

An analysis of professional development for school leadership in the Ohangwena region of Namibia: Challenges and Prospects

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Abstract: The main focus of this paper is to analyse professional development for school leadership in the Ohangwena region of Namibia. The study explores leadership, professional development, school leadership, school performance and educational leadership associated with quality for schools' targeted performance in the region under study. Schools in the said region were assessed for their need of good professional development skills to ascertain whether professionals are able to handle others diligently in their operations. School leaders with over sighted leadership skills were issues that were viewed as crucial in order to improve schools performance. Finally, the paper examines the need for proper leadership professional development training that is vital in improving on the domains of supervision, delegation and control of subordinates in an educational sector for improving academic performance.

Keywords: Leadership, Professional development, School leadership, School performance, Educational leadership, Quality, Principal

1.1 Introduction

This paper seeks to abide and pursue the University of Namibia as the focal point for consideration in order to explore professional development and school leadership for performance and is designed to guide the conduct and portray results gathered as milestones of the study of this nature. The paper examines school leaders who are working in communities with different people and who are in fact having different backgrounds in their operations in the education environment. In fact, schools are assessed for need of good professional development skills in order to determine whether professionals are able to handle others diligently. The issue with school leaders with over sighted leadership skills aimed at improving schools performance has been assessed. Finally, the paper examined the leadership need for proper professional development training that enables them to improve on supervising, delegating and controlling of their subordinates in order to improve academic performance.

1.2 Background

Educational leadership plays a pivotal role in school performance. Research shows that the quality of leadership has a significant impact on student outcomes (Bush, 2007). There is also increasing recognition that schools require effective leaders and managers if they are to provide the best possible education for their learners. Schools need trained and committed teachers, but they, in turn, need leadership of highly effective principals and support from other senior and middle managers. While the need for effective leaders is widely acknowledged, there is much less certainty about which leadership behaviours are most likely to produce favourable outcomes (Bush, 2007). This study discusses theoretical underpinning of educational leadership models, and impacts the evidence of their relative effectiveness in developing successful schools. The study will be designed in a qualitative form such that the leadership models, and impact the evidence of their relative effectiveness in developing successful schools will be discussed in descriptive form.

Crawford, Kydd & Colin (2011) emphasise that during any discussion on managing people, there is an investable focus on how people work together effectively. Both leading and team work are pervasive activities in human resource management in education, and are part of the process through which successful teaching and learning takes place in educational settings. For the above analysis and discussion, it's on that basis that this research is aiming to look deep on the issue of leadership and its impact on school performance. The purpose of the study is to improve leadership practices that have an impact on the schools performance. In dealing with subordinates, the appropriate leadership style may vary according to how long they have been in the job (Hersey, Blanchard & Johnson, 1996) cited in Everard, Geoffrey & Wilson (2004). This study engaged school leadership in a 3-day workshop, interviewed principals, and engaged middle management in a focus group discussion.

Before Namibia's independence, the country's education system was designed to reinforce the Apartheid system rather than providing the necessary human resource base to promote equitable social and economic development. It was fragmented along racial and ethnic lines, in what was termed the Bantu education system, which was also enforced in black community in South Africa, with vast disparities in both the allocation

of resources and the quality of education offered (Katjavivi, 2016). This had a great impact on the quality of education in the country. He further stated that challenges in implementing and monitoring high standards in teaching and learning outcomes across regional, cultural and socioeconomic subsectors prevent Namibia from fully achieving this goal. Though this is not the purpose of this study, this research is looking more on the professional development of the school leadership. This prompted an investigation into aspects of leadership that may have major impact on schools performance. Although there are some researches that were done in Namibia on school leadership for example Kawana (2007) in his research on the principal's leadership role in a successful rural school in Namibia emphasises that the attitude and actions of the leader have a significant influence on the school's performance. The manner in which the principal conducts him/herself, shared vision he/she encouraged and his/her stakeholders on associating with all stakeholders involved in education, were instrumental in the organisation's positive achievement (Kawana, 2007).

