Strengthening School's Management Capacity for Better Education Outcomes in Eswatini: Calling for a Paradigm Shift

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Abstract

This paper provides a critical analysis of the various competencies necessary for the development and training of effective principals in the light of the current school administrative and management practice in Eswatini. In order to provide a cadre of effective school administrators, it is important that administrators get equipped with a range of the essential administrative and management skills. The Eswatini education school system allows for ascendency into management and administrative positions without the requisite knowledge and experience. Promoted officers invariably tend to get presented with the learning-on-the-job kind of experiential management engagement. Yet the Principals and their Deputies are disproportionately critical in the facilitation and implementation of the current education reform processes. Furthermore, there seems to be rare if at all any occasions where they are assisted to deal with the "culture shock" in their new roles as Managers of schools — they are left to swim or sink on their own. This paper presents findings drawn from observations, experiential practice and interaction with some principals in the Manzini Region. It further suggests pathways for addressing the critical administrative and management gaps in the school education system. These include constructive utilization of pre-deployment capacity building forums, on the job training, supportive supervision, monitoring and evaluation for optimal educational outcomes.

Keywords: Principals, Management, Administration, Development, Supportive Supervision, Monitoring, Evaluation & Educational Outcomes.

Introduction

This paper endeavours to explore how school management capacity could better be strengthened in the Manzini region in Swaziland. The education sector from this country, drawn from anecdotal evidence, seems to point to the fact that the one area that has not been given prime consideration to improving the management capacity of schools is improving the leadership and management resources (the principals of schools) the country has in this regard.

According to Farkas et al (2001) the work of school principals grows in complexity, and demands multiply each year. This job exhausts experienced principals, hence new principals feel severely staggered. Smith (2002), in the same vein advances that leading is inherent in teaching. It can be regarded as the heart of the management process because it is by means of leading that planning and organizing is activated. Also, the quality of the achievements of the learners is determined mainly by the way in which the principals as the leaders execute their tasks.

Conceptual framework

The study was based on the concept that appointments and promotions into the office of the principal have inbuilt challenges within itself. The conceptual framework hypothesized that there are many challenges that principals, especially newly appointed ones in management of schools. These include misconceptions about school management, importance of delegation, teacher management and students' management as well as financial management-based challenges.

The independent variables were; school management, delegation of duties, teachers, students and finance. The intervening variables, included lack of specific administration skills, mismanagement of human resources, negative attitude and absenteeism. The dependent

variable was challenges principals face in their endeavour to provide quality education.

The purpose of this study

According to Taylor & Francis (2010) the education system is in the process of change and adaptation, and in order to understand the present position of education one should remember that the provision for education is taking place at a time when the present extent of change is far greater than that of the past. Against this background the purpose of this study is to investigate problems and challenges encountered by principals as school administrators. Furthermore, the study seeks to determine the effectiveness of school management by principals in schools in the Manzini Region. The study also seeks to determine the extent to which principals contribute to the attainment of educational goals in secondary schools. It is the debate of the authors that a study of the administrative process as well as managerial issues facing personnel at schools in the Manzini Region, may offer helpful recommendations concerning the improvement of school administration in the area concerned.

Statement of a problem

As the system of education in Swaziland is in the process of transformation, the principal is confronted with major administrative challenges and problems. Principals, in their role of administering schools, need to manage and lead students, teachers as well as parents in order achieve their main purpose, namely to be worthwhile institutions of learning. They appear to face challenges regarding guiding and enabling teachers to impart knowledge to learners, managing school finances, and harmonizing relationship with parents.

In view of the above observation the researchers want to assume that unless the problems, challenges and misconceptions are investigated, addressed and recommendations are made, school administration will remain a problem to the school principal and his management team, staff, parents and students.

Research questions

Main question

- How competent are principals in the management of their schools?

Sub-questions

- How effective are the schools managed administratively?
- How well is discipline maintained?
- How effective are the school finances managed?
- How is delegation applied in these schools?

