

Enhancing Learner Achievement through Effective School Leadership: Experiences from Selected Rural Schools in South Africa

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ABSTRACT The role of school leadership in the South African educational context has become incredibly complex and its effectiveness needs to be investigated. The roles of school principals are expanding as a consequence of the devolution of powers from local, regional or national bureaucracies to school level. Such devolution increases complexity in the role of principals. The goal of this qualitative study was to explore the roles of school principals in enhancing learner achievement in schools. Premised on the qualitative research approach, a purposive sampling technique was used to select 6 schools identified by district education officials as having performed well for the past five years and seen as having effective leadership. The findings reveal that effective leadership in schools is vital if schools are to succeed in providing good learning opportunities. The findings reinforce recent literature that defines leadership as a shared social influence that enhances goal achievement.

INTRODUCTION

There is unprecedented and overwhelming international interest in how educational leaders, especially principals of schools, influence learner achievement (Wadesango and Bayaga 2012; Gu and Johansson 2013; Oterkiil and Ertesva 2015; Day et al. 2016.). There has been a flux of international reviews on the direct and indirect role of school leadership on student learning outcomes (Bell et al. 2003; Witziers et al. 2003; Leithwood et al. 2004; Marzano et al. 2005; Leithwood et al. 2006). The literature on sustained learner achievement also sees quality school leadership as a key to continued learning improvement (Datnow 2005; Hargreaves and Fink 2006).

The context of school leadership has been rapidly changing and this is reflected particularly in educational reforms and school restructuring movements not only in Africa but also the world over. The roles and functions of school leaders have changed in many countries of the world, and as a result, school leaders are confronted with an altogether new range of demands and challenges. The management and leadership tasks of school leaders are both complex and interrelated, so that there is no clearly defined, specific role of school leadership, but at best a matrix of different aspects (Huber 2004). Some role segments relate to working with and for people; others to managing resources. Leadership, to a great extent, is regarded as a key factor in accounting for differences in the success with which schools foster the learning of their students. While other factors within the school also contribute to school turnaround, effective leadership is the principal catalyst (McCarley et al. 2016; Sayadi 2016). Witziers et al. (2003) similarly found that school leadership has a positive and noteworthy effect on student achievement while Waters et al. (2004) reported that effective school leadership substantially increases student achievement. Despite the fact that some emergent perspectives have depicted school

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leadership as a shared (Barth 2001; Donaldson 2001; Lambert et al. 2002) or distributed process (Spillane et al. 2000; Gronn 2002; Klar et al. 2016), there is dearth of research that documents how principals in schools understand their participation in leadership and its relationship to school achievement in South Africa. The success of school leaders in building high performance organizations depends on how well these leaders interact with the larger social and organizational context in which they find themselves (Leithwood and Jantzi 2002; Day et al. 2000; Leithwood and Prestine 2002).

Studies in developed countries have established that the presence or absence of effective school leaders, positive school climate and positive attitudes of teachers can, directly or indirectly influence school performance and learner achievement (Hallinger and Heck 1998; Witziers et al. 2003; Waters et al. 2004; Kruger et al. 2007; Klar et al. 2016). While the equation of effective school leadership and improved school performance appears to be relatively simple and straight forward in theory, in practice the interplay between the various components is complex and unpredictable. International literature on the role of principals shows that one of the key roles of leadership is leading learning and teaching (National Assembly for Wales 2005). The principal who works with teachers and school governing bodies could create conditions and structures that support effective learning and teaching for all. School principals have a direct responsibility for the quality of learning and teaching and for pupils' ultimate achievement. This implies setting high expectations, monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the learning processes and outcomes. While it is evident that there is a fundamental connection between the principal's leadership and school performance in terms of student achievement (McCarley et al. 2016), research on this relationship begins and ends with that concept (Cotton 2003). On the other hand, Harris (2004) and Story (2004) have argued that although the leadership field is replete with descriptive studies of effective leadership, these studies have rarely tracked, with sufficient rigor the relationship between leadership and learner performance. Harris (2004: 4) reminds us that "we do not know, for example, exactly what forms of leadership result in higher learner performance across different school contexts, and in different types of school."

School Leadership Styles for Effective Teaching and Learning

Good leadership in schools can certainly contribute to school improvement by whetting the motivation, participation, and coordination of the teachers (Bellibas et al. 2016). Hallinger and Heck (2010) argue that, fifty years of theory and research offer increasing levels of support for the assertion that effective principal leadership makes a difference in the quality of schooling, school development and student learning.