In addition, Kawana (2007) indicated that the principal was shown as committed and a leader with good interpersonal working relationships. His study furthermore revealed that the principal is both a person- and task oriented leader, and closely resembled the ideals of transformational leadership. Importantly, Kawana's study further found out that, through the principal's instructional leadership, teaching and learning are seen as the core of the school's critical activities. It concluded that the principal's leadership role opens the school to the community and results in strong and mutually beneficial relationships between the school and its community.

Another Namibian scholar on school leadership who researched on the relationship between school leadership and learners' academic performance at four secondary schools in Kavango region is (Hausiku, 2015). In this study Hausiku (2015) found that pertaining to types of leadership practices used by the four principals revealed that, while the principals all described their relationship styles as democratic, constructive and fair, this was not always evident during the observations at the respective schools (Hausiku, 2015). He further more revealed in his research findings that principals often struggled to implement decisions that had been made collectively; they also experienced great difficulty in managing teachers, who often were not teaching, late, or absent from school and showed little interest in education of the learners. They recognised that their inability and lack of skills in leading and managing teachers, as well as the curriculum, had a direct impact on attitude, morale and performance of learners (Hausiku, 2015). Both researchers did not talk about the issue of professional development, this prompted an investigation into aspects of leadership that may have major impact on schools' performance. No research in Namibia revealed any plans for improving the quality of school leadership to improve school performance. This study is therefore aiming at finding out how these schools leaders' impact on schools performance and what role they play to contribute to school performance.

1.3 Statement of the problem

For the school leaders who are working in community of different people and different backgrounds, they need good professional development skills to be able to handle others diligently. School leaders may have over sighted leadership skills on how to improve schools performance, they may need proper professional development training that may enable them to improve on how to supervise, delegate and control their subordinates in order to improve academic performance.

1.4 Research questions

The paper was aimed at addressing key questions on how professional development (PD) affects school leadership in Ohangwena region of Namibia. The following are the specific questions the study wishes to examine:

1. What specific features of professional development are most powerful in supporting teachers' understanding of effective leadership?
2. Why professional development training is needed most by the school leaders?

1.5 Significance of the study

There is a growing body of evidence within the school improvement field that points towards the importance of capacity building as a means of sustaining improvement (Fullan, 2011; Hopkin & Jackson, 2002; Mitchell & Sackney, 2000). Change leaders must understand procedures and processes that create conditions to empower others, and share new vision necessary for school improvement. The researcher engaged school management in professional development session, conduct focus group discussions and interview school leaders to determine the impact of professional development training for leadership and this will improve performance in schools. The study will be significant to school management in the Ohangwena region, and policy makers to improve performance.

1.6 Limitations of the study

This study was conducted to collect data within a set timeframe in the Ohangwena region. Participating school leaders may not be representative of the entire leadership corps of Namibia and therefore, the findings are not generalizable. Financial constraints may limit a longer period of professional development training. Another financial constraint is that the researcher travelled back and forth day by day during the collection of data and the use of transport will be needed.

2. Literature review

The different leadership theories are numerous and thus, leadership from a local and international perspective is said to be the impact of school leadership on school performance and best practices to enhance the quality of school performance. Leadership implies the art of motivating a group of people to act towards achieving a common goal (Ward, 2017). This leadership definition captures the essential of being able to inspire others and being prepared to do so. Effective leadership is based upon ideas (whether original or borrowed), but won't happen unless those ideas can be communicated to others in a way that engages them enough to act as the leader wants them to act (Ward, 2017).

Professional development pertains to a wide variety of specialised training, formal education, or advanced professional learning intended to help administrators (school leaders), teachers, and other educators improve their professional knowledge, competence, skills, and effectiveness (The glossary of education reform, 2013). Quality in educational leadership is about making organisations (schools) perform for their stakeholders from improving products, services, system and processes, to making sure that the whole organisation is fit and effective (<http://www.quality.org>). The term principal entails the highest-ranking administrator in elementary, middle, or high school (www.encyclopedia.com).

2.2 Different leadership theories and educational management

Research shows education as the main change agent in developing and developed societies. As a result, the management of educational organisations is regarded as one of the most important management perspectives (www.eprints.um.edu). Basically, educational management is a discipline with respect to the management of educational organisations and since this field of study has been developed on the premises of other resolutely established disciplines, there is not unique statement to set out this subject of study. Although the process of determining organisational goals is fundamental to educational management, linking between organisational goals and aims of education and actions of educational management may be considered vital (www.eprints.um.edu). The other issue of importance is closely interlocked relation between educational management and educational leadership and a true combination of them to reach educational excellence (www.eprints.um.edu). This is the interest of my study to look at how professional development of school leadership can influence school results. The main focus was on how training school leaders and managers with new skills on management theories and models will enable them to improve the academic outcomes.

