenges frequently not experienced in primary schools. This more elaborate the hierarchy means that a greater proportion of secondary principals' interactions, relative to those of their primary counterparts, are likely to be with staff who have responsibility for a group of classroom teachers, rather than with classroom teachers themselves. (Bendikson et al., 2011).

Lack of support by the Department of Education
Researchers such as Puccio, Mance and Murdock (2010) decry the situation where principals feel "particularly lost with regard to the limited number of support structures available to assist them." Furthermore, the study revealed contextual problems, such as inadequate infrastructure and resources, under-trained and demotivated educators, low expectations, and poor post-school employment prospects that put school leadership under pressure (Bush & Glover, 2016).

Disruptions of teaching and learning are endemic in Limpopo Province
Reasons for reduced contact time or instructional time are well documented. Some of the reasons are genuine, but most of them are due to ill-discipline and the inability of the school principal to act against offenders. One of the school principals who were also a branch executive member admitted the interference of the South African Democratic Teachers' Union (SADTU) with the tuition time. The holding of meetings, workshops, memorial services, late coming, and absenteeism are the main contributors to non-completion of learning programmes, leading to poor learner attainment (Hompashe, 2018).

Labour unions' interference in school matters
Various authors such as Hompashe, (2018), Patillo (2012), and Zengele (2013) have empirically verified, "unions interfere in the principals' duties/job description and in the appointment of educators."

The recruitment of secondary school principals in South Africa
In South Africa, the number of teaching experience is one of the requirements for educators to be considered for recruitment, that is, for selection, interviews, and appointment. PAM broadened the criterion further; in order to qualify as a principal, one needs a three- or four-year recognised teaching qualification and seven years of teaching experience (Personnel Administrative Measures, 2016). However, Hunt and Fedynich (2019) disagree: "the sole criterion which is the length of service is no longer applicable to promote teacher to a high level. Managing the school really needs certain".

In England, it is mandatory for school principals to receive some form of formal training before they are appointed as principals. Teachers, who wish to continue up the career ladder, first, become senior teachers or

deputy heads, and thereafter work with the principal as a member of the senior management team (Scott, 2010). In Singapore, the successful potential school leaders are selected to attend the Management and Leadership in Schools programme at Singapore's National Institute for Education, based on interviews and leadership-situation exercises. Once accepted, aspiring school leaders can attend the four-month executive leadership training. In the US, it is mandatory for school principals to attain an educational Master's degree, and licences exist to regulate who may become and practice as a principal. The study conducted revealed that some principals "received training on the job" for the principalship (Ibid, 2010).

Continuous professional development of principals: the South African context

Scott (2010) opines, "The professional development of education leaders and managers has been slow to emerge in South Africa compared to some countries. There is a dire need for education authorities to introduce compulsory training and development programmes for aspiring and practicing school leaders to lead and manage their schools successfully (Mestry, 2017). In the United States of America, CPD programmes are usually offered by external agencies (The Wallace Foundation, 2013). For example, the Wallace Foundation, a national philanthropy organisation based in New York City, provides among others, school leadership training for head teachers (Scott, 2010).

Problem statement

According to Mouton, Louw and Strydom (2012), "many epithets or labels have been used to describe the South African education system. These include 'ailing' 'failed dismally' and 'lagging behind'". The central problem is that most secondary school principals are not adequately capacitated in the leadership styles, and this leads to poor learner performance/outcomes. Consequently, this leads to the following sub problems: Lack of knowledge and application of the leadership styles, poor learner achievement/outcomes/performance, lethargy and general collapse in discipline, lack of consequence management, poor parental involvement and lastly as Ylimaki, (2011) posits "the pressure to perform well is put on secondary school principals alone".

Noddings (2014) laments, "Efforts to raise teacher morale are certainly needed and important." The DBE is losing many exceptional educators prior to retirement age in search of alternate careers. The majority of them exit the profession because of ineffective administration. The most frequently cited reason for leaving the teaching profession is a lack of administrative support. Strauss (2015) informed readers that "today's college students, including those currently marching on campus, are significantly less likely than their parents to see teaching as a viable way to become agents of social change."