Researchers have discerned a number of school leadership styles and the most commonly known, according to Ali-Ibrahim and Ali-Teneiji (2013), are authoritarian or autocratic, where the authoritarian leader makes all decisions, independent of members' input; democratic or participative, where the leader welcomes team input and facilitates group discussions and decision making; and Laissez-faire or passive, which allows the group complete freedom for decision-making without the leader's participation (Zareen et al. 2015; Kasprzhak et al. 2015; Martin 2016). In 1967, Likert suggested another set of leadership styles: exploitative, authoritative, and benevolent authoritative, consultative, and participative. The exploitative-authoritative style leadership has low concern for the people and uses such methods as threats and punishment to achieve conformance (Ali-Ibrahim and Ali-Teneiji 2013). When an authoritative leader becomes concerned about people, a benevolent authoritative leader emerges. In the consultative style, as Ali-Ibrahim and Ali-Teneiji (2013) show, the leader makes genuine efforts to listen carefully to ideas, but with major decisions still largely centrally made. Using the participative leadership style, the leader engages people in decision-making; people across the organization are psychologically closer and work well together at all levels (Kasprzhak et al. 2015).

Another set of school leadership concepts was developed by Burns (1978), and these are transactional leadership and transformational leadership. These two styles have dominated scholarly debates as the major conceptual models of school leadership since the early 1980s (Silins and Mulford 2002; Hallinger 2003; Marks and Printy 2003; Story 2004; Huber 2004; Harris 2014; Oterkiil and Ertesva 2015). Transactional and transformational leadership form a new paradigm for understanding both the lower order

and higher order efforts of leadership styles in schools. These paradigms build on earlier sets of autocratic versus democratic or directive versus participative leadership (Avolio and Bass 2004; Harris 2010, 2012; Harris and Jones 2012). Transformational leadership, according to Avolio and Bass (2004), increases the interest of staff to achieve higher performance through enhanced commitments to the organization. This leadership style entails motivation of staff and influencing goal achievement strictly through being proactive (Marks and Printy 2003; Harris 2010; Ali-Ibrahim and Ali –Teneiji 2013). Transformational leaders develop relationships of mutual stimulation and elevation that convert followers into leaders (Avolio and Bass 2004; Shulman and Sullivan 2015; Sayadi 2016). As articulated by Burns (1978), four factors characterize the behavior of transformational leaders: individual consideration, intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation, and idealized influence. Individual consideration has connotations of giving personal attention to members who seem neglected. Intellectual stimulation focuses on enabling members to think of old problems in new ways (Avolio and Bass 2004). Inspirational motivation is exemplified by communicating high performance expectations while idealized influence emphasizes molding behavior through exemplary personal achievement, character and conduct (Bass 1978; Ali-Ibrahim and Ali –Teneiji 2013). Transformational leaders do not simply administer structures and tasks, but concentrate on the people carrying these out, that is, on their relationship and on making deliberate efforts to win their cooperation and commitment (Huber 2004; Leithwood and Mascall 2008; Sayadi 2016). Transformational leaders actively influence the culture of the school so that it stimulates more cooperation, coherence and more independent learning and working (Huber 2004; Kasprzhak et al. 2015). In addition, transformational leadership concentrates on the results, the success of the teaching learning process, and on the relationship between these outcomes and the specific processes which led to them (Avolio and Bass 2004).

On the other hand, transactional leadership is based on the reciprocal exchange of duty and reward that are controlled by the principal (Huber 2004; Avolio and Bass 2004; Smith 2015). Transactional leadership is defined by Avolio and Bass (2004) as setting up and defining agreements or

contracts to achieve specific work objectives, discovering individuals' capabilities, and specifying the compensation and rewards expected upon successful completion of the tasks (Martin 2016).

