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Exploring School Leadership Styles Used to Improve Instruction and Learning in Schools

About the Author(s)

The authors are lecturers and academicians at the Walter Sisulu University and faculty of education. Their interest and passion in research revolve around school leadership, teaching and learning, and pedagogical approaches in schools.

Keywords

Principals; Educators; Leaders; Principals, Leadership

Cover Page Footnote

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Exploring School Leadership Styles Used to Improve Instruction and Learning in Schools

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Abstract

Schools are under intense pressure to improve quality and achieve long-term educational outcomes. To improve education, schools' teaching and learning environments must be improved. This research evaluated the various leadership philosophies used in South African schools to improve teaching and learning. The study's qualitative methodology included in-depth interviews with open-ended questions. A purposeful technique was used to select 16 participants from four different schools. The participants included four principals, four school management team members, four department heads, and four teachers. Themes guided the data analysis, focusing on patterns and resemblances while maintaining data quality. The study's findings revealed that school leaders had a basic understanding of the various leadership styles that can be used to improve teaching and learning, but only some were preferred by the leaders. Furthermore, it was discovered that some school leadership practices had a direct influence on both student and teacher dedication, as well as teaching and learning in classrooms. The paper then suggests that school leaders encourage leadership in schools through training initiatives.

Introduction

Schools are under enormous pressure to improve the quality of education, teaching, and learning (Atasoy, 2020). In today's interconnected world, education is becoming a tool for change. As a result of their location in a fast-paced, dynamic environment, schools feel compelled to pursue new avenues of knowledge acquisition and innovation (Fasiku, 2021). This rapid transformation has fundamentally altered how schools approach teaching and learning. The introduction of technologies, particularly in teaching and learning, creates numerous opportunities to improve instruction, advance learner-centered classrooms, and meet the diverse

needs of students (An & Mindrila, 2020). The inevitable existence of rapid changes implies that teaching and learning in schools must be improved rapidly through strong leadership to keep up with the pace of change. The global trends in education and educational reform attest to the growing interest in school leadership (Makgato & Mudzanani, 2019). Therefore, strong leadership is required in schools to ensure the timely and adequate allocation of resources, the enhancement of instruction, and the ability to make critical decisions when necessary. Different types of school leadership are used to improve teaching and learning and guide school activities.

According to Beri and Shu'aibu (2018), school leadership is a process that enables teachers, students, and stakeholders to collaborate to achieve educational goals successfully. As a result, leaders are responsible for leading instructional activities that inspire, motivate, and guide teachers and students to improve teaching and learning. School leaders and administrators must use one or more leadership styles (Francisco, 2019). Different traits and the relationship between the leader and subordinates are typical school leadership behaviors. According to previous research, the school principal is critical in promoting reforms and raising educational standards (Gouges & Malinova, 2021). To accomplish these goals, the principal must ensure that teachers are happy. In addition, the principal should manage time and resources to ensure the school's long-term viability. Some research (Alkindy, 2016; Al Khawlani, bin Bohari, and binti Shamsuddin, 2019; Al Qataweni, 2018) has shown that challenges in the school can be addressed, particularly by certain leadership styles. According to Gougas and Malinova (2021), understanding the effectiveness of school leaders requires attention to be directed to the qualities that effective school leaders possess and the behaviors needed to overcome challenges in school.

Corrigan and Merry (2022) demonstrate that when education is transformed from a focus on traditional skills and compliance to 21st-century skills and flexible behaviors, school leaders' experience is critical. Their study also discovered that school leaders exhibit a variety of leadership abilities, characteristics, and behaviors that allow them to impact staff members, students, parents, and the community. Despite growing interest in school leadership and its effectiveness in resolving challenges in schools, little scholarly research has been conducted on the various forms of school leadership and their impact on teaching and learning. In this regard, Karadag's (2020) discussion of school leaders emphasises the need for those who encourage

instructors and students to be dedicated to teaching and learning and to foster a pleasant school environment and improved relationships for effective decision-making.

Stakeholders in education want school leaders to foster a dynamic culture of participatory decision-making and establish cohesion among staff, teachers, and students to improve the educational system's effectiveness (Kalkan et al., 2020). As a result, school leaders must be adaptable to foster positive relationships with staff, students, and other stakeholders. The improvement in performance and success in teaching and learning will reflect not only the identity of the school leader but also the value that the leader provides to the school if there are positive interactions (Kalkan et al., 2020). In contrast, Munna (2021) argues that a leader's ability to implement a holistic program that improves students' learning, school, and classroom practices, as well as leadership style, determines a school's efficiency. Munna's (2021) study concludes that various factors influence the leadership style used in general. Notably, the study considered how the school's setting and educational policies influenced the type of leadership required. This shows that the leadership style used in schools dramatically impacts the quality of teaching and learning.

