

The Multidimensional Role of the Principal in Post-Apartheid South-Africa: A Philosophical Perspective

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ABSTRACT

The end of apartheid in 1994 brought about radical changes in the South African education system, especially for school principals to manage their own affairs as promulgated in the South African Schools Act. These developments have changed the principal's position irrevocably. However, these changes did not result in the expected outcome in the majority of schools for a number of reasons. Teachers are frequently unsure whether the anticipated changes will have the desired impact in schools. Moreover, principals and teachers have different views on how these changes will affect schools and their work. This paper adopts a conceptual approach that draws on various theories and concepts from the literature on school leadership and management. Understanding the challenges of the school principal's job after apartheid was the aim of the research. The Standards for School Principalship (2015) provided the theoretical framework and basis for this conceptual paper. It should be noted that principals are the most crucial persons in education since they serve as managers and major delivery agents in the educational system. They are the driving force behind improved educational outcomes in South Africa after apartheid. However, it is increasingly uncommon for principals to carry out their multifaceted tasks alone because of how significantly their positions have altered since 1994. All the parties concerned with running a school should receive training and orientation in this respect. The main findings of this paper are that, since the end of apartheid, principals face various challenges in their role, such as lack of resources, support, autonomy, accountability, collaboration, diversity, equity, quality, innovation, and professionalism.

KEYWORDS

Standards for Principalship, principals, schools, multifaceted role, change post-apartheid, South-Africa.

INTRODUCTION

School administrators today must perform their duties in a variety of educational sectors owing to the rigorous and difficult nature of their jobs (Bayeni & Bhengu, 2018). The principal's daily schedule typically includes a variety of administrative tasks such as scheduling, reporting, parent and community connections, as well as unforeseen crises and conflicts involving learners and teachers. The latter result in the work of the school principal being multifaceted and occasionally difficult to understand (Naidoo, 2019; Prew, 2007). The research question that guides this paper is: How do principals cope with the challenges of their multifaceted role in post-apartheid South Africa? The study investigates the role and duties of the principal in post-apartheid South Africa, assessing the theoretical and practical implications of the Standards for School Principalship (2015) for their position.

Principals are responsible for ensuring that every individual enters their facilities and creates a learning environment that matches the school's culture and purpose. Principals are crucial during educational transition because they are frequently viewed as successful if their schools perform well through significant educational change (Mutongoza et al., 2021; Naidoo et al., 2015; Starr, 2011). This is because change is generally accompanied by obstacles and failures. According to Starr (2011), the chief executive officer of a company, who is in charge of marketing, public relations, resource acquisition, management of labour relations, and strategic planning, might be compared to principals of the 21st century.

Additionally, Botha (2013) contends that the principal's job in the modern educational environment might be characterised as a balanced exercise in educational leadership and administration. He believes that all facets of leadership, including managing the curriculum, improving instructional programmes, working with the staff to define the school's vision and mission, and keeping a close relationship with the community, form part of the duties of principals. He contends that management, on the other hand, comprises responsibilities such as overseeing the budget, maintaining school facilities and grounds, and following by-laws and policies relevant to education.

Since the school administrator's function is evolving, the aforementioned factors as well as the fact that few school principals have received training for their job make the position held by the school principal incredibly challenging. This view is especially held because of the extremely complicated nature of schools. The complex nature of schools is mainly brought about by the various stakeholders with diverse interests and conflicting ideologies who are part of the school community. In addition, this complexity in schools is driven by constant policy and curriculum changes, increased and diverse learner populations, and unexpected events, such as learner-teacher conflict. The challenges mentioned, together with additional problems such as school violence, teenage pregnancies, drug abuse and resource shortages, complicate headship and the successful implementation of change in schools (Bush & Clover, 2014; Starr, 2011).