Transactional leaders focus on the basic needs of their staff (Burns 1978) and are not interested in providing high level motivation, job satisfaction, or commitment. Avolio and Bass (2004) describe three forms of transactional leadership: passive management by exception, active management by exception, and constructive transactional leadership. Passive management by exception involves setting standards but waiting for major problems to occur before exerting leadership behavior (Hallinger 2003; Sayadi 2016) and leaders who demonstrate active management by exception pay attention to issues that arise, set standards and carefully monitor behavior (Marks and Printy 2003). A constructive transactional leader sets goals, clarifies desired outcomes, exchanges rewards and recognition for accomplishments. Such a leader suggests and consults, provides feedback, and gives employees praise when it is deserved (Hallinger 2003; Marks and Printy 2003; Avolio and Bass 2004; Ali-Ibrahim and Ali-Teneiji 2013; Shulman and Sullivan 2015). The transactional leader is the manager of the transactions, which are fundamental for an effective and efficient work flow within the organization. The daily organizational office proceedings and administration of buildings, financial and personal resources (Huber 2004), the time resources of staff, as well as communication processes within and outside of the school are all included in this definition of transactions or interactions. All this, as Huber (2004) shows, constitutes the daily routines of school leadership and should not be underestimated. These routines represent part of the workload required to create the appropriate conditions for teaching and learning.

A useful distinction between transactional and transformational leadership is provided by Oterkiil and Ertesva (2015) who note that transformational leadership is focused on change while transactional leadership is focused on management, for example, maintaining the day-to-day activities associated with the school. Transformational leaders, unlike transactional leaders, are more likely to be proactive than reactive in their thinking, and more creative, novel and innovative in their ideas (Marks and Printy

2003; Avolio and Bass 2004). Transactional leaders may be equally astute but their focus is on how to keep the system running and reacting to problems generated by observed deviations and looking to modify conditions as needed (Marks and Printy 2003; Ali- Ibrahim and Ali -Teneiji 2013). Although transformational and transactional leadership are at opposite ends of the leadership continuum, they can be complementary (Leithwood and Jantzi 2002; Smith 2015). In a school situation the ideal leader would practice the transformational components more frequently and the transactional component less (Harris 2004). It should be noted that in schools, principals advocate transformational leadership and other forms of leadership that are consistent with evolving trends in educational reform, such as empowerment, shared leadership and organizational learning (Hallinger 2003; Leithwood and Jantzi 2002; Silins and Mulford 2002).

Considering the realities of South African schools today, many principals are doing their best to make it through any given day just leading the diverse needs of the school community. The time necessary for a transformational leader to build trust, commitment, independence, and empowerment of teachers and staff is not always available. In some contexts not every leader is able to convince their subordinates to perform at a high level (Witziers et al. 2003). Empirical research has found that successful school leadership creates conditions that support effective teaching through deployment of both transformational and transactional leadership styles. High quality leadership in schools is vital for school improvement and student learning outcomes (Gronn 2002; Marks and Printy 2003; Story 2004; Robson 2007; Mulford and Silins 2009). The Department of Education (2005) cites the school principal as the leading professional and effective leader critical to the achievement of educational goals and transformational goals of the South African education system. In the same vein, research by Bellibas et al. (2016) points to instructional leadership as a critical role of principals who achieve laudable school improvement results.

Objectives of the Study

The goal of this qualitative study was to explore the roles of school principals in enhancing learner achievement in schools. The study specifically sought to:

- ♦ Identify leadership styles used in effective schools.
- ♦ Examine ways in which school principals influence effective teaching and learning.
- ♦ Isolate functions of the school principal that are linked to enhancing learner achievement.
- ♦ Identify specific ways in which school principals assist educators in their teaching to enhance the achievement of school goals.
- ♦ Share findings among the school leadership community on best practices in enhancing teaching and learning.

METHODOLOGY

A qualitative research design was used to capture the richness of the lived experiences of teachers and principals from six selected schools in one district in a Province of South Africa. The broad aim of the study was to assess the role of principals in enhancing learner achievement in schools. The study offers a snapshot about the nature of school leadership at the time of data collection in the selected schools.

Sampling

Qualitative evidence was collected through a purposive sampling technique. The selected schools had performed well for the past five years. These six schools were identified by the district management on the basis that there was evidence of effective leadership in the schools that was seen as having contributed to school improvement and learner achievement. All six schools selected for the study agreed to participate in the study. Two teachers who had produced the best results in the last five years were purposefully sampled from each school, making a total of twelve teachers from the six schools. Teachers were coded as T_1 to T_{12} , while school principals were coded as P_1 to P_6 . This was done to protect the identity of participants. Sampling of schools and participants was linked to the aims of the study and in this case they were schools that had effective leadership that led to good learner performance. The schools sampled for the study were located in different parts of the district and were coded as follows:

School A: A combined school with 712 learners and 18 teachers.