Forms of leadership previously used in schools have received more attention in academic literature. Francisco (2019) investigates the relationship between various school leadership models and their effectiveness in teaching and learning. According to the study, there is a direct relationship between the leadership style and influence used in schools and the quality of instruction. This suggests that the style of leadership used in the school has a significant impact and far-reaching implications. An effective leader depends on one's ability to influence behavior change in teachers' and students' attitudes toward improved teaching and learning (Atasoy, 2020). This is especially evident when the leader can include staff members, students, and interested parties in determining the direction of the organization's development goals and curriculum. Furthermore, the leader's ability to use intervention strategies to reduce difficulties in the institution creates several opportunities for improving teaching and learning, student achievement, and the institution's overall well-being (Francisco, 2019).

The effectiveness of principals' leadership styles is critical for raising educational standards and fostering a positive learning environment. There has been extensive research on

school leadership styles, mainly focusing on school leadership and management. However, more about the influence of school leadership styles on teaching and learning and students must be known. More so, there needs to be more known research on factors contributing to the efficiency of school leadership style in improving teaching and learning in the study context. Hence, the study aimed to assess the various leadership styles used in South African schools to improve teaching and learning. The discovery of a gap in the extant literature influenced the choice of this type of investigation. While research on school leadership and leadership styles is extensive, there has yet to be as much research on leadership styles used to improve teaching and learning in the Enoch Mgijima Local Municipality where the study was conducted. Given the reputation of the Eastern Cape as one of the underperforming provinces in South Africa, the study setting was considered especially important. Underperformance in most schools has been blamed on the schools' leadership. As a result, this study investigated the various leadership styles used in schools to improve teaching and learning.

South African Historical Context for School Leadership

Numerous changes have been made to the South African education system from the apartheid era to the democratic era. During the apartheid regime, school leaders were used by the government to divide the country based on racial identity among students and teachers (Buthelezi, 2016). The inequality ingrained in the apartheid education system resulted in systemic injustices that undermined teaching and learning and reduced school principals' effectiveness and authority. As a result, the curriculum was considered irrelevant at the time because it did not create the desired positive school climate that promoted efficient teaching and learning (Botha, 2016). Consequently, the government made a concerted effort to create a system in which school leaders were exploited as puppets to exclusively serve their employers by neglecting and discriminating against black schools, resulting in not only indifference among teachers and principals but also in a drop in the quality of educational outcomes.

This problem was exacerbated by most newly appointed principals needing more leadership skills to effectively run and manage schools in a rapidly changing educational environment (Khumalo, 2019). After the leadership gap, school leaders found it difficult to foster and support a learning environment consistent with policy reforms in education (Bhengu &

Myende, 2016). As a result, it took much work for principals in racially discriminatory schools to ensure effective teaching and learning. Furthermore, because of their location and circumstances, rural and township schools experienced this reality severely. If schools are to transform and improve teaching and learning, strong leadership that can quickly adapt is needed, and learning to deal with the ongoing changes in the educational sector is required.

As a result of the challenges discussed above, South Africa's national government has taken several steps to address the inequalities and injustices inherent in the apartheid schooling system. According to Wolhuter (2020), the South African government has implemented policies to ensure social mobility for individuals, advance democracy, foster an environment where all students have equal access to opportunities, and advance a human rights culture in schools since the country's independence in 1994. Given the background information provided above on the role of school leadership, as well as how various leadership philosophies can be used to improve teaching and learning in schools, it is worthwhile to gain a general understanding of school leadership and the various school leader types that can be used to improve educational activities in schools as well as improve school and student achievement.

Research Question

To explore the phenomenon being studied, the following researchers' question was used:

- What dominant leadership styles are used in schools to improve teaching and learning?

The goal of this study was to provide an answer to the research question above.

Theoretical Framework: Transformational Leadership Theory

The concept of leadership introduced by James MacGregor Burns in 1978 and discussed in the work of Khan et al. (2016) forms the basis of this study. While extensively researched, Burns is recognized for being among the first to define this theory in his exploration of leaders and organizational behavior (Khan et al., 2016). According to Burns, transformational leadership involves a process that inspires and enhances leaders' and followers' spirits. He contends that a leader's transformative approach does not benefit and change the organization but impacts the followers themselves.