Management is a series of actions and tasks relevant to highly well organised and effectual application of resources within the organisation in order to attain organisational objectives (Sapre, 2002, p. 102) cited at (www.eprints.um.edu) and educational management may be regarded as a discipline with respect to the management of educational organisations is fundamental to educational management (Bush, 2011, p.3) cited at (www.eprints.um.edu).

Theories and models of educational management have been categorised by different scholars (www.eprints.um.edu). Cuthbert (1984) as cited at (www.eprints.um.edu) classified educational management theories to five groups including analytical-rational, pragmatic-rational, political, and phenomenological and interactionist models. Additionally, Bush (2011, p. 34-35) as cited at (www.eprints.um.edu) based on four elements including the level of agreement about objectives, the concept of structure, the level environmental influences and the most appropriate strategies within the educational organisations has categorised the models of educational management into six clusters which are formal, collegial, political, subjective, ambiguity and cultural models and finally has linked these six models within nine different leadership styles in the context of educational organisations (www.eprints.um.edu). These nine leadership styles are managerial, participative, transformational, distributed, transactional, postmodern, emotional, contingency and moral. It is notable that since the concentration of instructional or learning centred leadership is mostly on learning and teaching (direction of influence rather than the essence and origin of influence), it has not been linked with any of the six models of management (Bush, 2011, p.17-18).

2.3 Formal model of educational management

Structural, systems, bureaucratic, rational and hierarchical models constitute the formal models of educational management (Bush, 2011, p. 40-42) as cited at (www.eprints.um.edu). These models assume that the structure of the organisations is hierarchical and predefined objectives are pursued based on a rational method. The authority and power of heads is the product of their formal positions and also these managers are responsible and accountable to sponsoring bodies for the operation and execution of agreed policies in their institution (www.eprints.um.edu). This argument is relevant to my study thus will make use of it to deliberate further discussion on how professional development of school leadership improves schools performance.

Formal models of educational management are linked with managerial leadership style. This style of leadership has some assumptions such as concentrating on execution of actions, tasks and activities proficiently as a means facilitation of other organisational members' activities, high degree of rationality in the behaviour of members and allocation of authority and influence to formal positions based on the status of positions within the organisational chart (Leithwood, Jantzi& Steinbach, 1999, p. 14) cited at (www.eprints.um.edu).

2.4 Collegial model of educational management

The second models of educational management are collegial models. Major assumptions of these models are policy determination and formulation, decision making based on a process of discussions, agreements and consensus and sharing the power among some or all of the members of the organisation who are considered to have a common perception of the organisational objectives (Bush, 2011, p. 72) cited at (www.eprints.um.edu).

Collegial models are linked with three leadership styles which are transformational leadership, participative leadership and distributed leadership (Bush, 2011, p. 72). The core assumptions of transformational leadership are concentration on commitments and components of organisational members and the fact that higher level of commitments to organisational objectives as well as greater capacities for goal attainment would contribute to the productivity of the organisation (Leithwood, 1994) as cited at (www.eprints.um.edu) has conceptualised the transformational leadership in education sector based on eight dimensions as building school vision, setting objectives, intellectual stimulation provision, offering individualized patronage, best practices and core organisational values modelling, high performance anticipations display, produce culture creation within schools and finally encouraging participation in school decision making process by developing required structures (www.eprints.um.edu).

In essence, collegial model or theory is well matching with the purpose of this study as it emensionally contribute to the school performance because of its good objectives that set good structures for everyone in the organisation to have high performance anticipation as stated above. Collegial model could be one of those leadership theories that school leaders can employ to improve the results as it embellish culture of team work.

2.4 Participative leadership

Participative leadership which sometimes is described as shared collaborative or collegial leadership is the second approach pertinent to collegial models of educational management (www.eprints.um.edu). As a normative theory, participative leadership is premised on three criteria which are an increase in school efficiency due to applying participative approach, justification of participation by democratic principles and availability of leadership to any lawful stakeholders in the framework or context of site based management (Bush, 2011, p. 87).