School B: A primary school with 1000 learners and 22 teachers.

School C: A secondary school with 1200 learners and 24 teachers.

School D: A secondary school with 500 learners and 12 teachers.

School E: A combined school with 1203 learners and 25 teachers.

School F: A primary school with 410 learners and 15 teachers.

It is acknowledged that in a small scale study of this type generalization of findings to a national scale is difficult to make. Furthermore, purposive sampling of schools where effective leadership was evident meant that these schools were by definition not representative of the population of schools as many that performed poorly were not sampled. However, because these schools performed well, it was assumed that this was a result of effective school leadership, and therefore allowed researchers to make some tentative generalization about leadership theory with regards ways in which effective leadership enhances teaching and learning.

Data Collection

Data were collected from participants via semi-structured interviews with a diagonal cross section of school staff, including senior teachers and principals in each school. All interviews were semi-structured to provide a basis for comparison across research sites while also allowing sufficient flexibility for context-based variables. Semi-structured interviewing was used as the primary data collection method because it best captures experiences of participants in their own words (Charmaz 2006; Creswell 2007; Silverman 2014). For this study, the semi-structured interviews were designed to allow interviewees to give their views and experiences in the schools. The researchers decided to limit the number of interview questions to five to allow participants to remain focused on the research problem. An interview guide with the following five questions was used:

- ♦ What are the leadership styles adopted in your school?
- ♦ In what ways if at all, does the principal influence effective teaching and learning?
- ♦ What are the main functions of the school principal that are linked to enhancing learner achievement?
- ♦ In what ways if at all, does the principal assist you in your teaching to enhance the achievement of school goals?

- ♦ How are decisions made in the school?

All but one of the interviews were conducted face-to-face and one interview was conducted through telephone after a foiled face-to-face attempt.

Data Analysis

Qualitative analysis of data was conducted using a comparative method consistent with grounded theory approaches (Charmaz 2006; Bryant and Charmaz 2007). Coding the data and constantly comparing and categorizing emerging themes helped to make sense of the voluminous data (Malakolunthu et al. 2014). Once interviews had been transcribed, the coding of data commenced. The analysis involved intensive reading of each transcript and the identification of key words and phrases that connected the participants' accounts of their experiences in schools with their leadership (Denzin 2009; Holton 2010; Lather and Pierre 2013; Green 2013). It was at this stage that the researchers' memos were also coded and incorporated as data. Frequency of concepts and thematisation of narratives were criteria used to identify emerging themes.

RESULTS

The main focus of the study was to establish the role played by principals in enhancing learner achievement. The opinions of participants and conclusions drawn from each of the questions are presented and analyzed in depth below.

Leadership Styles Adopted in the Schools

All principals maintained that they adopted some form of power sharing in the schools (distributed leadership) where heads of departments and teachers with expertise played a significant role in leading others. For example the principal (P1) of combined school A, voiced that:

In this school leadership is distributed to all teachers according to their talent or expertise. As long as Mr. Moyo (pseudonym) has certain expertise in certain teaching areas we give him the chance to lead in that area, and ask him to develop others and most members of staff like that type of arrangement (P1).

It also became clear from the qualitative data provided by both teachers and principals that school leadership in the six schools had moved from autocratic leaders to participative leaders who orchestrated decision-making and school leadership using teams of people to achieve school goals. One of the teachers (T2) commented in this regard:

We are responsible for all that takes place in this school. The absence of the principal does not make a difference in this school we work as usual. Our school is progressing well, we set our goals at the beginning of year and our principal specifies the compensation for achieving the goals or going beyond and rewards that can be expected upon achievement of our goals are explained. We have targets to achieve, we have tasks to accomplish, every teacher works towards achieving specific goal (T2).

In many responses on the question of styles of leadership in schools, self-leadership, shared leadership and distributed leadership were implied. For example teacher (T5) reflected:

Leadership is shared among us we also lead ourselves, we learn a lot from others who have expertise, we work together as a team, and we are a family (T5).

The study established that there were tenets of shared decision-making at the six schools where teachers were given responsibilities to make decisions on behalf of the school on important teaching and learning issues.

How Principals Influence Effective Teaching and Learning

Frequent citations from teachers stressed the importance of monitoring classroom instruction as a key to learner achievement and school improvement. This is illustrated in the following two teacher responses and one principal response:

Our school is improving because of the role played by the principal. The leadership practices that prevail here promote effective teaching and learning. (T1) There is continuous monitoring of teaching here.