The Multiple Roles of Principals' administration

The role played by the principal is a multifaceted one profoundly influenced by his/her knowledge, life experiences, values as well as skills both learnt and acquired. Traditionally, the principal resembled a middle manager as suggested in William Whyte's 1950's classic *The Organization Man* – an overseer of the educational operations in the school organisation., However, today, in this rapidly changing era of standards-based reform, outcomes based oriented learning, transparency and accountability, a different conception has emerged– one which draws lessons from contemporary corporate life to suggest leadership that focuses with great clarity on what is essential, and how to get it done.

Stein and Book (2000) bring clarity to the principal's roles when they enumerate a breakdown of some of the manifold individual tasks that the principal ought to carry out.

- Prepare a development plan, receive school monies, keep records of those monies, administering the school's budget, procurement.
- Cognisant of teachers' welfare, ensuring effective instructional supervision, teachers.
- Professional development.
- Monitoring student welfare, ensuring effective teaching and learning, admitting and placing students, ensuring that report cards are sent to parents.
- Administer the welfare of support staff.
- Attending meetings, acting as a resource person in the school, ensuring infrastructure of school development.

One may easily come to the conclusion that at various times, principals must be administrators, managers, diplomats, teachers and curriculum leaders, sometimes all within one school day. It is definitely a balancing act, and principals must be proficient in all of these areas, as well as able to fluidly move from one role to another. Figure

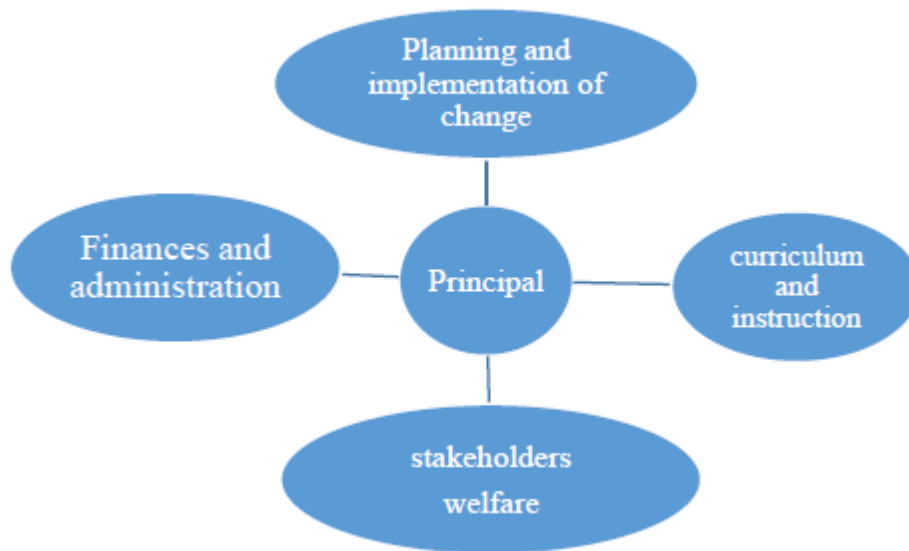1, below presents a vivid view of the principal's role.

Figure 1. Role of a principal

In many ways the school principal is the most important and influential individual in any school. He /she is the person responsible for all activities that occur in and around the school building. It is the principal's leadership that sets the tone of the school, the climate for learning, the level of professionalism and morale of teachers, and the degree of concern for what the students may or may not become. The principal is the main link between the school and the community and the way he or she performs in that capacity largely determines the attitudes of students and parents about the school. If a school is vibrant, innovative, child entered place, if it has a reputation for excellence in teaching, if students are performing to the best of their ability, one can almost point to the principal's leadership as the key to the success.

Why principals fail to successfully execute their duties

There are several reasons why school principals fail to successfully implement curriculum reforms in their schools. These are discussed below:

Lack of change Knowledge

Sahlberg (2006) states that lack of understanding of change as the necessary condition for improved implementation of the new curriculum. Curriculum reforms and introduction of new approaches in teaching are usually full of good ideas that fail to be properly implemented. Sometimes the reforms are successful in one context and fail in another. This is, in most cases due to the lack of the understanding the insight about the process of curriculum changes and the essential ingredients that help in a successful curriculum implementation.

