

## School Management Teams' Experiences of Their Participation in School Management in Primary Schools of Mankweng Circuit in Limpopo Province

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**KEYWORDS** Management Functions. Orientation. Reflective Practice. School Performance. Self-reflection

**ABSTRACT** The study investigated participation of primary school management teams (SMTs) in school management. The purpose of the study was to establish self-reflective practices employed by SMTs in performing their management function. The study followed a qualitative approach with a case study research design. The population consisted of SMTs from primary schools. Participants consisted of 10 members of SMTs in primary schools of South Africa. Purposive sampling was used to select participants from less experienced to the more experienced in management positions. The thematic approach was used to analyze data collected through use of verbatim quotations. The study found that SMT members were not aware of all of their daily functions, and this affected their participation in the school management. The study recommended that SMTs in primary schools be trained and orientated on management functions prior their appointments in the positions.

### INTRODUCTION

Internationally (USA), McGonagle et al. (2015: 111) envisage the aim of school management teams (SMTs) as “embracing, not only individual education and training, individual appraisal and career enhancement, but also whole or holistic staff development as part of a dynamic and changing organization”. In other words, the responsibility of school management teams (SMT) in USA was to ensure that teachers are supported and trained on areas where they lack knowledge. Being supported may include providing them with possible teaching strategies for their subjects, being advised on how to manage their classrooms/lessons, and any other important information that they might need. However, such responsibility requires reflective practice for SMT to identify areas that teachers may need support and training. A school operates as an organization whereby each and every individual member of the staff has some functions to fulfill. The main responsibility rests on those in the position of school management (Soot and Viskus 2014). However, poor participation of members of SMT might affect their ability to fulfill all SMTs functions as expected. In order for a school to operate effectively, the roles and functions of each member of the SMT should be clear-

ly defined. The participation of SMT, in the context of Nigeria, represents the school's management structure, which is responsible for implementing the education policies in their schools (Hauwa 2015). However, there was a need for members of SMT in this country (Nigeria) to reflect on their practice and see if they are fulfilling their functions, namely, implementation of education policies, among others. According to Hauwa (2015), SMT members in Nigeria were entrusted with measuring teaching outcomes in schools to meet national goals, that is, retraining of staff on Information and Computer Technology (ICT) to meet specific time-based national objectives, and effective management of under-funded public schools based on the directions of tough political leaders who coin their manifestos around free education (Saylag 2015).

In South Africa, according to Department of Education (2012), one of the key facets of education management is to develop leadership and technical management skills so as to ensure effective and efficient delivery within education institutions. The Principal, Deputy Principal, and Head of Department constitute SMT in a school, in the South African context. Therefore, SMTs should have clear functions and lines of authority should also be clear with regular forms of communication. The participation of SMTs al-

allows them to reflect on their practice, which is management of the school. This process allows SMT members the ability to explore, contemplate, and analyze their daily functions.

The core business of the Provincial Department of Education is teaching and learning, hence its vision is to equip the people of the province through the provision of quality, lifelong education and training, values, knowledge and skills that would enable them to fulfill a productive role in society (Swanson 2013). For the Department to achieve its vision, schools have to be properly managed and governed. Moreover, for the school to produce better results and quality education, it requires good School Management Teams (SMTs) to carry out their leadership and management functions effectively. One of the key roles of education management is to develop leadership and technical management skills so as to ensure effective and efficient delivery within education institution. In the context of this study, an empirical study was conducted to determine if in certain instances, some SMT members in selected schools of the Capricorn District were aware of who was responsible for what among themselves. As a result, this delays the operation of the school because they ended up shifting blames among themselves. In some situations, the commitment of individual SMT members who work hard was negatively understood, especially by other teachers and the principal. Pfeifer and Jankowski (2015) mentioned that some staff members accuse such committed team members as gunning for the post of principal, and this results in poor morale in such members. It was important for members of SMTs, as school managers, to reflect on their practice and see if they are fulfilling their functions.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Eisenhart (2011: 205) defines a theoretical framework as “a structure that guides research by relying on a formal theory. This is constructed by using an established, coherent explanation of certain phenomena and relationships”. As a researcher, one has to locate the research problem in a body of theory. Thus, the theoretical framework is a collection of the findings and conclusions. In a qualitative study the theoretical framework is very important.

In the context of this study, Henderson’s (1992) Ethically Based Model of Inquiry on Re-

flexive Practice has been used. The theory is based on reflective practice, and it also discusses what characterizes a reflective practitioner. It points out the kind of manager, and what a reflective practitioner is supposed to be. This theory is relevant to the present study, because the researcher has looked at the characteristics of reflective practitioners, in order to explain management practices of School Management Teams of Mankweng Circuit.