I would say our school is progressing well due to the influence of our principal who is a leader focused on improvement at classroom level. He moves around the classrooms to see what is going on and at times helping some

teachers. There is effective management of teaching in the school (T3).

I visit classrooms almost daily to assist teachers and ensure that all learners attend school. I also check learners' workbooks to see the quality of their work. The improvements in teaching here are hugely [attributed to] teachers who are taking responsibility, yes they are very responsible (P3).

Functions of Leadership Linked to Learner Achievement

The results showed that leadership in schools was seen as having important functions that are linked to the achievement of effective teaching. Participants identified the following:

Leading and not misleading teachers in the schools.

Leading learning and teaching.

Giving others the opportunity to lead.

Empowering teachers.

Continually double checking the activities of teachers and learners.

Exercising leadership.

Actively seeking out new challenges in the school.

Developing teachers.

Developing schools and providing opportunities for others within the school to lead and to learn.

Controlling structures in the school.

Create a climate of high expectations of success.

Ensuring an orderly and supportive environment.

All participants in the study indicated that the influence and actions of principals largely determined the success of the school. According to the principal of school E, principals play a pivotal role in ensuring the achievement of school goals by seeing to it that teachers do their work.

How Principals Assist Teachers

The research findings from both teachers and principals show that all the six principals ensure the availability of appropriate learning and teaching support materials for their teachers and learners. In expressing this idea one of the teachers (T7) had this to say:

We get enough support from the principal. You can see my class has enough text books for all learners. Our parents also raise money to buy text books that are kept at the school. Problems of absenteeism among learners are settled by the principal (T7)

The majority of teachers interviewed noted the following:

Principals facilitate on-going learning for staff.

Principals secure teaching and learning resource materials.

Ensure that teachers and learners are not disturbed during lessons.

Ensure motivation of teachers and learners.

Ensure that reasonable class sizes are maintained

Ensure that learners are well disciplined and no bullying of each other.

Undertake classroom observations to assist teachers.

Ensure that the school has enough teachers.

Promoting teamwork in the school.

Protecting teachers from undue distractions which affect learning.

Using hard work and results as the basis for rewards and recognition.

Providing teachers with materials and professional development necessary for the successful execution of their jobs.

Recognizing individuals and their efforts in the achievement of school goals.

Articulate a vision of learning.

Going from class to class observing teachers teaching and giving them informal feedback and also presenting model lessons.

All these issues were summarized in the response from one of the teachers (T11) who had this to say:

Our school is improving very well because of the assistance we get from the principal, such as providing us with the necessary resources for our teaching. Even in sporting activities we are doing well because we have enough support from the principal (T11).

In most responses from teachers it was noted that principals ensured that teachers continued to learn and that teachers were deeply engaged in some form of collaborative professional learning in the school or with sister schools.

Decision-making in Schools

The six principals interviewed emphasized that decision-making in their schools was par-

ticipative where teachers had some input on key decisions made in the school. Two principals and one teacher noted:

School improvement for all means involving teachers in decision-making. This also involves consulting teachers where the school is facing some problems. I discovered that teachers have solutions to most problems affecting our schools but they can only give their views when consulted (P6).

I am trying to follow a democratic, participative decision-making by letting teachers become involved in decision-making in most of the decisions taken. Well at times I make important decisions as the principal but there is shared decision-making governance in this school (P3).

Our principal is aware that teachers are competent enough to make decisions that can improve teaching and learning. We are consulted to make important decisions and this has been seen to be working well in this school and benefiting our learners (T7).

It was clear from the interviews with both teachers and principals that the only way to achieve large scale development and learner achievement was to invest in collective decision-making with teachers.

Frequent citations from teachers noted that decision-making in schools was participative as shown in this quotation;

The principal of this school would always seek to involve teachers in designing and implementing important decisions and policies in the school. He engages all members of staff in meaningful dialogues regarding teaching and learning (T8).

Most specifically, the study established that principals on regular occasions consulted teachers and frequently engaged them to discuss curriculum and instructional as well as learner behavior and to some extent troubleshoot observed difficulties faced in teaching and learning. All participants were of the opinion that in their schools teachers engaged in practices that encouraged learning. During conversations, especially with teachers, all teacher interviewees highlighted their teaching experiences, acknowledging that their experiences in different schools were critical to their ability to participate in decision-making to improve teaching and learning.