Research Question

What is the impact of leadership styles on the capacitation of secondary school principals in Mogalakwena Education District?

Research Objective

- To explore the kind of support programmes principals receive from DBE that assist them to improve their leadership styles.

Theoretical Framework

This study was based on the Instructional leadership theory. Functions that generally typify instructional leadership include; defining and communicating a clear mission, goals and objectives: Setting, together with the staff members, a mission, goals and objectives to realise effective teaching and learning. Managing curriculum and instruction: Managing and co-ordinating the curriculum in such a way that teaching time can be used optimally. Principals need to support the teaching programme and provide the resources that teachers need to carry out their task (Krug, 1992, Parker & Day, 1997:87). According to Mafuwane (2011) "the emergence of this concept in the leadership field and the rigorous research attention that it has received, is a result of mounting pressure faced by principals as a result of the year-on-year poor performance of learners in the matriculation examinations." The results of the study are further discussed and interpreted through the theoretical lenses of the role of the principal as the instructional leader and the impact that instructional leadership has on student outcomes.

The application of the Instructional Leadership Theory in the study.

The study made use of Instructional leadership theory to improve the knowledge and application of the leadership styles of the secondary schools principals'. In this case the leadership styles challenges that secondary school principals have were interpreted within the lenses: role of the principal as the instructional leader and the impact that instructional leadership has on student outcomes.

The role of the principal as the instructional leader

The school principal as an instructional leader means that the he/she is perceived by close associates as (1) providing the necessary resources so that the school's academic goals can be achieved; (2) possessing knowledge and skill in curriculum and instructional matters so that teachers perceive that their interaction with the principal leads to improved practice; (3) being a skilled communicator in one-on-one, small group, and large group settings; being a (4) visionary who is out and around creating a visible presence for the staff and students and parents at both the physical and philosophical levels concerning what the school is all about, and (5) maintain a positive school climate and initiate organisational change (Smith & Andrews, 1989).

These roles are symmetrical with the principals' roles as delineated in the Personnel Administrative Measures as prescribed and to ensure that the education of the learners is promoted in a proper manner and in accordance with approved policies (Government Gazette, 2016).

These tasks are dynamic and complex and this place a special demand on school principals to respond accordingly. The high management and leadership expectations breed frustration and disillusionment to the secondary school principals (DBE, 2016:38-39). However, the failure of a school is never levied against teacher(s), and this has always been the case in school administration. This is equally true when there is success in an educational institution, suggesting that the principal has an overarching role of the institution. Hence, if a school is excelling academically, it may be inferred that the leader has embraced aspects of instructional leadership and is in control of the management of that institution (Heaven & Bourne, 2016).

The impact of instructional leadership on student outcomes

Osborne-Lampkin (2015) undertook a study examining the relationships between principal behaviours and learner achievements in South Africa and found that "results suggested positive relationships between learner achievements and principals' instructional management, internal relations, and organisation management." A lot of emphasis is currently placed on the need for principals to be instructional leaders or leaders of learning; primarily because this type of leadership has a stronger impact on student outcomes than other types of leadership. The more focused the school's leadership is on instruction, the more effective the school will be in adding value to student outcomes (Bendikson et al., 2011). In essence, the effective instructional leadership of the principal is a critical part for continued school improvement that enhances students' academic achievement. Principals today must be instructional leaders capable of developing a team of teachers who deliver effective instruction to every student (Yahya, 2015).

Research Methodology

This study followed the qualitative approach to investigate the impact of the leadership styles on the capacitation of secondary school principals of Mogalakwena education district. The reason for choosing qualitative research was to purposefully select participants or sites and documents that best helped the researcher to understand the problem and the research question. The benefits of a qualitative approach are that research is conducted in natural settings, capturing the individual's lived situations. Meaning derived from the research is therefore specific to that setting, and its conditions and the subject's own frame of reference (Creswell, 2014). Hence, the qualitative approach enabled the researcher to collect data using multiple data collection instruments.