Henderson’s (1992) model indicates that the reflective practitioner should be a problem solver, have a knowledge base, and should have love for teaching, and for the management of a school. The theory has assisted the researcher to examine the kinds of managers in the schools of Mankweng Circuit, with the ultimate goal of explaining the participation of SMT on school management. According to Henderson (1992), reflective managers are expert teachers who know management styles, and are able to reflect on their work, and fulfill their duties and responsibilities. Henderson further emphasized that they must be specialists in time management, discipline, psychology, instructional methods, interpersonal communication, and learning theory.

Malatji and Wadesango (2014) further argued that reflective managers willingly embrace their decision-making responsibilities. They regularly reflect on the consequences of their actions. They are receptive to new knowledge, and they regularly and willingly learn from their reflective experiences.

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The qualitative research approach was used in this study. This approach enabled the researchers to gather sufficient information about day-to-day functions of SMTs in primary schools. Researchers used an interpretative paradigm with a case study as a research design. The population comprised Heads of Departments, Deputy Principals and Principals from primary schools. With regard to data collection, two types of interviews were used to collect data, namely, focus group interviews and semi-structured individual interviews. Two focus group sessions of six members of SMTs were conducted. The focus group consisted of two Heads of Department, two deputy principals and two principals that were currently working at public primary schools. With regard to individu-

al interviews, three SMT members with more than 15 years in management positions were interviewed (one principal, one HOD and one principal). Thematic approach to data analysis was used to analyze themes that emerged from data collected.

### Research Question

What is the SMTs' participation in school management in South African primary schools?

### Research Objectives

To explore the SMTs' participation in school management in South African primary schools.

## RESULTS

In a school, each and every SMT member is expected to perform his/her functions and fulfill them. Within SMT, there are HODs, the Vice Principal, and the Principal. Each member of the SMT in a school has his or her functions and roles to fulfill. Table 1 illustrates some of the functions stated by SMT members, when they were asked to mention their functions.

**Table 1: Individual interviewee responses on the daily functions of school management teams**

Main theme	Sub-themes
Functions of SMTs: Managing Others	Educators' class attendance, Teaching takes place, Monitoring of learners.

### Functions of SMTs

School Management Teams (SMTs) are obligated to carry out their duties in such a way that teaching and learning takes place in the school. Some of the functions of SMTs include leading learning in schools, curriculum management, distributing educators' work, ensuring the establishment of functional subjects and learning areas committees, managing timetabling issues, assessing and evaluating learner performance, human resource support and management, school development planning, and developing/empowering self and others.

### Managing Others

It has been generally believed that the functions of SMT members in South Africa are sup-

posed to be similar since they are governed by the same policies and the same job description. However, different SMT members from different schools understood their expected functions differently. The main responsibility of SMT members is that of managing others. The following issues were raised when members of SMTs were pronouncing some of the important aspects when managing others.

### *Educators' Class Attendance*

The core business in all schools comprises teaching and learning. Therefore, it is the primary responsibility of members of SMT to make sure that teaching and learning in their schools is taking place. Some of the participants mentioned that part of their responsibility is to make sure that educators attend classes according to the timetable. **II1** also shared the same sentiment in this regard.

He understood his function as follows, *to see to it that educators attend lessons and teach.*

Based on the view of **II1**, the issue of class attendance goes beyond that since one has to make sure that teaching and learning are actually taking place. Making sure that teaching and learning are taking place in schools is one of the common functions that most SMT members understand to be their functions. However, making sure that teachers attend lessons, and actually teach, required one to be a reflective practitioner who would know teachers' period registers and be able to monitor them effectively.

### *Teaching and Learning Must Take Place*

The concept of teaching and learning can be broad in the education fraternity. In the context of this study, teaching and learning refer to the educators covering the scope of the syllabus which they are expected to cover, and that they would be able to prepare learners for the next grade. In achieving all these issues, SMT members would need to monitor and make sure that teachers plan their lessons every day, and teach accordingly. **II2** mentioned that his responsibility was to check whether teachers are fairly assessing learners and that such assessments were marked and given back to learners on time. **II3** and **II4** had a similar understanding with regard to their management functions. They both agreed

that part of their functions was to make sure that educators are actually in class teaching. They also believed that it was their responsibility to moderate the question papers before they were given to learners for assessments. In order to fulfill this function, it is important that members of SMT discuss with teachers the days or dates of moderations, and other important dates and activities that might affect their management functions.