Today, transformational leadership holds significance as it motivates followers to be committed and actively contribute to the organization. This is due to the leader's skill in

encouraging followers to excel while keeping the organization's goals at the forefront (Alqatawenh, 2018). Korejan and Shahbazi (2016) suggest that transformational leadership emerges when leaders and followers work together toward achieving objectives. Studies indicate that transformational leaders are incredibly influential during crises (Alkhawlani et al., 2019). Their ability to make decisions that alleviate follower concerns and communicate effectively about an issue's seriousness is crucial. They accomplish this by offering support to followers during times of crisis.

Pennell (2023) suggests that transformational leadership primarily focuses on motivating and guiding followers to exceed their expectations. This leadership style is effective in environments because it emphasizes inspiring changes among individuals, teams, and the organization. In Cherian's view (2024), innovative and creative leadership is crucial in schools to enhance the capabilities of teachers and leaders, thereby improving the teaching and learning atmosphere. This highlights the significance of leadership in schools due to its ability to;

- To improve teaching and learning.
- Develop and communicate an inspiring vision.
- Encourage and assist followers.
- Cultivate desired behaviors, attitudes, and strong work ethics (Pennell, 2023)

Transformational leaders are more inclined toward instigating institutional dynamics and structural changes than traditional directive leaders (Cherian, 2024). Their primary goal is to bring about change and groom followers into leaders, making it imperative to delve deeper into this leadership approach as the basis for this study. A deeper understanding of this theory will improve teaching and learning in schools, which is the study's primary aim.

Literature Review

Principals' choices in school leadership significantly determine the school's instructional standard, teaching, and learning (Francisco, 2019). However, it is critical to recognize that school principals' leadership styles should be influenced by various factors, including the environment, the difficulties, and any specific problems the school is currently facing. A literature review demonstrates that various forms of school leadership can significantly improve classroom

teaching and learning and mitigate the institution's challenges. The following section examines various school leadership models successfully implemented in educational settings.

Instructional School Leadership

Given that its main emphasis is on teaching and learning, instructional leadership is essential to school improvement. According to Shava and Heystek (2021), instructional leadership is a style of leadership that places equal emphasis on the school, teachers, parents, and students about teaching and learning. This is accomplished by encouraging a positive school atmosphere, assisting teachers and students in attaining curriculum standards, and enhancing the school's teaching and learning culture. A study in South Africa investigated high-achieving schools in poorly resourced environments with a sample of primary schools (Hadley et al., 2008). The study notably identified instructional leaders' role as instrumental in positively impacting learner performance. For instance, the study argued that instructional leaders could guide reforms in schools that were failing and operated in an environment with resource constraints. According to Nurdianti and Nurdin (2019), embracing instructional leadership is particularly helpful when teachers need help managing the curriculum and carrying out teaching and learning activities. Therefore, instructional leaders' responsibilities include strengthening teachers' instructional skills and fostering an environment conducive to learning. Teaching and learning are enhanced due to the instructional leader's role and ability to mobilize the different actors and stakeholders. As Hompashe (2018) asserts, instructional leadership is essential for school growth because it enhances and creates a favorable environment that boosts performance and achievement.

Participative School Leadership

According to Buthelezi (2016), participatory leadership is a style of management in which staff members share some decision-making power with their superiors. Among the essential characteristics of participative leadership in education is their ability to effectively coordinate (Komariah et al., 2023). Furthermore, coordination is used by principals in character operation, which is seen in various forms, such as delegating authority, empowering staff, fostering cooperation with stakeholders, and improving interactions and communications with teachers and learners. Zaila and Bin Bakr (2021) identify participatory leadership used by school

principals as exceptionally important in school administration and management as it contributes to an enabling environment for normal instructional activities. This is suitable as these leaders take the initiative to involve employees in decision-making. However, Bell et al. (2018) describe participative leadership as a process in which the principal and teachers cooperatively make decisions. Meintjes (2018) states that school decision-making has been seen to motivate teachers to work more, improve their performance, and raise their commitment to the school, supporting the previous claims. This kind of leadership also considers the importance of the teacher as a vital human and intellectual resource and as the institution's central hub. Involving teachers in decision-making has always been the focal point of the participatory leader, which ensures social cohesion and team building.