Background and statement of the problem

The school principal has traditionally been regarded as someone who exercises authority, power and discipline (Idrees, 2019). During the 21st century, this role has expanded significantly and much more is expected of the principal, such as understanding and solving complex education issues (Tang, 2018). Botha (2013) and Mestry (2017) assert that over the past 20 to 30 years, significant changes have occurred in educational institutions globally. The emergence of self-management and control in schools, which is associated with an increase in autonomy, is one of these tendencies. In order to accomplish this, administering, ruling, and controlling schools are the responsibility of the school principal and the school governing body (SGB). Numerous stakeholders in education were under a great deal of strain as a result of the shift to school-based management as well as the political and curriculum changes that have taken place since 1994. Schools, and specifically school principals, have not escaped the demands of the time either. They end up on the receiving end of the changes and as a result, they have had to adapt their role, functions, behaviour and outlook on life. Some have done so successfully; others have not.

The role that the school principal plays is extremely important since it is believed that their leadership is the main factor in the effective relationship between school reform and school progress (Chimbi & Jita, 2021; Osworth, 2022). To remain up to date with the growing demands, expectations, and problems of contemporary society, principals are increasingly required to lead creatively (Botha, 2013; Bush & Clover, 2016; Jakubowski, 2022). Principals are under a great deal of stress as a result of the swiftness with which changes have occurred and continue to occur as well as their growing administrative burden (Botha, 2013). In the context of South Africa, exploring alternative techniques to managing change is challenging because it is a complex process. The new governance structure in schools has changed, leaving principals ill-equipped for their new roles. As a result, school principals may find it difficult to adapt to these new roles and ways of communication, thus leading to role confusion (Botha, 2013).

Much of the time, especially during times of educational reform, the principal's involvement in school affairs is put to the test. In this regard, it is particularly important that principals familiarise themselves with the enabling as well as inhibiting factors that are at play during change. Enabling factors make change possible and successful, while inhibiting factors tend to derail change. Inhibiting factors revolve around aspects such as uncertainty, fear of the unknown, insufficient communication channels and support as well as the management style of the principal (Allie & Sosibo, 2017; Van der Westhuizen & Theron, 2014). Other inhibiting aspects that school principals must also keep in mind during change are, for example, the lack of resources and infrastructure, the low morale and motivation of teachers and learners, the resistance to change from some stakeholders, and the socio-economic challenges faced by many schools (Mestry & Singh, 2007; Naidoo et al., 2015; Ngcobo & Tikly, 2010). Furthermore, research on underperforming schools has revealed that the general characteristics of these schools have to do with weak leadership roles (Bush & Glover, 2012).

Principals of underperforming schools often also have little or no interaction with external stakeholders, teachers or learners (Bush & Glover, 2012). Additionally, there is a lack of deliberate focus and participation in the classroom environment (Elmore & City, 2007). The previous duties and obligations of the school principal lead to the conclusion that the significance of the principal's professional training and development cannot be overstated. Unquestionably, successful curriculum reform and school improvement depend on the growth and preservation of administrators' professional competence and roles (Taole, 2013; Tang, 2018). The Department of Basic Education's failure to implement a specific programme to address the principal's professional development needs may increase the number of factors impeding the successful implementation of educational reforms.

All the above aspects have an inhibiting effect on the climate of a school and are indicative that the principal is not fulfilling their role properly. It is assumed that the enabling factors have an opposite effect and contribute to the principal fulfilling their role effectively. To develop a healthy school atmosphere that supports learning and progress, the principal should balance enabling and inhibiting variables.