### *The Monitoring of Learners*

The monitoring of learners should include making sure that learners are always in class and learning what they are expected to learn. Participants **II4** further mentioned that his responsibilities also include, *monitoring that the learners are doing their work and attending classes.*

Based on **II5**'s response, it became clear that SMT members understood their responsibility as that of monitoring both teachers and learners. It can be argued that the responsibility of SMT members is to monitor that learners are in school, attending classes and doing their work. However, such responsibility requires partnership between SMT members and parents to ensure that learners attend school and do their homework.

**Table 2: Focus group's responses on the daily functions of school management teams**

<i>Main theme</i>	<i>Sub-themes</i>
<i>Administration and Decision-making</i>	Facilitation of all submissions to the circuit office, updating school log book. Identify teachers that need to be developed.

### **Administration and Decision-making**

The work of school management involves a lot administrative work and decision-making. The following issues were raised when the members of SMTs outlined how best they could fulfill this function.

#### ***Facilitation of All Submissions to the Circuit Office***

One of the common communication vehicles between South African schools and the Depart-

ment of Basic Education is circulars. Time and again, schools receive circulars from the Department about what needs to be submitted to the circuit offices. As a result, **FG1** mentioned that it was the responsibility of SMT members to facilitate such submissions and to make sure that their schools submit on time. To support this responsibility, **FG2** shared the same understanding since he also believed that it was his responsibility to check whether there were any circulars from the circuit, and also to check the roll call for educators.

Continuous checking of circulars from the circuit assisted members of SMTs to be up to date and to know the important dates of submissions to the circuit offices.

#### ***Identify Those Teachers That Need To Be Developed***

According to **FG2**, the responsibility of SMT members is to ensure that all teachers are capacitated and are ready to teach the new syllabus. **FG2** further mentioned that in her school, she sent people to the universities for short courses that improved their teaching practice. With the introduction of the new curriculum and the integration of technology in teaching, there was a need for members of SMTs to identify those teachers who still needed to be developed, and train them. To support this, **FG1** also mentioned that they invited the services of private service providers who offered computer literacy, as part of an initiative that contributes to staff development.

Furthermore, **FG1** mentioned that:

*The principal should ensure that newly appointed teachers and SMTs are inducted and oriented into their duties and responsibilities. They should also ensure planning and the implementation of high quality staff training programs.*

This role can be fulfilled by cooperating with the institutions of higher learning in relation to continuous professional development and management development. In-service training becomes important in this regard for SMT members to attend some short courses that would improve their practice. It may be argued that the principal, as a member of the SMT, has the responsibility of developing staff members by ensuring that they attend the relevant training and workshops that contribute to the total de-

velopment of their professional teaching careers (Table 2).

### **Main Findings of Roles and Responsibilities of SMTs**

These findings were based on the daily functions of school management teams. The main findings were summarized under the following headings, that is, managing others, this involved educators' class attendance, monitoring (teaching and learning), and monitoring of learners, administration and decision-making, which involves the facilitation of all submissions to the circuit office, updating of the school logbook, and identifying those teachers that need to be developed, and recording and filing, which involves storing, registering, and the filing of all minutes of the meetings.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Functions of School Management Teams**

#### ***Leading the Learning School***

School Management Teams (SMTs) are obligated to carry out their duties in such a way that teaching and learning take place in the school. Hillson (2015) conducted a study in the eastern region of Japan on the principal as a key role player in the school. The study investigated the role played by the principal in a school. The results of Hillson's study revealed that the results and quality of education in a school depend on the effectiveness of the SMTs as a school leadership vehicle.

#### ***Curriculum Management***

Curriculum management can be very complicated in the school context for one to understand. In the context of the SMTs as curriculum managers, curriculum management means the SMTs should be monitoring all the curriculum activities and should see to it that all members of the staff (teachers) adhere to the curriculum policies (Department of Education 2012). Soot and Viskus (2014) conducted a study in Ghana on school managers as curriculum leaders in school. The study investigated the impact of SMTs on curriculum management, and the results of the study have shown that SMTs play a

very crucial role when it comes to curriculum development and management.

#### ***Distributing Educational Work: Keeping Files of Educators***

SMTs, as school managers, are working with quite a number of educators. Sometimes, it becomes difficult for SMTs to know the profile of each individual teacher in the school. Therefore, it becomes important that they to keep the profile of all educators to undertake the distribution of work and duties. According to McGonagle et al. (2015), it is the responsibility of the SMTs to make sure that there is equal work distribution among all the staff members (educators) in a school. Good SMTs have the responsibility to encourage the spirit of working together and supporting one another as colleagues.