Directive School Leadership

According to Bell et al. (2018), directive leadership provides subordinates with a framework to act and make decisions that align with the leader's goals. It requires the leader to clearly define what the followers expect to accomplish, the strategy, and the necessary quality levels (Solomon & Steyn, 2017). As a result, the school principal exercising this type of leadership has ultimate control and authority over decision-making in everything that happens in the school (Bell et al., 2018). Direct instructions that contain what is expected, how to follow them, and when to fulfill them are typically given to employees by leaders who use a directive leadership style (Bell et al., 2018; Saleem et al., 2020). For this to work, they establish the performance standards and state the rules and regulations employees must abide by. However, Solomon and Steyn (2017) believe this kind of leadership is effective when the leader exercises proper authority and aids followers in their tasks.

Shared School Leadership

Han et al. (2021) defines shared leadership as a cooperative process where team members must guide one another in accomplishing a shared objective. This type of leadership demonstrates a collective and team leadership trait related to dynamic components of shared influence with specific group members who want to accomplish a common objective (Ali et al., 2020). Shared leadership, as maintained by Cobanoglu (2020), means a situation where many teachers, who are only sometimes in an official capacity or a senior position, take on the role of

the leader in the school. This is crucial because it enables leaders to delegate authority and power to team members so they can participate in decisions affecting their jobs and receive rewards for doing so. This kind of leadership reveals employees' hidden skills, and followers can surpass their limitations (Cobanoglu, 2020). In contrast, Ali et al. (2020) indicates that shared leadership emphasizes accomplishing school goals more than followers' interests.

Transactional Leadership in Education

According to Karabina (2016), transactional leadership is centered on the relationship between the leader and the team and the advantages of a contract where the leader compensates loyal and dedicated workers for their dedication. According to Nazim and Mahmood (2016), the main goal of transactional leadership is to force followers to labor in exchange for a favorable reward. As a result, transactional leaders increase employees' motivation through rewards. To do this, the leaders make the objectives obvious and how their followers' actions relate to them. Jekelle (2021) states that among all the leadership philosophies used by school administrators, the transactional leadership style, which emphasizes the organization's efficacy and supervision of the followers, was most frequently used in a school setting. However, Malechwani (2019) believed that transactional school leaders should work with their followers to implement a planned objective before agreeing to uphold it. This dramatically limits the leader's ability to assess the outcomes and alter course as necessary.

Transformational School Leadership

Transformational leadership is described as leaders who inspire followers to be at their best potential and to perform effectively according to the requirements of the school as an organization (Jiang et al., 2017). According to Jiang et al. (2017), the role of a transformational leader in the school is critical because they emphasize the vision and mission of the school. Furthermore, most scholars consider the role of the transformational leader to be impactful, as they place more emphasis on making the necessary changes that are needed in the school (Al Kindy et al., 2016; Buthelezi, 2016; Hompashe, 2018; Luggya, 2019). In support, Khumalo (2019) submits that transformational leadership contributes to sustainable teacher and learner commitment. Despite the pros of transformational leadership in a school, Cobanoglu (2020)

observes that the influence of transformational leadership is felt less when the school demands an instant improvement in response.

Research Methodology

A case study design with an interpretive qualitative research methodology investigated the school leadership styles utilized to enhance classroom teaching and learning. Using an interpretivist approach allows researchers to address complex issues and their meanings depending on the context (Black, 2006). The data-gathering technique was an extensive qualitative interview with open-ended questions. In-depth interviews enabled interviewees to provide comprehensive information about the examined topic (Mestry, 2017). A purposive sampling technique was used to select 12 individuals who participated in the study. Using a smaller sample helps to explore, explain, or describe what transpires within a smaller group of participants in a study (Islam & Aldahani, 2022). According to Islam and Aldahani (2022), using a smaller sample in a study could provide an in-depth understanding of the behavior or the situation applicable to a broader study population. Participants selected were leaders or had experienced leadership roles before, and they had an in-depth insight into school leadership. Four members of school management teams, four departmental heads, and four educators with leadership experiences from the four schools selected within the Enoch Mgijima Local Municipality in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa made up the research sample. Participants needed to have more than three years of experience in school administration. Before the interviews, study participants were required to sign an informed consent form. The interview sessions lasted between 45 and 60 minutes per session.

