

Full Length Research Paper

Empowerment of the school management team by secondary schools' principals in Tshwane West District, South Africa

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The South African education scene is characterised by principals who come from the apartheid era where they manage the school alone in an authoritarian manner. Old approaches to school management have changed because the society has also changed. There is a shift from top-down style of leadership to shared or distributed leadership which requires the empowerment of those in managerial positions in schools. The principal is expected to manage the school together with significant stakeholders. In this study attention was focused on the extent to which principals perform the duties of instructional leadership and how they empower the School Management Team (SMT) to execute instructional leadership. Additionally, the study aimed at finding out impediments that principals experience in the course of empowering the School Management team. The study used a quantitative method involving the use of a questionnaire. The study population consisted of 90 principals and deputy principals and 165 heads of department in Tshwane-West District. Data analysis consisted of descriptive and inferential statistics. The greatest challenge is the administrative workload experienced by principals. The study also found that rural principals perform the duties of instructional leadership more than the urban principals. Principals perform their duties well and this is good for the academic performance of learners.

Key words: School management, instructional management, empowerment, culture of teaching and learning, teaching and learning.

INTRODUCTION

Attention has been given to the instructional leadership of principals and the School Management Team mainly because of the decline in learners' achievement in national and international examinations, and the lack of a culture of teaching and learning in many schools.

According to Weeks (2012 quoting Nieman and Kotze), there are numerous dysfunctional schools in which the culture of teaching and learning has broken down. A study by Taylor (2007) reveals that the culture of teaching and learning has collapsed. Many reasons can be cited

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for the collapse of the culture of teaching and learning. Some of the reasons for the collapse in the culture of teaching are the failure of principals to practice instructional leadership effectively and lack of supervision of teaching and learning as there are no clear policies developed by the principal and the School Management Team (SMT) (Mogonediswa, 2008).

In the South African context, therefore, an important challenge is to practice instructional leadership so as to restore the culture of teaching and learning (Weeks, 2012). Instructional leadership focuses on managing teaching and learning as core activities of the school. An instructional leader concentrates all his/her energies on teaching and learning and is worried by poor examination achievement of learners. Thus Bush et al. (2009) maintain that the management of teaching and learning remains one of the fundamental activities for the principal and other school leaders. In spite of this, principals concentrate on other aspects of the school rather than on teaching and learning. Mestry (2013) contends that the principals' day comprise activities such as dealing with multiple teacher and student crises. In addition, Bush and Heystek (2006) aver that principals are mainly concerned with financial, human resource management and policy issues.

Studies by Phillips (2004) and Marishane (2011) point out that anything to do with teaching and learning is the responsibility of teachers and heads of department. This supports the premise that the principals should empower the heads of department in their duty as instructional leaders. This is because without the exercise of instructional leadership roles, the classroom becomes the major source of crisis in education. This results in ineffective teaching methods and weak subject knowledge all leading to poor quality schools (Fleisch, 2008). Concurrent with the management reforms and demands for the execution of various instructional leadership roles, principals are expected to provide opportunities for the deputy principal and the heads of department to fine-tune their practice as instructional leaders (Taole, 2013). Given the circumstances above, Gultig (2010) contends that it is important to ensure that South African schools hold principals accountable to empower deputies and head of departments with the skills to execute instructional leadership in order to attain quality education. Mestry (2013) argues that no one person can execute all the tasks facing principals and recommends that principals should empower management teams with instructional leadership instead of management functions.

Scholars such as Spillane et al. (2004) and Taylor (2009) outline the following three requirements for developing effective teaching and learning in schools:

1. Sound classroom practice from specialist teachers;
2. Sufficient and suitable learning material and
3. Sound and proactive leadership and management of

learning.

The literature shows that the above requirements are not present in South African schools. For example, findings from the study conducted in the North-West Province by Van der Westhuizen et al. (2002) point out that grade 12 learners performed badly in the national examinations and one critical cause for this occurs where principals blame the teachers and parents for poor performance while parents blame principals and teachers. However, not only does this apply to the North-West province but also to the Limpopo Province.

Research by Bambi (2013) points to the fact that heads of department have a sense of their role as instructional leaders but are hampered by, amongst others, rigid educational frameworks, uneven distribution of power within the school, inadequate training and administrative duties. This implies that the principal should create conditions that allow heads of department to execute their role as instructional leaders. In this case, principals should embrace empowering and distributing leadership instead of clinging to power and trying to be supermen and superwomen who perform all duties in the school.