According to Pfeifer and Jankowski (2015), SMTs have the duty to make sure that each and every educator in a school fulfills their duties and responsibilities, which comprise teaching and learning. Furthermore, these researchers outline that it is the responsibility of the school SMTs to delegate the duties accordingly in order to ensure the smooth running of the school. It is the significance of the present study to ensure that each member of the SMT understands his/her duties and responsibilities to ensure smooth running of the school.

#### ***Ensuring the Establishment of Functional Subjects and Learning Area Committees***

A good leader always delegates duties to the members of the staff. Therefore, SMTs, as school leaders, should also make sure that the different subject and learning committees are formed and functional in the school (Department of Education 2012). Senior and experienced teachers can be delegated to lead their respective subject committees. Rauduvaite et al. (2014) conducted a study on the effect of delegation in an organization. The study was conducted in Botswana in one of the rural schools of the eastern region. Lasauskiene and Barkauskaite (2014) used a case study in his study wherein results revealed that most of the performing schools in the region use delegation as a tool when managing their school.

### ***Provide Feedback After Class Visits and Prioritize Development Priorities***

The SMTs have the responsibility to provide feedback to the staff after class visits. The HOD would then visit the classes and report back to the principal on the educator's performance and the areas that call for further development (Skills Development Levies Act 9 of 1999 in DoE, 1999). The principal would then call for a staff meeting to report the feedback to the entire staff. According to Swanson (2013), fifty percent of the money for norms and standards should be spent on teaching and learning. Therefore, the principal has the responsibility of prioritizing issues in the school and at the same time, to ensure that educators receive training in those areas where they struggle (teacher development) as part of teaching and learning improvement.

### ***Human Resource Support and Management***

The SMTs, as school managers, must bear in mind that in the school context, are dealing with human beings as the capital of human resources. Therefore, they have the responsibility to support each individual staff member in the school and to treat members of the staff equally. Understanding different human behavior could assist SMTs to fulfill this responsibility. SMTs should understand and respect the rights of each individual staff member in the school (Labor Relations Act 66 of 1995 in DoL 1995). It is the responsibility of principals to manage educators' leave and monitor learners' and educators' attendance in a school. Moreover, SMTs should maintain discipline in the school and provide support for vulnerable learners in the school.

### ***Developing and Empowering Self and Others***

SMTs should also ensure that they develop and empower themselves and other teachers in the schools. Some of the areas reviewed as areas of development are as follows.

#### ***Staff Development***

According to the Employment of Educators Act 76 of 1998 in DoE (2012), the SMTs should ensure that newly appointed teachers are induct-

ed and oriented in their duties and responsibilities. They should also ensure the planning and implementation of high quality staff training programs. This role can be fulfilled by cooperating with institutions of higher learning in relation to continued professional development and management development. Educators should be assisted in developing and achieving these objectives, in accordance with the needs of the learners and the school (Peterson and Chapman 2013).

Therefore, the SMTs oversee the mentoring, coaching and support of all educators, in general, and those that are underperforming, in particular. To ensure complete fulfillment of this role, the present study has revealed that it is the responsibility of the SMTs to provide a conducive environment for sharing of expertise among educators. Moreover, SMTs oversee the effective implementation and management of the Integrated Quality Management System (IQMS) in order to monitor school and staff development. In other words, they should delegate some members of the staff to deal with IQMS matters effectively (Kleinheksel 2014).

### ***Managing the School as an Organization***

Managing the school as an organization involves being active and knowledgeable about activities that result in the smooth running and management of the school. Some of the issues reviewed serve as keys for managing school, as an organization.

#### ***Financial Management***

According to Hillson (2015), the principal and SMTs are responsible for managing the school's finances and should apply the necessary controls to maximize efficient use of the funds available. Consequently, they should support the School Governing Body (SGB) in developing the annual budget by providing them with learner enrolment, fee exemption and collection levels.

#### ***Manage Information***

According to Bush (2013), the SMTs have a role to manage relations with the media in the context of the promotion of Access to Information Act and provincial guidelines. They should also manage all sensitive information, particularly learner and educator personnel files. There-

fore, they should ensure that sensitive learner and teacher information is properly maintained, stored and accessible to only those authorized to view it. In some instances, educators and learners share sensitive material with the school management, and as a result, such information should be managed with confidentiality.

#### *Community Networking Partnerships*

The SMTs should be in a position to understand socio-economic and political issues impacting teaching and learning in the school, and adapt accordingly. It is also the responsibility of the SMTs to set up community-school partnerships to support teaching and learning. Furthermore, SMTs should participate in community activities in connection with educational matters and regularly reflect on such participation to ensure community development. They should support all fundraising structures and initiatives and should liaise with the relevant departments, as well as with sports, cultural, community and social organizations, as required (Walter 2013).