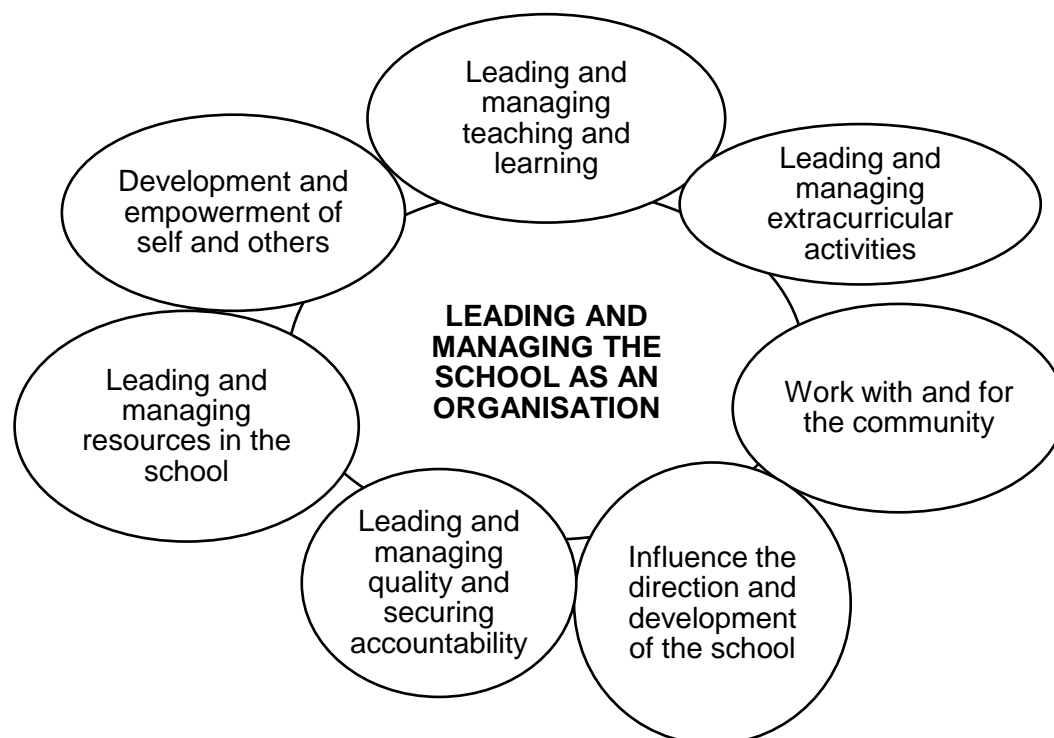
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This research investigates the issues that principals confront in post-apartheid South Africa, finding factors that influence performance and school results. It also examines the implications of the Standards for School Principalship (2016) and makes recommendations for strengthening the role of the principle and professional development. The study analyzes school leadership, educational reform, post-apartheid transition, principalship standards, and change management using a conceptual approach. It investigates the study topic attentively and provides insights by utilizing secondary data from appropriate sources. These sources are located and accessed using the systematic literature review approach.

The Standards for School Principalship (2016) were selected as the conceptual framework because they provide a comprehensive and relevant description of the role and responsibilities of principals in post-apartheid South Africa. They also reflect the values and principles of the South African Constitution of 1996 and the South African Schools Act 84 of 1996 which are the main legal documents that guide the education system. The Standards for School Principalship (2016) are also aligned with the international best practices and benchmarks for school leadership, such as the OECD's Improving School Leadership project (2008) and the International Standard Classification of Education (2001). The Standards for School Principalship formed the basis on which the multidimensional responsibility of the school principal was discussed.

Figure 1.

Adapted from the Standards for School Principals (2016)



In the following section, the various standards for principalship will be covered; however, one standard—leading and managing the school as an organisation—is not included. The remaining standards essentially relate to how principals should run and lead their institution.

Lead and manage teaching and learning

According to Clarke (2007), effective activities in the teaching and learning domain are the foundation of a school, the purpose of education, and its primary duty. He contended that the question to ask oneself is, "What should be done to make effective teaching and learning activities happen, and how will one know that they have in effect happened?" Effective teacher and learner engagements are the cornerstone of a school, the goal of education, and its main responsibility, according to Clarke (2007). Leaders should operate within either an educational or transformative framework, according to Msila (2011). The notion that instructional leadership might be an appropriate approach to education is gaining more and more acceptance (Clarke, 2007). It is becoming more widely accepted that instructional leadership may be an effective method for implementing school change in South Africa.

Influence the direction and development of the school

Xaba (2006) maintained that it is challenging for schools to pinpoint areas that need improvement; the result is that development planning typically yields flimsy and impractical objectives. This planning activity interferes with the need for tangible improvement and reform in schools. Teachers also have the perception that their district fails to provide them with the resources and assistance they require for professional development. The district's curricular revisions were implemented slowly or not at all, demonstrating the influence of their

perceptions. If teachers' opinions are not changed, it is likely that their professional development programmes will not be successful.