Extant research shows that instructional leadership of principals and heads of department is a popular topic among researchers. Some commentators focus on the challenges faced by rural principals in attaining the desirable learner achievement. These commentators point to the challenges faced by rural principals such as lack of funding, difficulty in recruiting highly qualified teachers, out-dated facilities and lack of technology (Du Plessis, 2017; Du Plessis and Mestry, 2019; Preston et al., n.d.). Other commentators compare the instructional leadership of rural school principals with that of urban school principals (Erwin et al., 2011). There is also a tendency of treating instructional leadership of principals separately from that of the heads of department without providing a bridge between the two. For example, Kwindu (2002), Zulu (2004), Lunenburg, 2010), Taole (2013), Mestry (2013) and Maila (2013) all studied the instructional role of principals while Bambi (2013) focused on the instructional leadership of heads of department; but, these studies do not indicate how principals can empower the SMT to perform instructional leadership effectively.

The literature also shows the narrative of a comparison between male and female principals in the execution of instructional leadership. Vedavaski (2017) concedes that there is a slight difference between male and female principals but does not indicate the nature of the difference. Burns and Martins (2010) examined the differences between male and female principals using the invitational theory and found that male and female principals differ in the source of their authority. Male principals derive their source of authority from their formal position whereas female principals derive their source from their expertise. Shakel et al. (2018) assert that

female principals consistently obtain higher ratings on instructional leadership when compared with their male counterparts. Burns and Martin (2010) conclude that effective principals will always be effective regardless of the gender of the principal.

In his study, Taole (2013) investigated the capacity of principals to provide instructional leadership and argues that principals need to free themselves from managerial tasks and delegate these tasks to the management team but this aspect was not further researched. Mestry (2013) and Maila (2013), however, recommend that the principal should delegate instructional leadership instead of managerial functions, to heads of department. In this study, it is argued that heads of department are instructional leaders because their job descriptions, according to Education Labour Relations Council (ELRC), resolution 8 (Department of Education, 2000), specifies that they should be responsible for the effective functioning of their departments and to ensure that the subject and the education of learners is promoted in a proper manner. Thus the principal should create conditions under which the heads of the department can effectively carry out their duty as instructional leaders.

Problem statement

Instead of concentrating on empowering management teams with instructional leadership to improve teaching and learning, most principals deal with financial, resource management and policy issues (Bush and Heystek, 2006). Recommendations from previous research indicate that principals do not understand their role in supporting heads of department in instructional leadership (Bambi, 2013). Findings by Kruger (2003) indicate a move away from the authoritarian modes of the past to a more collaborative approach and recommend that principals should make an effort to empower teachers (including deputies and heads of department) to enable them to fulfil their roles. The above means that principals are unable to fulfil their duty of supporting the SMT in executing their instructional leadership roles.

It is against the afore-mentioned background that this study seeks to investigate how principals empower the management teams in executing instructional leadership. The above question can be unbundled into the following sub-questions,

1. What is the difference between rural principals and urban principals and what is the difference between male and female principals in executing instructional leadership?
2. How do principals perceive their performance of the duties of instructional leadership?
3. How do principals empower the School Management Teams in executing instructional leadership?
4. What impediments do principals experience in empowering the School Management Team to execute

instructional leadership effectively?

Aims of the study

The main aim of the study is to investigate how principals empower the SMT (deputy principal and heads of department) in executing their instructional leadership role effectively. This main aim is supported by investigating the following objectives:

1. To establish the difference between rural and urban principals, and male and female principals in executing instructional leadership
2. To investigate how principals perceive their performance of the duties of instructional leadership.
3. To establish how principals empower the School Management Team (SMT)
4. To investigate the impediments that principals experience in empowering the School Management Team

Theoretical perspectives

The study is premised on three theories, the theories of empowerment, instructional leadership and distributed leadership. The three theories are intertwined in that empowerment enables instructional leadership to be performed by the School Management Team (SMT) and distributed leadership is the vehicle that enables empowerment to take place. Basically, the principal should execute the duties of instructional leadership in order to empower the SMT to do the same. One cannot expect others to perform a duty that he/she is not able to perform. One of the ways in which empowerment can take place is through the exercise of distributed leadership.