Research Design

The researcher used a case study research design based on its relevance and benefits. The case in this study was the impact of leadership styles on the capacitation of secondary school principals. Maree (2011) defines a case study as "a systematic enquiry into an event or a set of related events which aims to investigate and describe a phenomenon of interest". The case of interest for me in this study was in the field of school leadership with special reference to the impact of leadership styles on the capacitation of secondary school principals in the Mogalakwena education district. Mogalakwena district is one of the smallest districts in LPDE with 9 circuits. Pacho (2015) who maintains supports this, "the narrow focus of a case study can promote understanding or inform practice for similar situations. It is particularly suitable for learning more about a little known or poorly understood situation".

The research paradigm: interpretive

The study was located within the interpretative paradigm. Neuman (2014) defines a paradigm as "a general organising framework for theory and research that includes basic assumptions, key issues, models, of quality research and methods for seeking answers." The qualitative methodological approach is both interpretive and interactional and therefore, was deemed suitable for the case study: having conducted an in-depth study of a small number of subjects that constituted the research population. This requires studying human action from the perspective of the social actors themselves. In this study the researcher attempted to understand the leadership styles of the secondary school principals in relation to their contexts or worlds, from their perspective and not his own. In other words, it is about the meaning and interpretation of the participants.

Population and Sampling

Population

The population consisted of thirty (30) participants that comprised of principals, educators, HODs and SGB members from four secondary schools in Matlalane and Mogalakwena circuits within Mogalakwena District office, Limpopo Province.

Sampling Procedures

Purposive sampling was used to select four secondary schools that is, two performing and two underperforming based on their grade 12 results for the past five years that is, from 2015 to 2019.

Data Collection

Data collection instruments were employed as Pacho (2015) proposes, "Data collected through in-depth interviews, were triangulated with data from focus group, document review and vice versa." The data collection method used in this study was audio recording, semi-structured individual interviews, focus groups and

document analysis or review (Yilmaz, 2013). Maree (2011) who contends, "The strength of using case study method is its use of a multiple sources and techniques in the data collection/gathering process", endorses this view. The semi-structures interviews and focus groups provided primary data that is "more reliable, authentic, and objective" (Kabir, 2016).

Data Analysis

According to Creswell (2014), is when the researchers review all of the data, make sense of it, and organise it into categories or themes that they cut across all of the data sources. In this study, data collected from respondents was analysed in terms of grounded theory that involved a systematic coding process to assist in finding categories or themes. As Basit (2010) theorises "interviews are recorded digitally and recorded verbatim to provide in depth information and analysis."

Results

The results of this study are summarized in the following five themes: support programmes principals receive from Department of Basic Education, challenges that newly appointed secondary school principals face, the leadership styles of principals of performing schools, correlation between the principal's leadership styles, learner achievement, recommendations, and suggestions that may serve as strategy for schools' leadership styles development. These themes were used to guide the discussion below:

The support programmes principals receive from Department of Basic Education

In order to determine what type of support programmes principals receive from DBE, participants were asked questions about their understanding and application of different leadership styles. Their responses indicated that despite their qualifications on leadership and management, they still regard CPD as essential. P1 bemoaned poor support programmes that principals receive from DBE:

"I was never trained on the different leadership styles since I was appointed, and I only learnt about school leadership when I was doing my BED honours degree in management and leadership" (P1).

These views also resonated with H5 who also consented that:

"These principals are highly qualified, but Department must still workshop them, leadership matters" (H5).

From the statements quoted above, it is clear that principals do not receive sufficient support in CPD and that a qualification on leadership and management cannot replace training and development. The demographic information of each principal showed that all of them have BED Honours degrees in school leadership and management, but have still succinctly expressed the need for CPD on school leadership or the leadership styles.

Challenges that newly appointed secondary school principals face

The instructional leadership is the centre nerve of all education activities in schools. When asked about their main duties as the principals P2 affirmed that:

"My main duty is to ensure that the school runs smoothly and effectively in order to produce good results and is not easy, but I must make sure that I put systems and strategies in place to achieve this mission. Even if I'm not there the school will run normally because I have put the systems in place" (P2).