Lack of involvement

Principals need to be closely involved in the conceptualization and direction of curriculum reforms. Sahlberg (2005) argues that, for a long time the role of stakeholders, including principals was not seen relevant and necessary in the last twenty years. This lack of involvement of principals in the curriculum reforms means that they wouldn't be privileged with to know the changes affecting the curriculum, hence they would oppose all that is in the packages.

Curriculum change is not just about curriculum matters, but it affects other facets of schooling, including learning, teaching, administration and the culture of the school. In Eswatini the level of stakeholders' consultation varies with different reforms. If there is little involvement of principals in curriculum reforms, it will be difficult for them to properly plan for the reforms. Therefore, developing and implementing relevant activities for the new program might be a challenge, thus it will be hard to achieve the desired goals. For instance, nothing much was heard about the involvement of stakeholders when International General

Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE) was introduced in 2006 in Eswatini. The first few years of the introduction of IGCSE encountered some opposition from teachers and principals. This was because they didn't know level of demand the program required; it was learning on the job scenario.

Principals need to create an atmosphere that will make all the groups available in a school ready to meet the curriculum reforms. The climate is not only for the successful implementation of the reforms but also for breaking down resistance and turning limiting powers to facilitating powers.

Lack of a Conducive Climate

Figure 2. Critical considerations in school management for better education outcomes

Source: https://www.google.com/search?q=++Plan+Do+Act+Check&tbm

Methodology

This study employed the mixed research design to closely examine the competencies necessary for the development and training of effective principals who are able to lead and deliver worthy results. It also attempted to capture an overview of the current level of both teachers' confidence in their principals' ability to execute instructional leadership. It is in this premise that the researchers sought to collect data using closed-ended and open-ended questionnaires as well as in-depth interviews. Open-ended questions were also used for they give the respondents a chance to deliver rich information and not a fixed choice question. The questionnaire is chosen as a tool for it is cheaper in terms of finance and time as compared to other tools. Moreover, it covers a large percentage of the population. Face validity of the questionnaire and interview schedules was established by experts in Educational Administration Offices. These included officers from the inspectorate, college lecturers as well as other relevant education officers. The population comprised 30 principals from secondary schools, and 60 teachers. Simple random sampling was used to select the teachers from secondary schools in the Manzini region

Findings

Below is a table 1 that presents results of the questionnaire administered to teachers. 60 teachers participated in this survey and all of them were able to give feedback, and hence the table below.

Table 1 a. Teachers' perceptions on principals' ability on administrative and instructional supervision issues

Administrative role	Strongly Disagree	Disagreed	Sometimes	Strongly agree	Agree	Totally Agree
1.Principal and staff define goals and objectives	10 - 16.7%	13 - 21.7%	25 -41.7%	16 -26.7%	14 -23.3%	31/60 - 52%
2. Principal and staff work out a plan of school activities	5 - 8.3%	7 - 11.7%	11 - 18.3%	20 - 33%	17 - 28.3%	37/60 - 62%
3. Principal delegates administrative duties to staff members	8 -13.3%	10 16.7%	17- 28.3 %	8 - 13.3%	17 - 28.3%	25/60 - 42%
4. Principal keeps staff updated about policies	0 - 0%	5 - 8.3%	15 -16%	20 - 33.3 %	20 - 33.3%	40/60- 67%
5. Principal recognizes good teaching procedures	15- 25%	8 - 13.3%	14 - 23.2%	13 - 35,8%	10 -16.7%	23/60 - 38%
6.Principal experiments with teachers' suggestions	20 -33.3%	10 - 16.7%	11 - 18.3%	11 - 18.3%	8 - 13.3%	19/60 - 32%
7.Principal effectively solves staff problems	15 - 25%	16 --26.7%	11 -18.3%	10-16.7%	9 – 15%	19/60 - 32%
8. Leading in the school is democratic	17 -28.3%	18 -30%	15 -25%	9 -15%	1 2.-7%	10/60 -17%
9. Goals and objectives mutually established by staff and principal	10 -16.7%	15- 25%	17- 28%	10 - 16.7%	8 - 13.3%	18/60 - 30%
10. Teachers permitted to be innovative	9 - 15%	11- 18.3%	18 -30%	11 - 18.3%	11 - 18.3%	22/60 -37 %
11. Principal promotes a sense of belonging	9 - 15%	7- 11.7%	23- 50%	16 - 26.7%	5 -8.3%	21/60- 35%
12. Principal achieves status from staff	5- 8.3%	5 - 8.3%	12 -20%	18 - 30%	20 - 33.3%	38/60 - 63%
13. Principal establishes a climate conducive to effective teaching	5 - 8.3%	9 -11.7%	20 - 33.3%	18 - 30%	8 -13%	26/60-43.3%
14. Principal establishes communication channels	10 -16.7%	5 - 8.3%	23 - 38.3%	5 - 8.3%	17- 28.3%	22/60 - 37%
15. The principal provides instructional supervision	13 -21.7%	11 - 19.3%	16 - 26.7%	10 - 16.7%	10 -16.7%	20/60 -33%