Instructional leadership

The literature reveals various understandings on the concept of instructional leadership. Glanz (2006) indicates that an instructional leader ensures that the school offers the core function of the school, which is instruction.

Research studies indicate that the principal as an instructional leader should ensure that the school offers the core function which in instruction (Glanz, 2006). It is expected from principals to act as instructional leaders who know that successful leadership is one that supports successful teaching and learning. To this end, Bush (2007) posits that instructional leadership focuses on the direction of influence, managing teaching and learning as the core activities of educational institutions. In addition, Sharma (2012) agrees that instructional leadership is crucial in the development and sustenance of an effective school which focuses on learners' achievement.

Furthermore, Grey and Lewis (2012) hold a view that the introduction of instructional leadership may salvage failing schools. Therefore, the principal and the management team are held accountable for the academic performance of the learners and students. Principals are thus required to empower management teams with instructional leadership skills in order to enhance teaching, learning and learners' or students' performance.

Notably, Bendikson et al. (2012) distinguish between direct and indirect instructional leadership. These scholars explain that on the one hand, direct instructional leadership is leadership that focused on the quality of teacher practice, including the quality of curriculum, teaching as well as assessment. Whilst on the other hand, indirect instructional leadership refers to the creation of conditions for good teaching and teacher learning by ensuring aspects such as policies, routines, support high quality effective teaching and learning.

There are various conceptions of instructional leadership as alluded above. Nonetheless, there is convergence among many scholars about its role in supporting effective teaching and learning (Grobler and Conley, 2013; Naicker et al., 2013; Bhengu and Mthembu, 2014). These scholars agree that instructional leadership focuses on teaching and learning and on the behaviour of teachers in working with learners in order to achieve improved academic outcomes. It therefore means that the instructional leader's influence is targeted at learner's or student learning through the teachers. Putting it in a different context, Mitchell and Castle (2005) argue that instructional leadership entails the principals' actions which target improved learner outcomes. However, it is worth noting that such actions are more meaningful and bear fruits if the principal understands how to align these actions in ways that build structures to support leadership in others and influence instruction in ways that will result in increased learner's or student achievement.

In the context of the actions above, instructional leadership may be described by those actions that the principal performs, or delegates to others like the management team, to enhance optimal and effective teaching and learning including learners' or students' performance and achievement. It therefore means that the principal ensures maximum educational achievement by prioritizing instructional leadership quality within the school. Fullan (2002) advocates that instructional leaders should at all times strive towards excellence in teaching and learning with the primary purpose of improving learners' or students' achievement.

In empowering the SMT, the principals should work cooperatively with the staff in setting vision, goals and objectives in order to enhance and realize effective teaching and learning. Glanz (2006) contends that without a vision there is no direction or hope for the future. Van Niekerk and Wydeman (2008) assert that the vision of the school will always relate to the function of the school like an organization, which is ideal for effective teaching and learning. It stands to reason that a vision of

the school deals with the desired future of the school and indicates the ideal that the instructional leader and the school personnel are striving to achieve.

In conclusion, Gupton (2013) avers that school leaders need to know their schools very well and to understand their staff and learners or students within their schools. Therefore, it is required that the principal should regularly involve the management team and the staff in the process of drawing up a meaningful vision for the school. The principal is also expected to inspire the management team including the staff to take ownership of this vision and to share the common goals and objectives, respectively (Blasé et al., 2010).

Empowerment theory

It seems empowerment has become a buzzword in corporate and educational circles, and has been applied in a number of fields including feminine literature, poverty alleviation efforts and community development. Hawkins (2002) postulates that empowerment is difficult to define but essential for learners, teachers and management teams (SMT). In this study, it has been used to explain the relationship between principals and the School Management Team. Hennink et al. (2012) aver that although empowerment has become a mainstream concept in discourse, its definition is elusive. This is further supported by Luttrell et al. (2009) by saying those who use the concept never attempt to define it.