From this response it becomes clear that the challenges that newly appointed principals face emanate from the main duties of the principal. The new principal is pressured to put systems in place that will foster unity, teambuilding, and shared vision to enhance effective teaching and learning.

The leadership styles of principals of performing schools

The study discovered that there are more staff meetings in performing schools than in underperforming schools. T3 confirmed this assertion:

"Our interaction with the principal is good because they have two briefings every month and a full staff meeting monthly at 14H00 so that we don't interfere with lesson" (T3)

However, the responses from participants revealed that underperforming schools are characterised by lack of staff meetings H7, averred:

 "We don't sit down and discuss issues but because we sometimes have only five minutes briefing after a long time.

The responses shed more light on the distinction between the leadership styles of performing and underperforming principals in terms of the distinction between the roles and characteristics of management and leadership.

Correlation between the principal's leadership styles and learner achievement

There is correlation between the principal's leadership styles and learners' achievement because the principal is the sole influencer of learner performance. G2 indicated that their school is doing well since the arrival of the new principal. However, when asked about what might have caused the poor results in S3, the participants put the blame on the principal, and compared him with the previous principal who was transferred to another school. G6 chronicled or registered her frustrations as follows:

"Since he arrived at the school, we can see that education is not going well, because our learners failed dismally last year. You see sir, that lady was strong, she made sure that learners attend lessons, and all teachers were also coming to school. You see school children want a strong leader and they will pass but now eish…" (G6).

From the response quoted above it is clear that the type and application of leadership style(s) will determine how curriculum delivery takes place that is, how teachers teach, and learners learn.

Recommendations and suggestions that may serve as strategy for schools' leadership styles development

DBE should put measures in place for leadership styles development of secondary school principals. The participants were asked about possible strategies for secondary schools' leadership styles development. Hence, P3 recommended that:

"I think the Department must just call us for a weekend or a week to capacitate us on this" (P3).

The responses from participants suggest that the DBE must regard CDP as sacrosanct. To avoid the so-called "microwaves" workshops, the duration of the training must not just be one or two days but at least a week or longer.

Discussion

The findings were discussed under the following sub-themes: the application of democratic leadership style requires experience, effective school leadership is inherent, accountability in the primary and secondary schools contrasted, unpopular decisions shunned in underperforming schools, ill-discipline and poor parental participation are endemic in underperforming schools and the realisation of learner achievement within a short period (Bendikson, et al, Blackmore, 2011 & Adeyemi, 2010).

The application of the democratic leadership style requires experience.

It is interesting to note that all principals characterised themselves as democratic leaders. Actually, during the interviews, the democratic leadership style overly dominated other leadership styles. However, whilst on the one hand, educators and most stakeholders extol the democratic leadership style for as Okoji, (2015) suggests "being most effective and leads to higher productivity, better contributions from group members, and increased group morale", on the other hand the application of the leadership style requires experience (Adeyemi, 2010). The participants and the literature reviewed confirmed that the misapplication of this style can cause learner achievement to be adversely affected (Okoji, 2015). Lack of training leads to lacunae or gaps as far as a mixture or combination of leadership styles is concerned, as most principals think that the democratic leadership style is the only appropriate one.

Effective school leadership is inherent

The startling finding is that effective school leadership seems to be inherent. This is consistent with the Great Man and Trait theories, which aver that the capacity for leadership is inherent, that great leaders are born, they are not made. This means some school principals are doing well because they were born with such leadership qualities (Mango, 2018 & Charry, 2012).

They are still performing despite the lack of support in professional development from DBE. Excerpts from the various respondents and document analysis such as grade 12 results justified this claim or assertion. Lunenburg, (2011:1) who shows that "leadership and management are not synonymous, therefore, not all managers have the leadership qualities, and not all leaders have managerial qualities" further expanded this finding.

Accountability in the primary and secondary schools contrasted.