18. Principal is acquainted with the school curriculum	13 21.7%	11 - 19.3%	16 26.7%	10 - 16.7%	10 16.7%	20/60 -33%
19. instructional leadership evaluated by principal staff	19 -31.7%	15 - 25%	11- 18.3%	6 - 10%	9 - 15%	15/60 - 25%
20. The principal solves staff problems	15 25%	14 - 23.2%	8 - 13.3%	13 - 5,8%	10 - 16.7%	23/60 – 38%

Table 1a. One notices that a majority of the teachers believe that principals do not value their input in the general running of the school. They believe that schools principals do not see them as relevant and participatory human resources in the school setting.

Table 1b. Teachers' perceptions on the principal's attitude towards individualised learning

Administrative role	Strongly Disagree	Disagreed	Sometimes	Strongly agree	Agree	Total Agree
21.Principal encourages individualized learning	15- 25%	15 - 25%	13 - 21%	7 -12%	10- 16.7%	17/60 – 28%
22.Principal encourages special programmes of methods for individualizing instruction	20-33.3%	17- 28.3%	11- 18.3%	4 - 7%	8 - 13.3	12/60- 20%
23.Principal provides material and psychological support for learners with special needs	19 -31.7%	15- 25%	11-18.3%	6 - 10%	9 -15%	15/60- 25%
24. Principal provide feedback on learners with special needs to parents	20 -33.3%	17- 28.3%	11- 18.3%	4 - 7%	8 -13.3%	12/60- 20%
Principal sensitize the community on inclusive education.	19 -31.7%	15- 25%	11- 18.3%	6 -10%	9 -15%	15/60- 25%

Table 1b presents a poor attention provided by principals of public schools towards individualised learning. Since we are teaching individuals, not groups of individuals, it is the function of the school within its budgetary, personnel and curricular limitations to provide adequate schooling for every learner no matter how much he/she differs from every other learner. This solely lies in the hands of the principal. The country has embraced inclusive education; hence it is the duty of every school to ensure that the common goal towards inclusion is achieved.

Below is a table that presents results of the questionnaire administered to school principals from thirty schools in the Manzini Region. A total of 30 principals participated in this survey and all of them were able to give feedback, and hence the table below.