Additionally, the study of Xaba (2011) demonstrates the difficulties in building efficient governance. He asserted that it was clear from the remarks made by participants that understanding governance was difficult, largely because governors interpreted their responsibilities differently, which prevented their focusing on their core task of advancing the best interests of the school. This makes it more difficult for the school governing body to carry out their duties effectively, as outlined in the South African Schools Act 84 of 1996. In addition, Mestry et al. (2009) and Bantwini (2012) emphasise the connections between effective professional development and teacher motivation. Extrinsic motivation should not replace intrinsic motivation for professional development to be successful.

Leading and managing quality and securing accountability

The promotion of quality assurance is ultimately the principal's responsibility (Standards for School Principalship, 2016). Another key performance of the school principal is the continuous improvement of the school. As mentioned earlier, owing to the multifaceted nature of the job, principals cannot do it alone, but should form partnerships with relevant stakeholders (South African Schools Act, 84 of 1996). Therefore the national and provincial ministries of education in addition to learners, teachers, parents, school governing bodies, and the general public should be involved as a social compact (Standards for School Principalship, 2016).

Leading and managing people in the school

Principals, who are in charge of overseeing human resources, must be aware of the needs of the school (Standards for School Principalship, 2016). The principal must create a supportive environment by ensuring that all vacant positions are appropriately filled and that teachers are apportioned a fair share of the workload while the Department of Education is in charge of the school's staff appointments. The principal, who is in charge of managing human resources, is in charge of guiding staff about working conditions at the school and offering advice on labour-related matters (Standards for School Principalship, 2016).

Leading and managing extracurricular activities

The administration of a school should create a culture that takes into account the social and economic contexts of its learners by offering extracurricular events such as sport and cultural activities, among others. Socioeconomic considerations must be taken into account in order to enhance teaching and learning as well as the school's reputation (Department of Basic Education, 2014).

Development and empowerment of self and others

Together with all other stakeholders and in the spirit of *ubuntu* [humanity towards others], the principal has the overarching duty of establishing a professional learning community in the school (DBE, 2011). The foundation of a professional learning community is effective interpersonal contact and communication that recognise and manage diversity in terms of race and gender, amongst others (Standards for School Principalship, 2016).

Work with and for the community

For the sake of the school, the principal must forge partnerships and collaborative relationships with both internal and external school communities as a member of the senior management team (SMT) and the SGB (DBE, 2011). Schools are part of certain social and economic groups that both impact them and are influenced by them. The larger community that the school serves can offer resources and support to the institution. Moreover, the school itself can be beneficial to the growth and development of the community as well. According to the Standards for School Principalship (2016), community development and school improvement go hand in hand.

DISCUSSION

As seen in Figure 1, the core standard for principalship revolves around leading and managing the school as an organisation. However, the other standards are not stand-alones; rather, they are interdependent and complementary in nature. The remaining standards can be used to assist the principal in leading and managing the school effectively. For instance, according to Bush (2013), the strategies for enhancing teaching and learning, such as the requirement for modelling, monitoring, and professional dialogue, have not received sufficient attention. The attainment of consistency in behaviour and practice norms for both learners and teachers, as well as high-quality monitoring of classrooms and discussions of practice within learning areas or phases, are examples of this.

The results of a study by Ngidi and Qwabe (2006) found that the parents, teachers, and principals' levels of concern about the state of the teaching and learning environment in schools varied widely. The study further found that the parents, teachers, and principals' perceptions of the collaborative role they play in fostering a culture of teaching and learning in schools were unaffected by their biographical characteristics, gender, or the highest grade the school provided. The researchers thus recommended that successful and fruitful collaboration among teachers, learners and parents in the design and implementation of the curriculum was essential to fostering a culture of teaching and learning.