As such the concept is defined differently by various commentators. The main idea is that empowerment is a process, not an event. This view of empowerment as a process is supported by Lord and Hutchinson (1993) who define empowerment as "processes whereby individuals achieve increasing control of various aspects of their lives and participation in the community with dignity". These authors further argue that empowerment can be understood as a process of change whereby the powerless people gain power to make decisions that affect their work. Cunningham and Gresso (1993) state that empowerment means helping people to take charge of their lives, inspiring people to develop feelings of self-worth and a willingness to be self-critical and reflective of their actions.

Hennink et al. (2012) postulate that empowerment "is the shift in the power structure or a process of transition from a state of powerlessness to a state of relative control over one's life, destiny and environment". Schermerhorn et al. (1997) view empowerment as the process by which school managers help others (management teams and teachers) to acquire and use the power needed to make decisions affecting them and their work. In the school empowerment means the transfer of power from the principal to the School Management Team (SMT) because the principal is seen as a powerful individual deriving his/her power for his/her position and referent power as a result of his/her expanse

knowledge of the education process. As such empowerment is seen as a process and an outcome. The outcome consists of the SMT moving from powerlessness to a state of relative control over their lives, destiny and environment (Hennink et al., 2012). Moreover the SMT gains access to valued social resources and valued social roles, which enables them to exercise authority and control over their respective departments.

The principal has the power to influence and coerce his/her subordinates to achieve the goals of education. This presents power as something which is wielded by those who have it and that it can be bestowed by one on another. In empowering the SMT the principal is therefore bestowing power on the SMT making them agents who have the capacity to act independently and make their own free choices (Luttrell et al., 2009). The distribution of power does not mean diminished power for those who hold it but actually strengthens his/her power. This means that power shared is power gained. In a school the SMT gains control and power but does not diminish the power of the principal.

The principal's efforts to empower the SMT may be thwarted by people experiencing surplus powerlessness. People experiencing surplus powerlessness have internalised their oppression and the process of moving from powerlessness cannot be expected to emerge spontaneously from within and easily accept the offered empowerment. Structural rules and social forces may limit the degree of acceptance of empowerment by the people experiencing surplus powerlessness. Mosoge (2018) argues that the struggle against apartheid by teacher unions resulted in the challenge to the authority and power of principals. Thus, principals attempting to empower their SMTs may experience resistance to their authority and power.

The principal must find ways to motivate them to reach the entry level of empowerment by creating conditions that will foster the empowerment of those in managerial position (Lintner, 2009). One way of motivating those people experiencing surplus powerlessness is to create an enabling environment. Page and Czuba (1999) attest that, all too often, empowerment merely shifts management and leadership responsibilities to willing workers, who then work in a frustrating ambiguous environment. Hennink et al. (2012) describe an enabling environment as the existence of effective partnership with local and international structures. The enabling environment is created when the principal provides an open, friendly and supportive environment to teachers and often uses expert and referent power according to appropriate cases, situations and contexts (Elmazi, 2018). This is possible where the principal organises and changes the existing structure and adopts distributive leadership.

The principal should form a partnership with the SMT in managing the school because empowerment has less to do with coercion and more to do with synergy. This involves capitalising on individual and group capabilities,

and casting off quite a degree of accumulated power. Higgs (2002) is of the opinion that empowerment for the management teams can only succeed in an environment where the desire for empowerment is greater than the desire for power. The enabling conditions cast the person in the role of an agent. In this way it encourages the individual to act independently and to make free choices. Empowerment can only have a lasting effect if it is transacted, not as a conflict of control and demand, but rather as a sharing of tools between trustworthy and responsible stakeholders.

Distributive leadership

Empowerment can only succeed when the principal creates an enabling environment by practising distributive leadership. The school consists of a community not only of the principal. This community includes parents, teachers, learners and non-teaching staff. This community shares an interest in and involvement with the same object (Foot, 2014). The subject of interest is the education of children that the community is interested in, seeing them succeed in their studies and further on in life. This suggests that education is shaped by social factors and group membership along with roles and positions each occupies in society (Van der Walt and Wolhuter, 2018). Historically, the community expected the principal to be authoritarian, to control everything in the school, to manage the school as his/her little fiefdom. That was regarded as a strong principal. However, the community nowadays expects the principal to be democratic and, according to the South African Standard for Principals (Department of Education, 2020: 3) "good principals do not act in isolation but lead and manage their schools democratically....."