Table 1 c. Principals' responses

Administrative process	Strongly Disagree	disagree	Not Sure	Strongly agree	Agree	Total Agree
1. You received orientation before assuming your position?	30 -100%	0 - 0%	0 - 0%	0 - 0%	0 -0%	0/30 - 0%
2. The Regional Education office gave you, your job description	24 - 80%	4 - 13.3%	2 - 3.3%	0 - 0%	0- 0%	0/30 - 0%
3. The MoET prepared you for the management and administrative Position	27- 90%	3 - 10%	0 - 0%	0 0%	0 0%	0/30 - 0%
4. You had management and administrative experience before your promotion	10- 33.3%	12 - 40%	0 - 0%	3 - 10%	5 - 16.7%	8/30 -27%

5. The Ministry has trained you on leadership since you have assumed your position	13 - 30%	6 -16.7%	0 - 0%	8 -26.7%	3- 30%	11/30 -37%
6. Principal and staff define goals and objectives	0- 0%	0 -0%	3- 10%	24 -80%	3- 10%	27/30 - 90 %
7. Principal and staff plan activities early in the year	2 - 6.7%	2 - 6.7%	5 -16.7%	11-36.7%	10 -33.3%	21/30 -70%
8. Principal and staff develop rules and regulations	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	16- 53.3%	14 -46.7%	30/30 -100%
8. Principal and staff develop rules and regulations	0- 0%	0 -0%	0- 0%	16 - 53.3%	14 -46.7%	30/30- 100%
9. Decisions are taken in consultation with staff	0- 0%	0-0%	6 - 20%	13- 43.3%	11 -36.7%	24/30 -80%
10. Teachers are permitted to be innovative	0- 0%	0- 0%	8 -26.7%	12 -40%	10- 33.3%	22/30 -73%
11. Principal encourages strong relationship among staff	0 -0%-	0 -0%	0 - 0%	27 -90%	3 - 10%	30/30 -100%
12. Teachers share their problems and concerns with principal	5 16.7%	2 6.7%	10 33.3%	8 26.7%	5 16.7%	13/30- 43%
13. Principal provides Instructional supervision	0 - 0%	2 - 6,.7%	3 - 10%	10 - 30.3%	5 16.3%	15/30 - 50%
17. Principal consults staff before modifying curriculum	0 -0%	0 -0%	12 -40%	17 -56.7%	1 -3.3%	18/30 -60%
18. Principal facilitates learning and teaching	0 - 0%	0 - 0%	10 - 30.3%	17 - 56.7%	3- 10%	20/30 - 67%
19. Principal facilitates staff evaluation procedures	2 - 6.7%	3 - 10%	7 - 23.3%	13 - 43.3%	5 -16.7%	18/30 - 60%
20. Principal and staff establish evaluation procedures	2 - 6.7%	4 - 13.35	2 - 6.7%	15- 50%	12- 40%	27/30- 90%
22. Principal holds meetings proposed by teachers	4 - 14.3%	11 -36.7%	3 -10%	8 -26.7%	6 - 20%	14/30 - 47%

Table 1c. One notices that in the 22 questions to which principals were required to respond regarding their competences to manage schools, they disproportionately responded by stating that they were not sure. At other instances, the felt they had not been capacitated sufficiently to play their roles effectively and efficiently to attain the desired education outcomes.

Conclusions on the Findings

In most developed world countries like America, England, Sweden and Australia preparation and development is formally institutionalized with colleges offering training for principals before and after appointment. The preparation and development are well structured and systematic in the sense that aspiring principals are prepared for school leadership before appointment and then continuously developed after appointment to enhance performance in their administrative duties.

In Africa, preparation and development of principals is not as entrenched into the systemic processes of the education policy design as it is in the developed countries. In most cases, it is either lacking or not formal (Bush & Oduro, 2006). In Eswatini, however, principals are appointed into positions not necessarily because of relevant training for the position but the focus is placed on teaching experience and corresponding experience as deputy principal of a school. It is also common for most aspiring principals to be driven by the benefits that come with the package of being appointed principal (Naidoo 2006).

In view of the findings of Table 1 one may come up with the following conclusions:

1. There is evident lack of ability to unify the stakeholders and ably execute all their duties, hence this leads to poor management and poor relationships with teachers, learners and parents. The most common factor leading

towards this failure being the inability to recognize their position requires them to serve rather than to seek to be served.