The study used a thematic analysis to analyze data because of the study's qualitative nature. Thematic analysis was appropriate because it sought to discover patterns and interpretations of a particular phenomenon in a particular context. Validity was also ensured when the data were analyzed according to the themes and patterns found in the transcriptions. Along with getting ethical approval from the University of Fort Hare, the provincial department of education requested permission to conduct the study. To ensure trustworthiness, a detailed audit trail documenting research decision, data collection, and analysis processes was maintained (Carcary, 2009). Validity was ensured by using a peer-reviewed interview instrument to ensure

its suitability for the study. Data collection protocols, which included interview guides and checklists, were developed to ensure consistency, which helped to ensure reliability in this study.

Findings

This section of the study reports on the findings on critical issues related to the different types of leadership used to improve teaching and learning in schools. The findings are reported thematically. The participants selected for this study included the principals (PR), Heads of Departments (HoDs), and School Management Team Members (SMTs).

Types Of Leadership Used in Schools

According to the participants' responses, schools apply a variety of leadership philosophies to enhance teaching and learning. Factors such as the context of the school affect the choice of leadership style utilized in schools. Improving performance, maintaining order, fostering social cohesion, making decisions, and participating in school-related educational activities are just a few of the important considerations that go into the choice of leadership that is adopted. In addition, the location of the school, which may be in a suburb, township, or rural area, plays a big part in the leadership style employed. The study revealed that school principals use a particular leadership style or a combination of multiple leadership philosophies to handle the varied issues that the school may be experiencing. This suggests that school principals (PR) have an in-depth understanding of specific leadership styles that might be applied to enhance classroom teaching and learning.

PR 1 was concerned about the behavior and attitude of the leader, and they explained that,
In my school, we use leadership by example because learners watch what I do as a leader.

PR 2, however, was particular about the leadership styles used in his school. He stated that:
In my school, we use four different types of leadership depending on the situation or task. We use a democratic, autocratic, laissez-faire, and contingent leadership style.

PR 3 said:
We use transformational and transactional leadership styles. In transformational leadership, I motivate the teachers to understand the school's vision and goals. In

transactional leadership, I focus on recognizing and rewarding individuals who are working hard.

These responses from the principals indicated that they had a fair understanding of the different types of leadership that can be used to improve teaching and learning in schools. The responses of school management team (SMT) members are as follows:

There are different leadership styles, and each works best on a specific condition. As a leader, you cannot use only one leadership style. The style used will be determined by the situation you are faced with. (SMT 1.)

Various leaderships are dependent on the situation. There are times when, as a leader, you must be harsh, and there are times when you have to use rewards.

Sometimes, we use the stick and carrot leadership style, where you reward positive behaviors and punish or rebuke negative behaviors not to repeat. (SMT 2.)

Apart from using different types of leadership, SMT3 also dwelt on the need to complement leadership and an improved school environment by asserting that:

My school uses instructional, strategic, transformational, and peer-to-peer leadership styles. As a leader, I believe in creating a positive learning environment, one of the most critical aspects of teaching.

SMT 4 mentioned that:

We use consultative leadership, where the leader seeks the opinions of others before making a decision.

Regarding the responses of school management team members to the question, it appears that, by their experience and collaboration with school principals, they understand how teaching and learning can be improved. However, they needed an in-depth knowledge of the different types of leadership that could be used.

Responses from heads of departments (HoDs) included the following: HoD 1 showed the extent to which the choice of leadership style made them work synergistically by stating that:

First, we use participatory, delegative, and laissez-faire leadership types. These styles require us to work as a team for the betterment of our school (HoD1).

According to HoD 2, the leader's function is vital in choosing leadership. The HoD said:

What is important in leadership is consistency, monitoring, and evaluation of crucial roles of the leader.

HoD 3 responded that:

Our leadership is consultative. The principal consults the HoDs and SMTs in many decisions. This is also known as distributive leadership because it requires leaders to delegate and share responsibilities.

HoD 4 mentioned that:

Most of the leaders in this school exhibit only one leadership style: laissez-faire. Sometimes, we also use delegated leadership to blend the laissez-faire style.

These findings reveal the importance of leadership in consistently monitoring and evaluating the leader's critical roles. In addition, leaders use consultative leadership to involve others by delegating and sharing responsibilities.