Crawford (2005) emphasises that schooling is becoming more complex in structure and purpose and therefore organisational change and development will require more fluid and distributed forms of leadership. Indeed, in the current global discourse concerning alternative approaches to educational change, distributive leadership has received wide acclaim (Hargreaves and Fink, 2008). Orthodox leadership models are without any doubt criticised and seen as inadequate to sustain school improvement (Harris, 2005).

In a knowledge-intensive enterprise such as teaching and learning it is impossible to complete complex tasks without fostering implementation of distributed leadership responsibilities that enhance the empowerment of the management teams with instructional leadership skills (Hartly, 2007). Harris (2005) refers to distributive leadership as the contemporary leadership practice emerging in South African schools. It is worth noting that distributive leadership is becoming a norm believed to be both relevant and timely to empower management teams with management skills required to improve teaching and learning through appropriate implementation of

instructional leadership.

It is contested by Fletcher and Kaufer (cited in Leithwood et al., 2006) that in the distributive perspective, leadership is potentially enacted by people at different hierarchical levels in the organisation, in contrast to a view of leadership as a set of personal characteristics or attributes found in people at the top of the hierarchy. Remarkably, the distributive perspective accords opportunities and opens up the possibility for every person or individual (deputy principal, Head of Departments and teachers) to act and execute acquired instructional leadership skills as leaders and managers in one way or another (Goleman, cited in Harris and Muijs, 2005:28).

Gronn (2003), in particular, is helpful in conceptualising distributive leadership. Gronn (2003:85) draws upon the Activity Theory of Engeström (1999), which emphasizes leadership as a collective phenomenon, the centrality of the division of labour, the interdependency of relationships and the notion of emergent activities. It is in this context distributed leadership may be viewed as a social distribution of leadership where the leadership functions over the work of numerous individuals and the task is achieved through interaction of many leaders. In this instance, leadership is concerned with interdependency rather than dependency and embraces a variety of leaders in diverse roles who share leadership and management responsibilities (Harris, 2005).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research adopted the post-positivistic paradigm because it provides an alternative to the traditions and foundations of positivism towards conducting disciplined investigation (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009). Post-positivist approaches assume that reality is multiple, subjective and mentally constructed by individual researchers (Salmani and Akbari, 2008). Therefore, post-positivist researchers assert that one can only approximate the truth and reality but can never explain it perfectly or absolutely. They concur with the notion that the world cannot be observed by complete objective and disinterested outsiders and that the natural sciences do not provide the model for all social research (Dezin and Lincoln, 2000). It can be concluded that the post-positivistic paradigm ensures that the value systems play an important part in the conduct of research and interpretation of data (Kumar, 2014; Hammersley, 2012).

A quantitative research method was considered most relevant and appropriate for this research study. Within the quantitative method, the survey method was adopted. Instrumentation consisted of a questionnaire developed by the researchers based on existing questionnaires; for example, Kwindu (2002), Zulu (2004) and Bambi (2013) in order to suit the present study. The questionnaire is structured into four sections:

Section A: Biographical information (Six questions)

Section B: Execution of instructional leadership by the principals (eight questions);

Section C: Empowerment of the SMT (9 questions)

Section D: Impediment in the way of empowering the SMT (6 questions)

Sections B to D were constructed by utilizing a four-point Likert

scale ranging from small extent (1) to great extent (4). The Likert scale is useful when data need to be evaluated or quantified in a research survey (Leedy and Ormrod, 2010) or when a researcher wants to measure a construct (Maree and Pietersen, 2007). In addition, it is also useful when behaviour, attitude or other phenomena need to be evaluated on a continuum (Leedy and Ormrod, 2005:185). The rationale for selecting a four-point rating scale was to prevent neutral responses from the respondents; thus, ensuring that respondents either indicate a supportive or non-supportive response in accordance with the different question items.

Content validity was used in order to validate the question items of the instrument. According to Pietersen and Maree (2007), this kind of validity refers to the extent to which the instrument covers the complete content of the particular construct that it is set out to measure. The content of the questionnaire was validated through a rigorous application of the content gained from the literature study. To validate the questionnaire the researchers conducted a pilot study among two principals, two heads of department, and two deputy principals who did not form part of the selected respondents. They were chosen because they share similar characteristics with the selected respondents involved in the main research (Strydom et al., 2005). The pilot study was used to pre-test whether the question items are understandable, relevant and cover the principal's role adequately. Thereafter the researcher considered the comments emanating from the pilot study and adjusted the questionnaire accordingly. To further ensure validity, the questionnaire was also submitted to experts in the field of educational management to scrutinize and comment on it. These comments were used to improve the questionnaire.