Principals, educators, and SMTs lamented that there is a lot more pressure on them compared to that of their counterparts in the primary schools. The education authorities put much pressure on them to produce good results in NSC grade 12 examinations. Comparatively, primary school principals are in the comfort zone, as the findings above prove, they are not subjected to the same accountability sessions as their secondary school counterparts (Bendikson, et al, 2011). The epithets like underperforming and performing schools are the educational jargon prevalent in the in secondary schools (Mouton, Louw & Strydom, 2012).

Unpopular decisions shunned in underperforming schools

One of the elements of a good school leader is aligning the educators with the vision of the school, and administering discipline if necessary (Portin, Knapp, Dareff, Feldman, Russell, Samuelson & Yeh, 2009). Notwithstanding, it emerged from the engagement with the participants that these disciplinary processes happen only in performing schools. Principals of underperforming schools are afraid to take unpopular decisions, also called consequence management. This is tantamount to shunning or abrogating their instructional leadership roles or responsibilities. It, therefore, comes as no surprise that satisfactory learner performance, especially in NSC grade 12 results, remains elusive in these schools (Bush & Glover, 2016).

Ill-discipline and poor parental participation are endemic in underperforming schools.

The researcher juxtaposed and zoomed into learner discipline in the four schools under investigation, and found that ill-discipline and poor parental participation are some of the distinctive elements between performing and underperforming, or failing, schools (Atieno & Simatwa, 2012). The study found that poor learner discipline is endemic in underperforming schools the issue of ill-discipline has become a conundrum in these schools. Another important finding is that the principal's leadership styles are also benchmarks for their efficacy on factors such as parental involvement (Naidoo & Petersen, 2015). The results of the study revealed that there is a correlation between the leadership styles of principals and parental involvement. Comparatively, despite their low literacy levels and socio-economic status, parental participation or involvement in performing schools is far better than in their underperforming. The majority of parents in performing schools attend meetings and other school activities (Preetika & Priti, 2013).

The realisation of learner achievement within a short period.

According to Hull (2012) as cited Krasnoff (2015) "principals who are highly effective have at least three years of leadership experience at that school". Hull suggests that school improvement cannot happen overnight.

However, it emerged from the responses of the participants that Hull's notion is not cast in stone. This means that it is possible for the principal to improve the results within a short period of one year, as opposed to taking many years before satisfactory learner achievement can be realised (Clark, Martorell & Rockoff, 2009). In addition, this is evidenced by the practical example that this researcher witnessed where the principal took over the leadership reigns of the school four months before the final grade 12 NSC examinations and the learner achievement improved to around seventy per cent. This happened under the same conditions as the previous incumbent that is, the same infrastructure, educators, and community. I, therefore, submit that it is not the transition into a new school that determines the school culture per se; but as Barnes, Brynard and De Wet (2012) rightly attest is "the principal's leadership styles that determine the school culture" during the transition. The principal's leadership styles are vital and can establish him/her as the lighthouse of the stakeholders, and put them in the upward trajectory within a short period in the particular school (Naidoo, Botha, Bisschoff & Du Plessis, 2012).

Conclusion

Based on the empirical evidence gathered from this study, one can confidently conclude that most secondary school principals are not adequately capacitated in the leadership styles, and this leads to poor learner performance/outcomes. The roles of principals as instructional leaders are critical or pivotal determinants of successful schools characterised mainly by good learner achievements. The study revealed that the support programmes the principals receive from DBE in terms the leadership styles development are not effective.

Recommendations

The study recommends that the conventional or traditional way of appointing principals must be reviewed or revisited. The DBE should revise requirements for the appointment as a principal for example; one of the requirements of qualifying as principals is the number of years or experience that the CS1 educator taught. This should not be the only touchstone for appointment as school principals; school leadership goes beyond just being a good teacher and producing good results in a particular subject(s), but evokes certain instructional leadership imperatives such as setting direction, motivating, and aligning teachers. On the issue of professional training and development, the study recommends that DBE should prioritise leadership style development by allocating more resources such as more time and money to conduct leadership-training workshops for school principals and the introduction of leadership preparation programmes for educators who aspire to be principals

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