Dominant Leadership Styles Used in Schools

Though different leadership styles are used in schools to promote teaching and learning, the study sought to find out from participants if a particular dominant type of leadership was used in their school. The responses from school principals were that schools did not settle on a particular type of leadership; instead, they blended two or more leadership styles to improve teaching and learning in their schools. PR 2 indicated they "*used democratic and autocratic leadership types very often.*" Autocratic leadership is used when a task needs to be completed at a particular date; for example, when schedules need to be completed at a particular time and date. More views are captured below:

In that case, there was no need to meet teachers for discussion. I, as the leader, needed to come up with a plan. (PR2.)

We use transformational and transactional leadership styles. The advantage of this leadership style is that it helps us to improve our relationships and, at the same time, improve the school environment for teaching and learning. (PR 3.)

Participants who were part of the school management team were asked about their opinions on the dominant types of leadership used in their schools, and their responses showed that schools had different dominant leadership types. SMT 1 indicated that:

The dominant leadership style used in our school is the democratic leadership style. The leader values a range of inputs and encourages the participation of every individual.

SMT 3 stated that:

We use instructional leadership more. This leadership style develops teachers first, giving learners a great learning experience. HoDs, SMTs, and teachers are consulted when a decision needs to be made.

The HoDs were also asked about their opinions on the dominant leadership styles used in their schools. Their views indicated that schools used dominant leadership styles to improve teaching and learning. In response to the question about the dominant type of leadership used in their schools to improve teaching and learning, HoDs indicated that they mostly used a blend of leadership styles to achieve a particular objective. HoD 1 said:

The dominant leadership style used is autocratic leadership. Learners are usually given little opportunity to air their views and opinions. This leads to learners developing attitudes. HoD 2 pointed out, "We use *laissez-faire* and *democratic* styles." HoD 3 focused on two interesting sources of the types of leadership used by stating:

The dominant leadership style is the one vested in you by the policy and something you used in your job description. In this case, only some things are written down. The principle of Ubuntu tells us that we are dealing with people and need to be empathetic. Ubuntu, as a guiding principle, builds human affection.

According to HoD 4:

The leadership styles used were delegated and participatory. The two styles help and promote teaching and learning in diverse ways.

These responses show that the typical leadership style is often autocratic, leading to learners developing attitudes. For instance, participants HoD 3 and HoD 4 mentioned that leadership uses policy and Ubuntu to build human affection in schools. In addition, one can quickly see how leaders find it convenient to use delegated and participatory leadership styles to help and promote teaching and learning.

Using Leadership to Improve Teaching and Learning In Schools

The study sought to understand how leadership improved school teaching and learning. As such, principals, school management team members, and heads of departments were asked how leadership was used to improve the quality of teaching in schools. The responses of the school principals to the question indicated that the leader's ability to improve teaching and learning largely depends on other factors and the leader's decisions. PR 2 responded by stating that:

You can only imagine when it is used with other leadership styles, like delegated leadership. Thus, tasks delegated to teachers should have a clear rule, and powers delegated must be supervised, or they will be abused.

According to PR 3:

To improve teaching and learning, there is a need to focus on supervision, organization, performance, commands, and respect. The negative side is that this leadership needs to be more flexible, and it could make members oppose change.

PR 4 was of the view that:

Teaching and learning can be improved when teachers perform at the same level. As the head, I have to use a way to enforce and conscientize them about their work.

Responses by school management team members showed the impact that leadership workshops and training had on the quality of teaching and learning in schools. According to SMT 2, workshop programs on leadership should be organized for leaders. SMT 3 added that:

Improving leadership competencies through training helps develop leadership and improve student performance. Learners will have a better, higher-quality education when leaders' skills are improved.

SMT 4 concurred, pointing out, "*Developing leaders to what is expected from them.*"

The responses by heads of departments to the question of how leadership can be used to improve teaching and learning in schools revealed that leadership is much more effective when leaders operate within a policy framework and cooperate with teachers. HoD 1 said:

This depends on leaders' ability to implement school policies that support teaching and learning.

HoD 2 responded thus:

All leadership styles must frequently be checked and improved upon when necessary.

HoD 3 was of the view that *ubuntu* leadership is critical to improving teaching and learning by positing that:

Ubuntu's leadership style works together, with everyone pulling together as a team.

According to HoD 4, teaching and learning can be improved:

Depending on the kind of people you are working with. If you have people employed who are passionate about their work, it makes it much easier for the leader.

Participants emphasized the need for continuous improvement of leadership styles and their ability to adapt the Ubuntu leadership style to improve teachers' and learners' commitment to effective teaching and learning.