#### *School Improvement Plan (SIP)*

The School Improvement Plan (SIP) is a management tool used to give a school the operational direction on an annual basis (Kleinheksel 2014). The SIP is linked to the school development plan (SDP) by translating the SDP into a set of activities for implementation in any given year. The SIP is informed by the School Funding Norms annual budget. The SIP is developed by the school, under the guidance of the SMTs. The School Improvement Plan is a plan to implement the SDP. The SIP is a one-year plan that should include all the activities that have been planned for any particular year.

The study found that SMTs are not aware of the following, as part of their functions/responsibilities, that is, managing quality and securing accountability, managing the information network, and representing the school. When it comes to the management of quality and accountability, the study revealed that SMT members were not aware of any procedures and measures for ensuring quality assurance. It further came out from this study that members of the SMT were not even aware that ensuring quality and securing accountability were their responsibility. In this regard, SMT members are in con-

tradition with what the Department of Basic Education expects from them. According to the DBE (2012), the deputy principal should ensure quality assurance of the learning environment by consolidating class visit reports from the Heads of Departments and following up on concerns through targeted class visits in support of the teacher, in order to improve teaching and learning in the school. From the discussion above, it may be argued that SMTs need training on issues of quality assurance in schools. Furthermore, there is a need for them to lead by example and to be accountable for their actions.

In schools where the study was conducted, it was found that there was a lot of sensitive information that was not well managed in the schools. For that reason, the study found that SMTs did not know how to manage information, or how to network with other schools and represent their school. These discoveries further revealed the confusion of functions and responsibilities between the Principals and Deputy Principals. To clear up the confusion between the principals and deputy principals, it is discussed in the PAM document that the deputy principals should manage sensitive information, particularly learners' and teachers' personnel files, and also ensure that sensitive learners' and teachers' information is properly maintained, stored and accessible to those authorized to view such information.

Reflecting on the discussion above, it may be argued that for SMTs to fulfill this role, they should liaise with the different sections of the department concerning administration and management, personal, financial, and other information that might be regarded as sensitive in a school. Therefore, it could be argued that the SMTs need to be trained on all their functions, and they should be allocated a document that lists all their functions in the school management environment.

Besides promoting teaching and learning, the members of an SMT have a responsibility to give direction in school, and to guide and supervise both educators and learners. This responsibility differs, depending on the position they occupy. For instance, the principal would give direction to other SMT members and guide them on how they should perform their duties, while the deputy principal would meet with the HODs in order to guide them and supervise them.

With regard to HODs, they meet with the educators in their departments to motivate them,

to guide and supervise their work. As discussed in the PAM document, SMT members should use a school improvement plan (SIP), as a management tool, to give a school its operational direction on an annual basis (Pfeifer and Jankowski, 2015). Giving an operational plan means explaining to the subordinates how the school is going to operate for the entire year.

In the case of HODs, teachers must be informed on when they should submit their preparations, when to submit learners' books, and all other important information they may need to know.

### CONCLUSION

The study was conducted with the view to explore school management teams' experiences to determine their participation in school management. It was concluded that SMT members were not aware of their responsibilities in the school, and this affected their participation in the management of the schools. The study found that SMT members were not aware of all of their daily functions, as they only knew the basic functions that appeared to be common. This challenge was found to result in poor management and a lack of fulfillment in the management functions. It was further revealed that SMT members, such as principals and deputy principals confused their responsibilities due to the similarities of their functions. The study concluded that the lack of training and orientation of SMT members prior to their appointment in the management positions resulted in confusion on their side.

Some of the functions that were revealed to be unclear to SMT members included keeping profiles of all the educators to inform the distribution of work and duties, promoting Information Computer Technology (ICT) in learning, human resource support and management, school development/improvement planning, quality assurance of the learning environment, staff development and financial management, management of information, networking and representing the school, the management of meetings and scholar transport, and the management of the national school nutrition program. The study further concluded that SMT members were in a dire situation, in which they were unable to differentiate their management functions as HODs, deputy principals and principals.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Training on Management Functions

The study recommended that SMT members be trained in the management functions since they were found not to be aware of some of their functions. In-service training and workshops are ways to keep the members of SMT on track with the current management issues in the district.

#### Framework for Management Participation

The study further recommended that SMT members be provided with a framework that would guide them on how to participate in their management functions.

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**Paper received for publication on October 2015**  
**Paper accepted for publication on May 2016**