DISCUSSION

Leadership Styles Adopted in the Schools

All the six principals interviewed as shown in the results section had a clear understanding of the styles of leadership they adopted in their schools. Transactional and transformational leadership (though these terms were not specifically mentioned) styles were common in the six schools. It also became quite clear from the qualitative data provided by both teachers and principals that school leadership in the six schools had moved from autocratic leaders to participative leaders who were orchestrating decision-making and school leadership using teams of people in achieving school goals. Such purposeful approaches to increasing school effectiveness as Klar et al. (2016) show can be done through the involvement of other formal and informal school leaders in leadership activities. Such instances where teachers were actively involved in core developmental tasks and were participants in the process of learner improvement are affirmed in a review of literature by Boylan (2016) who concludes that teachers tend to express greater expectations for and desire to participate in decisions related to classroom instruction and that participation in decision-making promotes teacher commitment to the decisions that are made, simultaneously increasing their motivation to implement them.

How Principals Influence Effective Teaching and Learning

As the results of this study show, frequent citations from teachers stressed the importance of monitoring classroom instruction as a key to learner achievement and school improvement. This underscores the importance of the complementarity between transactional and transformational leadership where leaders not only build trust within the team to foster cooperation to develop common goals and values and a common vision of the future (Kasprzhak et al. 2016) but also set performance objectives and clear measures for achieving those objectives and clear rewards (Martin 2016). The significance of monitoring classroom instruction on learner achievement is also reported in a study by Goddard et al. (2015) who found that schools in which principals were reported to be frequently moni-

toring instruction and providing relatively strong instructional guidance were the ones most likely to be characterized by high levels of collective work among teachers to improve instruction. In the same vein, Leithwood et al. (2006) argue that the core purpose of principalship is to provide leadership and management in all areas of the school to create and support conditions under which high quality teaching and learning take place and which promotes the highest possible standards of learner achievement.

Harris (2014) argues that the pressure for better performance, higher achievement and improved student learning outcomes lie with the principal and teachers who are at the sharp end of the teaching learning process. Harris (2014) identified eight strong claims about effective school leadership which are: Head teachers' values are key components in the success of teachers and learners; Successful heads use the same basic leadership practices, but there is no single model for achieving success; Differences in context affect the nature, direction and pace of leadership action. Heads contribute to student learning and achievement through a combination and accumulation of strategies and actions. There are three broad phases of leadership success; Heads grow and secure success by laying leadership strategies and actions and successful heads distribute leadership progressively.

Functions of Leadership Linked to Learner Achievement

An important finding under this section was that leadership in schools has key functions that are linked to the achievement of effective teaching. All participants in the study indicated that the influence and actions of principals largely determine the success of the school. This concurs with findings by McCarley et al. (2016) who argue that when, for example, teachers are consistently burdened by administrative tasks and mandates they have insufficient time to teach what they believe is important. The literature review has shown that there is a universal agreement that principals' leadership functions and actions play a pivotal role in ensuring high learner achievements (Mitchell and Castle 2005; Moloji 2007; Bush and Glover 2009; Bush et al. 2010; Sim 2011; Du Plessis 2013; McCarley et al. 2016; Sayadi 2016). On the other hand, Robinson (2007) stresses that the impact on student out-

comes is likely to be greater where there is direct leadership involvement in the oversight of, and participation in, curriculum planning and co-ordination and teacher learning and professional development. Also international literature on the role of principals, stresses that one of the major functions of the principal is leading learning and teaching (National Assembly for Wales 2005). Bellibas et al. (2016) show that contemporary research on school leadership has provided policymakers with increasingly persuasive evidence concerning the scope and means by which leadership contributes to student learning outcomes. Principals who work collaboratively with teachers create the conditions, structures and culture to support effective learning to enhance the achievement of desired learning outcomes.