Discussion

According to the findings, there appears to be a significant difference in participant responses about the types of leadership used in schools to improve teaching and learning. Participants' responses revealed a variety of leadership styles that can be used in schools to improve teaching and learning. Mainly, leadership styles like transformational, laissez-faire, democratic, and instructional were few among the leadership styles that participants indicated were used in schools. Participants' perspectives also revealed that the school's context and other factors are considered when determining the leadership style for a school. In schools, the type of leadership and leadership behavior used is critical for improving the learning environment and the performance of teachers and students (Francisco, 2019). The study established, for example, numerous variations in the leadership behaviors displayed toward teachers and students. It first recognizes teachers' critical role in improving teaching and learning by delegating instructional duties to them and including them in decision-making processes related to teaching and learning. As a result, Nurdiantu and Nurdin (2019) believe that instructional leadership should be embraced to help those struggling to manage the curriculum and carry out their duties effectively. This can be done by keeping track of and encouraging instructors' and students' in-class attendance and setting an excellent example for teachers and students. Furthermore,

responses from some participants indicated that school leaders foster a positive environment that promotes teaching and learning (Mestry, 2017).

Even though school leadership is important in teaching and learning in schools, school principals find it much easier to adopt a specific leadership style. School leadership has evolved, including the need for new leadership philosophies. According to Pont (2020), one of several underlying factors that frequently influence changes in leadership styles is the need to shift and decentralize leadership responsibilities. Alkhawani et al. (2019) argue that adapting to the educational context, teaching and learning, and changing governance for greater participation has necessitated school leadership reforms. Hompashe (2018), on the other hand, advocates for leadership, which is essential for school growth, and works to improve and create an environment that promotes learner performance and achievement. However, Gougas and Malinova (2021) established that the conceptualization and application of the various leadership philosophies used in schools frequently overlap. For instance, leadership styles like consultative, participative, shared, and collegial leadership overlap in their functions (Oco, 2022). Consequently, it is challenging to categorize leadership. This is because their characteristics can be applied to various leadership spectrums.

While leadership is vital in teaching and learning, principals, management teams, and educators, all agreed that the leadership style used depended on the context and history of the school. However, Meintjes (2018) believes that despite the context, leaders are responsible for motivating teachers and learners to be committed to improving teaching and learning. In essence, this means that while principals, as leaders, may have different responsibilities in the school to ensure that teaching and learning are efficient and uninterrupted, it is still critical to understand the type of leadership style being used in each context. This directly affects both teaching and learning and teacher and student commitment. This concern is shared by Cobanuglu (2020), specifically when many teachers are assigned responsibilities without official capacity or a senior position to assume leadership roles in the school. As a result, school administrators must understand how a particular leadership style can affect how goals and objectives are achieved through deliberate actions (Ali et al., 2020). According to Atasoy (2020), strong personal and professional values are essential for school leaders because they influence how much they

involve others in their duties and responsibilities. Thus, for leaders to be effective, it is essential that they understand the context of the school, motivate teachers and students, and use their instructional knowledge to improve the quality of teaching and learning.

To this extent, the South African Standard of Principalship establishes school principals' roles and responsibilities to ensure their effectiveness (Department of Basic Education, 2015). The policy encourages school leaders to adopt a leadership style that allows for the involvement of teachers and parents while also creating spaces for students' voices to be heard and defining their responsibilities. This is especially critical given the leadership gap identified (Bhengu & Myende, 2016); these authors, for instance, discovered that some school leaders found it difficult to foster and support a learning environment that was consistent with policy reforms in education (Bhengu & Myende, 2016). While identifying an absence of leadership in fostering and supporting a consistent learning environment is essential, it would be helpful for school leaders to understand the specific challenges they encounter and the underlying factors preventing them from aligning their practices with policy reforms. Similarly, Khumalo (2020) posits that this challenge is exacerbated as many newly appointed principals need to gain the skills to manage schools in a dynamic educational environment. This, therefore, requires school principals to be workshopped and capacitated to understand school policies and the context. Moreover, principals ought to set good examples for their subordinates to emulate. In general, school leaders are expected to improve the relationships and interactions among the various stakeholders, create a good environment, and improve teaching and learning outcomes for positive educational outcomes.