The third leadership style related to collegial models is distributed leadership which has been at the centre of attention of scholars in the 21st century (Gronn, 2010, p. 70) as cited at (www.eprints.um.edu). This kind of leadership is detached from the positional authority and is based on the competencies and skills of members in the organisational chart. In this way, Harris (2003) cited at (www.eprints.um.edu) stated that distributed leadership focuses on seeking and utilization of expertise where it exists in the organisation regardless of the organisational positions of the skilled members. In summary and in the context of educational institutions, distributed leadership is a leadership approach in which collaborative working is undertaken between individuals who trust and respect each other's' contribution and happens most effectively when people at all levels engage in action, accepting leadership in their particular areas of expertise and finally requires resources that support and enable collaborative environments (www.eprints.um.edu).

For all the above theories, contemplation on leadership and performance they (theorists) did not talk much about the professional development of school leadership and how it contributes to school performance. Although, they spoke about expertise within the organisation and collaborative working, these theorists did little to professional development need of school leaders, thus this study tried to find out how professional development of school leaders impacts on the school performance and if there is that need for professional training development programme for school leaders that may help them to contribute positively to school outcomes.

The issue of school leadership is widely argued by many scholars globally and in Namibia. Makgone (2012), researched on the evaluation of strategic leadership in selected schools and its contribution to academic performance in Namibia. Her research found that there is a relationship between the instructional leadership of the principal and academic performance of the learners and also that there is a relationship between the instructional leadership of the principal and academic performance of learners as perceived by teachers and the inspectors (Makgone, 2012). Makgone (2012) concluded that there is no dispute that instructional leadership of the principal supported by other variables in the school can lead to academic improvement in schools resulting in principals being classified as strategic and effective principals.

Since the mid-1990s, National education policies have had an increasingly strong influence on the work of school leaders (David, Day, Pam, Leithwood, Ging, Brown & Ahturidon, 2011). In England, for example, implementing the national curriculum and the primary strategies and the every child matters agendas has been a substantial part of the work of school leaders, in much as the No child Left Behind policy in the USA. National policies such as these significantly restrict the autonomy of school leaders and their staffs, forcing attention in schools to the consideration and implementation of government defined priorities. The influence of such national policies on the work of school leaders is a function of the mechanisms for ensuring accountability that are part of them. In countries with such policies, a significant part of the visioning and direction setting functions associated with successful leadership has migrated to central levels (David et.al., 2011, p. 19).

This is enviable even in developing countries where education has gone through reforms and many policies have been designed for school leaders and teachers to implement even though some of the national policies did not really address the issues of school leadership and performance. For example pregnancy policy and corporal punishment policies in Namibia did not really address the issues of school leadership and learners' performance. Instead of talking about retaining expected learner mother to remain in school until such time when it is deemed fit for them to go and deliver and later one not to torture learners emotionally by beating and humiliating them that can harm learners psychological. This is not the purpose of this research. This research is sought to test and refine existing models of school leadership as far as they can demonstrate an impact on pupil outcomes.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This research is qualitative in nature. In this case the main focus will be particularly to get the understanding how things occur, in this case how professional development contributes to school leadership and the effect professional development to school leadership contribute to school performance. Creswell (1994) emphasised that the data that emerge from a qualitative study are descriptive, that is data are reported in words (primarily the participant's words) or pictures, rather than in numbers. Qualitative research focuses on the process that is occurring as well as the product or outcome. For this study the focus was on the need for professional development training on school leaders and how it impacts on school performance. In other words, attention is paid to particulars; and data are interpreted in regard to particulars of a case rather than generalisations. Meanings and interpretations are negotiated with human data sources because it is subjects' realities that the researcher attempts to construct (Creswell, 1994). For this study, the researcher used the information obtained from the principals and middle managers (heads of departments) to analyse whether there is a need for professional development training that may help them improve their schools performance for those from poor performing schools and to sustain good performance for those from already performing schools.