How Principals Assist Teachers

Based on the data from both teachers and principals it can be concluded that all six principals ensure the availability of appropriate learning and teaching support materials for their teachers and learners. Principals, according to the results, ensured that teachers continued to learn and that teachers were deeply engaged in collaborative professional learning in the school or with sister schools. Citing a study by Salisbury and McGregor (2002), McCarley et al. (2016) report that within an open climate, principals were supportive and perceived as both non-directive and nonrestrictive and teachers were engaged, collegial, and had a strong network of social support. In this regard, Goddard et al. (2015) argue that school environments may be most productive when principals work collaboratively with teachers to develop collective expertise. The researchers argue that effective school principals do not leave learning to chance but they set the organizational framework to ensure effective teaching and learning happens. This resonates with Sayadi's (2016: 58) assertion of transformational leaders who influence organizational commitment by "promoting the values that are related to goal accomplishment, by emphasizing the relationship between employees' efforts and goal achievement, and by creating a greater degree of personal commitment on the part of both followers and leaders."

Decision-making in Schools

Decision-making in the schools studied, as revealed by data from school principals, was

participative where teachers had some input on key decisions in the school. It was clear from the results of the interviews with both teachers and principals that the only way to achieve large scale development and learner achievement was to invest in collective decision-making with teachers. These findings resonate with the transformational style of management which, according to Kasprzhak et al. (2015), is people-oriented, aims to achieve cooperation and build trust within the team and foster cooperation to develop common goals and values and a common vision of the future. To enhance the achievement of educational goals, teachers need to be engaged in interdependent decision-making and working together. They need to take joint action that helps to articulate a vision of collective responsibility. As Wadesango and Bayaga (2012) show, participation nurtures teachers' creativity and initiative, empowering them to implement innovative ideas which make decisions more likely to be acceptable and more likely to be implemented because they reflect and serve the interests of the community of practice that strive to put them into action. Similarly, Goddard et al. (2015), assert that instructional leadership may support the degree to which teachers work together to improve instruction, and together leadership and teacher collaboration may contribute to school effectiveness by strengthening collective efficacy beliefs. In this regard we argue for principals who seek to build collaborative processes to enhance the performance of their schools by providing opportunities for staff to participate in decision-making about issues that result in improved teaching and learning. The research findings in this study reinforce findings from literature review which established that allowing teachers to take initiatives and engage in decision-making has been associated with higher levels of teacher retention, job satisfaction and strong feelings of empowerment (Huber 2004; Marzano 2005; Leithwood and Jantizi 2006; Leithwood et al. 2008; Bush and Glover 2009).

CONCLUSION

The main findings from the study were that school principals play a significant role on student achievement, primarily through their influence on teachers' motivation, empowerment, shared vision, and creating a climate of high expectation and success. Principals in the schools

covered in this study played a wide variety of roles in the schools, not the least of which is the creation of academically supportive environments and cultures for both learners and teachers. The six schools covered in the study purport to create a professional environment that emphasizes collegial interaction, shared vision, creating best opportunities for learners, and valuing teacher professional development to enhance their teaching skills. Linked to these findings was the role of principals in promoting and supporting teachers' and learners' achievements, creating a positive work environment for teachers and ensuring staff morale which also creates the right learning environment for the learners to achieve. It is the principal's specific leadership style and use of deliberate strategies that significantly enhance effective teaching. While it is important to realize that formal designation of specific roles and responsibilities will always have a place in educational contexts, the future of school leadership resides in a distributed framework of leadership that permits teachers to be actively involved in leadership roles to enhance learner achievement.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Following are the conclusion given above, the following recommendations are advanced:

- ♦ To meet the needs of 21st century, principals of schools need to play a more dynamic role and become far more than administrators of top-down rules but adopt systematic strategies that focus on the instructional and learning outcomes of learners in schools.
- ♦ Efforts should be made in schools for participative decision-making involving each of the individuals or groups as they have the potential to contribute to collective leadership.
- ♦ While it is not possible to give a specific leadership style to enhance learner achievement, the suggestion would be that school leaders should seek to motivate teachers, delegating responsibilities and distributing powers to others. The principal should be the captain of the team, and the central source of leadership influencing teachers to achieve the vision of the school. It is the principal's leadership that sets the tone of the school, the climate for teaching, the level of professionalism and the degree of achievement.

- ♦ The study has identified the principal's leadership as a significant factor for school success. Principals should ensure a school-wide learning improvement agenda that focuses on goals for learner progress and also establishing a school-wide vision of commitment to high standards.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

A limitation of the study could be the size of the sample. Only six schools were used in this study. Future studies could therefore use larger samples and even sample across several provinces in South Africa. In addition, only best performing schools were used in the sample. Future studies could target poorly performing schools so that the views of teachers from those schools on how leadership styles stifle teacher performance and student learning could be empirically documented.

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