To steer the school towards a positive trajectory, a shared vision, mission, and strategic plan must be developed and implemented by the principal in collaboration with the SMT, SGB and parents of the school community. According to Xaba (2011), this strategy must enthuse and motivate every employee at the school and provide guidance for the institution's continued development. According to Bush (2011), although transformational language is frequently used in post-apartheid policies in South Africa, there is little proof that it has had an impact on educational institutions. However, some studies have suggested that transformational leadership can enhance school effectiveness by creating a shared vision, empowering teachers, fostering collaboration, promoting innovation, and building trust (Mestry & Singh, 2007; Ngcobo & Tikly, 2010). The quality of teaching and learning in the school is the responsibility of the principal, who collaborates with the SMT and the SGB. In order to ensure constant evaluation and review of all school operations and to foster group accountability and responsibility,

principals must build and maintain effective transformational quality assurance processes and procedures in the school (Mintzberg, 1973).

A professionally run school administration will impact the academic success of the institution. For schools to thrive as organisations, especially those at the basic education level, competent human resources, such as teachers, are crucial (Nanda et al., 2020). Therefore human resources need to be empowered to their full potential.

The Standards for School Principalship (2016) state that one of the school principal's leadership and management duties is to build an environment through extracurricular activities that take into account the needs and circumstances of all learners. Physical education is a Curriculum Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS) requirement for both primary and secondary schools. CAPS is the new curriculum document for South African schools. Therefore, it is essential that the principals are involved in this area, regardless of the stage of their career. Every learner's engagement and performance are emphasised by the policy. Their involvement in the curriculum are crucial for motivating learners to engage in a variety of co-curricular and extracurricular activities in addition to being physically active during the physical education class (DBE, 2011). The principal must also provide opportunities for shared leadership, foster teamwork, and encourage learner involvement in decision-making in order to empower the school, parents, and learners.

CONCLUSION and RECOMMENDATION

The multifaceted role of the principal was examined in this study. It has been claimed that the nature of the principal's job came about because schools cannot function independently from the communities they serve. The South African Schools Act 84 of 1996 serves as the foundation for all educational initiatives. Schools' decentralisation is another essential component on which all of their activities ought to be built. Based on the Standards for Principalship (2016), the study investigates the duties of principals in post-apartheid South Africa, finding enabling and inhibiting variables that influence their performance and school results.

The research investigated the effects of the Standards for School Principalship (2016) on the function of the principle and recommended changes and professional development. It emphasized the need of collaboration among all stakeholders in order to successfully lead and manage the school as an organization, including the government, district, school governing body, teachers, students, and the community. The study emphasizes the significance of continuous monitoring and evaluation of the impact of recommendations on school performance, as well as regular reporting of progress and challenges, and alignment of recommendations with national and provincial policies, standards, and international best practices for effective school leadership and management. However, the tasks are too overwhelming for one person such as the principal; therefore all the stakeholders who have a stake in schools should be involved.

It can be said that elements such as modelling, monitoring, and professional discussion are necessary for the principal to improve teaching and learning as one of the standards for principalship. Additionally, parents, learners, and teachers may all work together to create a culture of teaching and learning in the classroom. By establishing a school's vision, outlining the institution's goals, exemplifying best practices, and displaying high performance standards, leaders are thought to be particularly successful in gaining the support of stakeholders when they have transformation as their primary focus (Clarke, 2007). Additionally, it follows logically from this that those who disregard the systems and processes should be subject to the agreed-upon disciplinary actions. School sport, which develops from physical education, serves as the foundation for high performance and community sport. Physical education is compulsory as a subject in all schools in order to promote the development of learners' fundamental life and motor skills (DBE, 2011). Finally, continuous opportunities for professional and personal growth must be provided in order for the development of each staff member's abilities (Standards for School Principalship, 2016).

Implications for Future Research

This study revealed that the participation and collaboration of all relevant stakeholders, such as the government, the district, the school governing body, the teachers, the learners, and the community can help principals face various challenges in their post-apartheid roles. The principal should also monitor and evaluate the impact of these recommendations on the school's performance and outcomes, and report on the progress and challenges regularly. Therefore, future research should be aligned with the national and provincial policies and standards for school leadership and management, as well as with the international best practices and benchmarks for school effectiveness. It should be a concerted effort to train and uplift all the stakeholders who are responsible, for fulfilling the multifaceted tasks of schools, together with the principal,

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