To test the extent to which groups of question items of the questionnaire reflect the same attribute, internal consistency reliability was used. Groups of question items under the same heading were subjected to the Cronbach's coefficient alpha test. According to Struwig and Stead (2010), this test is suitable where individuals respond to items on multiple levels. Since the questionnaire consisted of groups of items, this test is suitable. All groups of question items with a Cronbach coefficient alpha of 0.80 were accepted (Pietersen and Maree, 2007).

The rationale for utilizing quantitative method in this research study is to ensure that participants have enough time to respond to questions than answering haphazardly, thus ensuring the validity of the findings made (Lund, 2005). In addition, the quantitative method ensures that the principles of ethics are maintained and upheld, for instance, keeping the identity of participants anonymous (Creswell, 2009). It is notable that in quantitative method, respondents are under no obligation to fill in the questionnaire (McMillan, 2003). The researcher assured respondents that anonymity will be upheld by not using their names or the names of their schools.

The study population consisted of the principals and deputy principals (n=110) and three or four heads of department (n=165) from a random sample of 30 schools in the Tshwane-West District. The return rate was as follows per category: Principals: 98.2%; Deputy-principals: 98.2% and Heads of Department: 83.0%. The response rate is large enough to draw valid and reliable conclusions (Ary et al., 1979). The reason for the high response is that the researchers personally handed out the questionnaire to the principals and requested them to distribute the questionnaire among members of the SMT. The researcher agreed with the principal about the date and time of collecting the completed questionnaires.

Data analysis consisted of inferential statistics such as the t-test and effect sizes.

RESULTS

Some of the data were subjected to a t-test to find out the

significant and practical differences between the construct of the questionnaire (section) and the biographical details. The following guidelines for interpretation of the practical significance of results (d -value) were utilized (Cohen, 1988),

Small effect: $d = \leq 0.2$

Medium effect: $d = > 0.2 - < 0.8$

Large effect: $d = \geq 0.8$ (A result of $d = \geq 0.8$ was considered as practical significant)

The t -test was conducted for two pairs of groups: Male and female, and urban and rural principals. This answers the aim of comparing the performance of male and female and rural and urban principals on instructional leadership.

Section B (performance of instructional leadership) shows a significant practical difference of medium effect (0.33) in the responses of male and female respondents. The mean score of females is greater than the mean score of males. This shows that females hold the opinion that females perform the duties of instructional leadership more than males.

Section C (empowerment of the School Management Team) shows significant and practical difference of medium effect (0.51) in the responses of males and females. The mean score of females is greater than the mean score of males implying that females are of the opinion that the principal almost and always performs the listed duties of instructional leadership; while the males express an opposite opinion. This implies that females perform these duties more than the males.

In Section D (impediments to empowerment) there is no significant and practical difference in the opinions of males and females. The mean score of males is greater than the mean score of females denoting that males experience impediments more than the females.

The t -test for the group: Urban and rural schools

In Section B (performance of instructional leadership), there is significant and practical difference of medium effect (0.49) between the means of rural and urban schools. The mean score of urban principals is greater than the mean score of rural principals denoting that urban principals perform the duties of instructional leadership more than the rural principals.

Section C (empowerment of the School Management Team) shows significant and practical difference of medium effect (0.50) between the two groups. The mean score of rural principals is greater than the mean score of urban principals denoting that urban principals perform their duties more than the rural principals.

In Section D (impediments to empowerment) there is no significant and practical difference between the opinions of the two groups. However, the mean score of

rural principals is smaller than the mean score of urban principals denoting that rural principals experience more impediments.

According to Salkind (2017: 212-213) there are two types of computations that can be done. For non-ordered groups, consisting of two independent groups, who were tested only once, the appropriate test is the t -test; whereas for ordered groups, consisting of more than two groups, who are tested only once, the appropriate test would be a simple analysis of variance. Thus in Tables 1 and 2, a t -test was used to compare two independent groups, being male-female and urban-rural. In Tables 3 to 4, the ANOVA was used to compare group D and group P, but now group H must be compared with group P in order to compare all groups with each other.