A plan of qualitative procedure should end with some comments about the narrative that emerges from the data analysis. Qualitative research presents information in the texts. Variety of narratives that exist is extensive, and examples from scholarly journal articles were used to illustrate models (Creswell, 1994). In a plan of this study, the scholarly journal articles were also used to discuss models of educational leadership and management and their impact on schools performance. This study was mainly aiming at finding the need for professional development on school leadership in Ohangwena region of Namibia. Descriptive entails the narrative outcome that was used to compare theories and general literature on the topic of the case study.

3.2 Sampling

Purposive sampling method was used in this research. This is because the sample of schools investigated was taken from secondary schools performing, non- performing and middle performing. Three secondary schools from Ohangwena region were the targets for this study. One has been performing the past ten years but has slightly dropped; another one has been doing not too bad but has been in the reach and finally the one that has been performing poorly. For all these schools, the common elements are the school leaders and academic results. The research looked at whether by providing professional development programme to these

schools leaders would make an impact on the schools' academic improvement. One principal and three heads of departments from each school were interviewed in a three day workshop.

The sample was taken in a non-discriminatory manner, depending on the school's management staff setup; at least both male and female leaders were considered for interviews. Years of experience were also considered as instrumental. This was used in order to find out whether those who had been in service for long or short period of time have also something to do with how they deal with management and leadership aspects of the school that can influence better academic outcomes. In total the sample consisted of eleven (11) respondents. Heads of departments were selected by the school principal through the request of the researcher.

3.3 Research instruments

In-depth interview for both heads of departments and principals was conducted in a three-day workshop. The purpose of the interview was to find out what types of professional development skills principals and heads of departments had or needed to address in issues such as leading others and contributing towards improving or sustaining good academic performance of their schools. This is because the three selected schools were performing and some were not performing. Those that have been trying and not reaching above average performance were also studied. The interview was conducted in an official language (English). The interview was structured and started with closed-ended questions which included gender and years of experience. Open-ended questions also followed and were used to allow more freedom of expression from the part of the respondents. The interviewee was ensured that the aim of the asked information needed was to complete the study only and thus no need for names of their schools and own identity was required. For each school, there was a three-day workshop to conduct interview sessions that lasted for at least between 40 to 60 minutes for each candidate. The interviewee was tape-reordered.

3.4 Data analysis

The data that was collected was recorded and transcribed to make analysis possible. Subsequent interpretation and discussion of the research findings were drawn from the analysis of the data that was collected. The data was analysed according to research questions and the discussion drawn from literature and the data obtained. After all the above attempts building on Creswell (1994) suggestions, the researcher can assemble data materials belonging to each category in one place and perform a preliminary analysis. Because this research was in the form of a case study, it discussed dominant modes of data analysis such as the search for patterns by comparing results with patterns predicted from theory or literature, explanation building, in which the researcher looks for causal links and explores plausible or rival explanation about the case; such that data were gathered and categorised properly. With this study, the link between professional developments of school leadership and how they can impact on school academic outcomes were analysed and these were necessitated by looking at what was discussed in the literature for different theories of leadership and the data collected. It was discovered that there is a need for professional development in the form of training to school leaders and how this training would shape them to improve the performance in schools.

3.5 Findings

In the final analysis the study found out that the school leaders who are working in communities with different people are having different backgrounds and this has an impact on professional development and school leadership. The schools further need good professional development skills to be able to handle others diligently, which at this pointing time seem to have wider gaps. There is also an issue with school leaders with over sighted leadership skills on how to improve schools performance, but this seem not to impact positively on school professional development and leadership. The leadership need proper professional development training in order to enable them to improve on how to supervise, delegate and control their subordinates in order to improve academic performance.

Conclusion

The paper focused on the analysis of professional development for school leadership in the Ohangwena region of Namibia and explored leadership, professional development, school leadership, school performance and educational leadership associated with quality for schools' targeted performance in the region under study. The paper assessed the need of good professional development skills for professionals that are geared toward handling other professionals and concerned stakeholders in educational schools diligently in their operations. Importantly, the paper discussed school leaders with over sighted leadership skills as issues that crucial are for improving schools performance. Finally, this paper had as well, examined the need for proper leadership professional development training in areas such as supervision, delegation and control of subordinates for the educational sector that ensure quality and improve academic performance.

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