Leadership Development Needs for School Principals

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ABSTRACT
The main purpose of this study was to investigate leadership development needs of School Principals in selected schools in Omuthiya circuit in the Oshikoto Region, Namibia. The study used a mixed research approach, a convergent parallel research design. Data were collected using a questionnaire and structured interview guide. Twenty participants (20) were purposefully selected from 30 schools in Omuthiya Circuit in the Oshikoto Region. The study revealed that most school Principals in the study area do not have leadership skills and knowledge needed to set direction for schools; redesign their institutions, develop their staff and conduct instructional supervision. This lack of appropriate leadership skills and knowledge is impacting negatively on their execution of work. Another key finding was that the Regional Directorate has failed dismally to induct newly promoted Principals despite conducting fast tracked hand-over take-over mini-inductions. The presence of the CPD has not helped the Principals in acquiring the highly needed skills for the job, since very few workshops have been held due to financial limitations and lack of time. The study recommended that school Principals Omuthiya Circuit in the Oshikoto Region need to undergo leadership development training across all the four key practices, namely setting direction, instructional supervision, developing people and redesigning the organization, for them to be able to provide and demonstrate quality leadership skills which help improve their schools’ results.

Keywords: Leadership Development; School Principal; Oshikoto Region

INTRODUCTION
In the dynamic landscape of education, effective leadership plays a crucial role in shaping the path of academic institutions Puspitadani, Yudea, and Loo, (2022). Furthermore, stated that School Principals, as key figures in the educational hierarchy, bear the responsibility of not only overseeing day-to-day operations but also fostering an environment conducive to growth, learning, and development. This imperative role demands leaders who are not only proficient in administrative skills but are also well-equipped with the necessary tools for personal and professional development (Dholkawala, 2023 & Groenewald, Kilag, Cabuenas, Camangyan, Abapo and Abendan, 2023). It is against this backdrop of the Omuthiya circuit in the Oshikoto Region, Namibia, this research embarks on a journey to explore the needs of leadership development among School Principals.

According to, Theron, (2023) Namibia, a country with a rich cultural heritage and a commitment to educational advancement, places a significant emphasis on the role of school leaders in achieving educational goals. The Oshikoto Region, situated in the northern part of the country, presents a unique context for investigation due to its distinct socio-economic and cultural characteristics (Muuilila, 2022). In addition, Schools in this region continue to evolve to meet the challenges of the 21st century, it becomes imperative to understand the specific leadership development needs that Principals encounter.

School Principals in Omuthiya circuit in the Oshikoto Region, Namibia operate within a dynamic educational landscape characterised by diverse challenges, ranging from cultural intricacies to evolving educational policies. Dinham, Elliott, Rennie, and Stokes, (2018) allude that, principal as key leaders in their institutions, they shoulder the responsibility of steering schools towards academic excellence and holistic
development. However, despite the significance of their roles, there are exists a critical gap in understanding the specific leadership development needs these Principals encounter in the study area. Furthermore, the existing literature on leadership development tends to be generic and often overlooks the contextual nuances that are inherent to specific regions and cultural settings. As a result, the unique challenges and opportunities faced by School Principals in Omuthiya in the Oshikoto Region may not be adequately addressed. Therefore, this study seeks to address this gap by conducting a comprehensive study that examines the specific leadership development needs in this specific Namibian context.

According to, Shikongo, (2021); School Principals in Namibian schools also oversee daunting responsibilities ranging from the effectiveness use of instruments from the National Standards and Performance Indicators for Schools in Namibia such as (Plan of Action for Academic Improvements (PAAI), School Development Plan (SDP), Classroom Observation Instrument (COI) and the Teacher Self-Evaluation (TSE). These instruments are meant to improve the learning outcomes in the learning system (Ministry of Education, Practical Guide SDP & PAAI, 2008). Furthermore, School Principals also have the responsibility to monitor the implementation of seven key areas as per the Ministry of Education, National Standards and Performance Indicators for Schools in Namibia, namely: Provision of Resources for the School and Hostel, Curriculum and Attainment, The teaching and Learning, The school as a social unity, Management and Leadership of School and Hostel, Links with parents and community & Links with other schools and the regions (Kayumbu 2020).