Conclusion

According to the study's results, school administrators utilize leadership approaches to enhance the quality of education. These approaches are designed not to enhance teaching methods but to inspire and encourage both educators and students to excel in their studies. While the study emphasizes the use of leadership styles and their intended impacts on education, it also indicates that many of the schools examined were performing below expectations. This raises concerns about the effectiveness of the leadership strategies being implemented. Some school leaders may need to employ leadership techniques or fulfill their duties to the best of their

abilities, possibly due to a need for more clarity regarding their roles and responsibilities. Furthermore, the study's findings indicate that poor school performance can be attributed to deficiencies in leadership decision-making processes, support for educators, and the overall organization of the learning environment. Understanding these factors is essential for school administrators to enhance their effectiveness by grasping their roles and identifying leadership styles or combinations that align with strengths and meet the schools' specific requirements.

To improve teaching and learning in schools, school authorities should hire a competent leader who can improve teaching and learning by utilizing effective leadership styles and practices. To achieve this goal, principals, school management teams, and other stakeholders must understand how to improve teaching and learning while maintaining high educational standards. To do so, they should adopt a specific leadership style based on the institution's setting. They should also be able to adopt a leadership style that promotes sound administration and the long-term viability of the school's vision. However, some perspectives indicate that lack of direction and accountability may cause the application of specific leadership styles in the school context, like autocratic, laissez-faire, consultative, and transactional, to fail. This leadership approach, for instance, either delays decision-making or makes the leader hijack decision-making with their effect on the school's management.

The study concludes that while many different leadership philosophies can be used to improve teaching and learning, the choice of leadership should be influenced by various contextual variables and the change sought. Any successful school leader must first improve the teaching and learning environment of the school. This could be achieved by focusing on their instructional responsibilities, encouraging social cohesion and participation, and providing teachers and students with the necessary tools to perform better. More so, the use of leadership schools can vary depending on the desired results that are being looked for. However, leaders need to understand that for leadership to be effective, the school context must be considered. For instance, improving the teaching and learning environment by instructional functions could overlook other significant factors contributing to the quality of teaching and learning provided in schools.

Leadership plays a role in enhancing students' performance and the overall quality of teaching and learning within schools. However, challenges arise when teachers and students resist leadership initiatives, hindering the implementation of measures to improve student outcomes. Additionally, differing preferences for leadership styles among staff can result in a lack of acceptance or support for strategies implemented by leaders with different styles. Successful leadership also relies on the backing of parents and communities, yet many struggling schools need more support from their communities. In scenarios, school leaders should devise tactics to engage parents and community members in school governance.

For school leaders to improve the performance of struggling schools, policymakers must focus on organizing workshops, training sessions, and support programs that help empower school leaders with the abilities, expertise, and understanding required to carry out responsibilities in underperforming schools. Additionally, educational authorities should guarantee the allocation of resources to disadvantaged schools and students to tackle the structural obstacles that the schools encounter.

The study's final finding is that participants' perspectives differ on the types of school leaders who can improve classroom teaching and learning. As a result, there is no such thing as good or bad school leadership. Instead, emphasis should be placed on how school leadership is perceived and implemented to facilitate improved classroom teaching and learning.

Recommendations

If school leaders want to improve teaching and learning, they must encourage leadership through conferences, seminars, and training programs. This can be achieved by enticing school principals and leaders to continue their education and participate in leadership development programs that offer exposure to effective leadership techniques, attitudes, and behaviors. Such leadership training and development should focus on leadership behavior like sharing decision-making, delegating responsibilities, and providing a supportive environment that ensures that not only the burden of leadership is reduced but also that improved decisions are accepted by all to be made.

School leaders play a significant role in education and should thoroughly understand their roles and responsibilities within the school system. They should also be familiar with the wide

range of leadership styles, allowing them to effectively use them to improve teaching and learning in the classroom. One significant way to help leaders understand their roles is to provide support and continuous training.

Schools should adopt different strategies to maximize parents' involvement and participation in school governance. This can be achieved through various strategies, such as family engagement, where students are expected to bring parents or guardians to school. Constant feedback could also be given to parents about their children. Such efforts entice parents to be interested in the children's education and the school's governance.

Principals should carefully consider teachers' and students' complaints regardless of the school's leadership style. Teachers can be represented by teacher unions, students by student representative councils, or a group of prefects in making significant recommendations to the school administration. Members of the school administration and governing bodies are critical to the success of schools. As a result, efforts should be made to strengthen bonds with school leadership, as they can assist the principal in dealing with setbacks and any unfavourable surprises that may occur in the institution.

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