2. Principals are rated low on caring relationships in schools. Poor and unhealthy relationships hinder the teaching and learning process for they result in poor co-operation between the parties involved. When results are bad especially the externally examined classes (Form 3 or 5), principals tend to blame teachers for low pass rates, teachers blame learners for not studying, and learners blame principals for poor management and teachers for not teaching.

3. Delegation of responsibility to teachers and other staff in the school relieves the principal from many pressures of work. Without effective delegation by school principals, cases of inefficiency, disharmony, and a poor working environment could result in poor school performance. Many principals still believe that if they promote participative management, their roles will diminish drastically with respect to power, control and authority.

4. Many teachers feel stuck in a dead-end position with few opportunities for growth or expectancy of reward. Keeping teachers motivated once they are in the profession is a growing problem. Job stress, alienation, feelings of ineffectiveness in the classroom and frustrating working conditions all contribute to this lack of motivation. It is the duty of the principal to ensure staff development in his/her school in order to keep his/her staff motivated and goal driven.

5. To learn well students, need high quality instruction and a well- crafted curriculum and they benefit most from positive and effective school leadership.

6. Principals are finding it increasingly necessary to make choices and decisions, often with far-reaching consequences. The problem is that they are not always sufficiently equipped to make carefully considered decisions in meeting situational demands.

7. An effective and creative performance of task depends on the extent to which individuals manage to hold their own demands successfully, both professionally and personally.

Conclusion

This study has attempted to determine the principals' capacities and roles as school administrators in the secondary schools of the Manzini Region. The need emerged from the researchers' concern about the radical change that is currently taking place in the Eswatini education system. This concern is clearly articulated by Whitaker (2003), who maintains that schools are undergoing radical changes in the manner in which their business is conducted. One of the most significant elements in this is that the leadership and administration in schools should be seen as the most crucial focuses for institutional development and growth in the years ahead. It should be remembered that school administration is a wide-ranging process and it needs principals to understand their roles and primacies. It is necessary that an administrator knows and grips the mechanisms of his/her institution. The findings indicated that in many instances' stakeholders' involvement is limited.

This is opposed by Tofller (1980), who argues that it will be necessary to release ourselves from the myth of authoritarian efficiency which attaches so much importance to the small group at the top of the organizational hierarchy to provide all the direction, supply all the answers and exercise all the control; which has the effect of missing the capacity of others in less senior positions to offer their capacities and creativity. However, no school is a perfect environment and school managers need to focus centrally on teaching and learning as the core purpose of education, through becoming a learning organization. The role of principals and other school managers is to adopt a critical perspective, constantly questioning how to improve teaching and learning in your school.

In supporting the need for stakeholder's involvement in school administration, Whitaker (2003), proposes that effective administration will be achieved when stakeholders have played an active role in designing and planning the activities and the development of the school as a learning organization.

Recommendations

I. Recommendations directed to the Ministry of Education and training.

a) The Ministry should develop programs that would equip young educators with leadership skills.

b) Principals should be periodically in serviced in administration and leadership skills

c) Experiential administration programs should be introduced in the pre-service training programs.

d) MoET should develop programs that will educate communities with inclusive education.

II. The recommendations to principals.

a) School principals should have a shared vision that in order to gain the cooperation of their staff. Principals must consider that staff members also have goals and needs which must be incorporated in the organizational goals.

b) Collective planning gives a sense of ownership. Planning without staff involvement is tantamount to dictatorship. Whittaker (1993:116), believes that the school developmental plan is a vital policy link between the governors, the professional staff of the school and the local education authority. This implies that planning must be inclusive.

c) Principals should expose Education policy documents and regulations to staff members familiarity with policy documents, may assist implementation thereof.

d) Principals need to learn to enhance trust of their educators and delegate without reservations. Delegation increases trust between parties involved. Once trust is built, there will be less need for supervision by the principal and there will be increased job satisfaction. (e) Principals should create more opportunities for educators' participation in decision making.

e) Principals must be open to be appraised by teachers, this would assist them grow in their job.

f) Principals should develop a well-coordinated instructional program which will assist in creating an effective teaching and learning process in the school.

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