Table 3 shows that there is no significant and practical difference between the groups. Judging by the high mean scores a conclusion can be made that all agreed that the principal performs actions of the instructional leadership.

Thus, a t -test was applied to non-ordered groups and a correlation was computed. A simple analysis of variance was computed for 3 groups. The results are shown in Table 4.

In Table 4, there is no significant and practical difference between the groups. The mean scores are also low so that one can speculate that principals empower the SMT to a lesser extent. The results are shown in Table 5.

In Table 4, there is a significant and practical difference between the heads of department and as compared to deputy principals and principals. Judging by the low mean scores one may surmise that the groups are experiencing impediments.

DISCUSSION

The data presented in this section show that male principals are better than female principals as far as school management and empowering the School Management Team to perform instructional leadership are concerned. This is contrary to what the literature tells us. Female managers are presented as being more committed to supervisory duties than their male counterparts (Okarama, 2016). Moreover, the female principal is inclined towards people relationships and participative management practices which the literature present as suitable for empowering the School Management Team in executing instructional leadership. The research by Shakel et al. (2018) found that female principals consistently obtain higher ratings on instructional leadership when compared with their male counterparts. In comparing male and female principals, these authors found that female principals being more active as instructional leaders demonstrated transformational leadership more than men and were more experienced in academic and professional studies as a result of being

Table 1. The t-test male and female.

Section of the questionnaire	Group	N	Mean	Std. deviation	p-value	Effect size
Section B	Male	151	3.23	0.63	0.001	0.33*
	Female	93	3.46	0.54		
Section C	Male	152	2.58	0.71	0.001	0.51*
	Female	92	2.88	0.56		
Section D	Male	156	1.24	0.28	0.001	0.21
	Female	92	1.16	0.27		

*Effect size according to Cohen's d= value. Significance level is at p-value < 0.05.

Table 2. The t-test urban and rural school principals

Section of the questionnaire	Group	N	Mean	Std. deviation	p-value	Effect size
Section B	Urban	87	3.52	0.47	0.001	0.49*
	Rural	155	3.13	0.68		
Section C	Urban	87	2.42	0.48	0.001	0.50*
	Rural	155	2,50	0.72		
Section D	Urban	86	1.19	0.33	0.001	0.11
	Rural	154	1.23	0.25		

*Effect size according to Cohen's d= value. Significance level is at p-value < 0.05.

Table 3. How principals perceive their performance of instructional leadership.

Section	Group	Mean	Std deviation	N	p-value	D with effect size	H with effect size
Section A	D	3.3750	0.72	56	0.001	0.24	0.22
	H	3.2030	0.57	137			
	P	3.5526	0.20	53			

D=deputy principal; H= Head of department; P=Principal. Significance level is at p-value < 0.05.

Table 4. Effects sizes of how principals empower SMT.

Section of the questionnaire	Group	Mean	Std deviation	N	p-value	D with effect size	H with effect size
Section B	D	2.7933	0.82	56	0.001	0.25	0.18
	H	2.5858	0.59	137			
	P	2.7099	0.39	53			

D=deputy principal; H= Head of department; P=Principal. Significance level is at p-value < 0.05.

appointed to principalship after they gain more years of teaching experience. In support of these, Keser et al. (2014) state that female administrators are able to

conduct their school work systematically, and that they are more ambitious and hardworking than males.

Despite the above findings female principals are faced

Table 5. Effect sizes of impediments that principal's experience in empowering the SMT.

Section of the questionnaire	Group	Mean	Std deviation	N	p-value	D with effect size	H with effect size
Section C	D	1,3671	0.43	56	0.001		
	H	1,1217	0.18	137		0.57*	
	P	1.2952	0.17	53		0.16	0.97

D=Deputy principal; H= Head of department; P=Principal. Significance level is at p-value < 0.05.

with a lot of negative circumstances. The society in which they live is riddled with stereotypes that women are less skilled than men; the patriarchal society forces them to play the role of being mothers, that they lack self-confidence and have no courage to struggle with men (Keser et al., 2014). That is why, perhaps, Okarama (2016) concludes by saying that given chance female principals can make better managers. The females investigated in this research seem to fall under the above said category.

Another finding is that principals of rural schools perform duties of instructional leadership more than the principals of urban schools. In tandem with this, rural principals experience less impediments in empowering the School Management Team. The above results are baffling in that the literature shows that rural schools face a lot of challenges. Du Plessis (2017) lists the following as barriers to effective management in rural schools: lack of funding, difficulty in recruiting and retaining highly qualified teachers, outdated facilities, limited technology and a community culture that does not value higher education. Data from this research show that despite these challenges principals in rural schools perform better than principals in urban schools on the level of managing the school and on the level of empowering their SMTs.

Starr and Simone (2008) complain about the one-size-fits-all policy of the government, the heavy workload of the rural school principal, who must manage the school and teach. Linton (2014), in his thesis, compares the rural school principals and the urban school principals and finds that the scale of problems is skewed towards the rural school principal. Perhaps the rural school principals in this research understand that performing their jobs is not just about what they do but how they do it (Starr and Simone (2008). These authors further say in rural areas there is strong community linkages and shared leadership practices. Possibly, the rural school principal practice shared leadership and involved the community in the governance of the school.

As noted above, the heads of department differ with the deputies and principals. This means that the heads of department view the impediments in the way of empowering the School Management Team as being not great and the principals and deputy principals view the impediments to be somewhat great. This is

understandable from the view point that heads of department may not be aware of the impediments that principals encounter in efforts to empower them because of their position in the hierarchy of the school. The close proximity of the deputies to principals makes them aware of the impediments that are experienced by principals.

Another view of the difference between heads of department and principals and deputy principals may be found in the way heads of department accept or reject empowerment opportunities offered by the principals. The advent of teacher unionism has resulted in tension between the principal and teachers with the result that heads of department may not accept opportunities of empowerment offered by the principal. The resistance of teacher unions against government policy has been translated into a challenge to the authority of the principal that has made it difficult to delegate duties to the heads of department. Hence the heads of department do not appreciate the impediments facing principals. Mosoge (2018) argues that principals consider experiencing resistance to their authorities to be very great while their SMTs consider it to be moderately great.

No differences were found between principals, deputy principals and heads of department in the performance of instructional leadership by the principal. This shows that the deputy principal and the heads of department have confidence in the principal as an instructional leader. Lee and Nie (2015) refer to the research by Ho and Chen (2009) who indicated that principals often work closely with heads of department. As a result, heads of department emulate their principals. The principals have shown commitment to distributed leadership and ultimately this has rubbed off on the SMT achieving a strong team of professionals.

Also no differences were found between the principals, deputy principals and heads of department as far as empowering the SMT is concerned. Addi-Racah (2009) maintains that teachers do not sense much freedom from administrative surveillance and that they have little influence over school policy, planning, programmes and budgets. It appears the SMT in this research feels the opposite. Empowered SMTs are ready to promote common goals and take on added responsibilities and accountability. It seems the SMT's perceptions about empowerment are changed into real perceptions about empowerment and make them feel empowered. In the

research by Ho and Chen (2009), as quoted by Lee and Nie (2015), leadership of principals correlated with the leadership performance of their heads of department showing a possible alignment between the school leaders at different levels thus ensuring the effectiveness of collective school leadership.

Conclusion

In concluding this article, it should be said that policy of the government requires principals to manage the school together with significant others including teachers, parents and, in some cases, learners. This makes it imperative for the principal to empower the management team in order to achieve synergy in his/her management. It may be assumed that coming from a background of authoritarian style of management, principals will find it difficult to adopt distributed leadership, which is the recommended style to foster empowerment of the management team. This article shows that this assumption does not receive any support because principals show an uncanny way of empowering the management team.

Furthermore, this article revealed significant differences between the management of males and females and between rural and urban schools. This alerts the service providers of management training to provide differentiated courses for each group of principals and not to adopt a one-size-fits-all approach to training. It also means when conducting evaluation the contextual factors imminent at the school should be taken into consideration. It is suggested that specific training should be conducted for female principals as they experience more hardship than their male counterparts. However, this article is not the last word on empowerment of the management team. Further research could use a larger sample differentiated according to different groups of principals. This means each group must respond to a different questionnaire tailor-made for each group. This would reveal deep-seated challenges for each group of principals. Research could also be conducted to gauge the effects of empowerment on teachers and learners.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests

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