Taking from the evidence on the demanding roles or responsibilities of the School Principals in the study area, it is still saddening that no professional qualification in leadership or management is considered when appointing school Principals. According to (Personal Administration Measures(PAM), PSM Circular no.6 of 2013, a promotion post for a school principal requires a recognised 3-year tertiary teaching qualification on National Qualification Authority (NQA) Level 6 or equivalent plus 7 years teaching experience. This requirement cements further the fact that school Principals in Namibia are entirely appointed based on their teaching background experience without considering their formal and professional leadership development or training (Mestry 2019 cited Tjivikua 2006).

Hence, it is this researcher’s strong conviction that if school Principals are not well-prepared for their leadership roles, they will hardly acquire adequate and effective leadership skills and knowledge to perform their duties effectively, which will lead to successful schools. Furthermore, based on the evidence on the ground regarding changing roles or responsibilities of school Principals, the challenges that they face on a daily basis in executing their official duties and the leadership development needs thereof have compelled the researcher to undertake this research in the Namibian context with specific reference to school Principals. This may help Principals to cope with challenges surrounding them and school leadership. In view of the aforementioned challenges, the researcher was motivated to conduct this study entitled, “The leadership development needs of School Principals in Omuthiya Circuit in the Oshikoto Region, Namibia.

In order to achieve the objectives, of the study, the study sought to answer the following research questions:

What are the leadership development needs of School Principals in Omuthiya Circuit in the Oshikoto Region, Namibia?

What are the leadership challenges encountered by School Principals in their execution of duty in Omuthiya Circuit in the Oshikoto Region, Namibia?

What are the importance of leadership development training or program to school Principals in Omuthiya Circuit in the Oshikoto Region, Namibia?
What are the strategies that can be implemented to enhance the leadership development of School Principals in Omuthiya Circuit in the Oshikoto, Namibia?

The significance of the study is multifaceted and extends to various stakeholders, including educational policymakers, school administrators, teachers, and researchers. The importance of this research lies in its potential to contribute valuable insights and foster positive changes in educational leadership within the Oshikoto region and beyond. The study may provide policymakers with a nuanced understanding of the specific leadership development needs in the Oshikoto Region. This insight is crucial for the formulation of targeted policies and initiatives that address the unique challenges faced by School Principals in the study area. Policymakers can use the research findings to create evidence-based strategies for enhancing educational leadership at both regional and national levels. Furthermore, school administrators and educational institutions can benefit from the study by gaining insights into the specific areas where their Principals may require professional development. This information can guide the design and implementation of tailored training programs to address identified gaps in leadership skills. Principals, in turn, can benefit from targeted support that aligns with their specific needs, fostering their personal and professional growth.

Leadership Development

Day, Fleenor, Atwater, Sturm, and McKee (2014) proposes that leadership development is distinct from management development to the extent to which it involves preparing people for roles and situations beyond their current experience. Leadership development is defined as “orientated towards building capacity in anticipation of unforeseen challenges, (Day et al. 2014). Furthermore, argues that leader development is about developing individuals in leadership roles, whilst leadership development takes a more relational view of leadership as a process involving everyone within the organisation. Thus, Day’s views leadership development as being fundamentally concerned with the development of collective organisational capacity. ‘Leader development’ is an investment in human capital to enhance intrapersonal competence for selected individuals, whereas ‘leadership development’ is an investment in social capital to develop interpersonal networks and cooperation within organisations and other social systems, (Yawson, 2017).

According to Bolden, (2016); Byrne, Crossan, and Seijts, (2018). leadership development within management education should develop the ‘character’, integrity, skills and discursive intelligence to equip them with adaptive skills. Thus, leadership development must incorporate elements of more typical management and self-development programs such as time management, project-management, delegation, self-awareness, and critical thinking. Such a notion gives enough weight to the idea that, leadership development should be offered to both senior managers and subordinates in the organisation as a means of enhancing both collective and individual capacity.

The Leadership Development needs of the School Principals

In recent years in both the national and international context, leadership development has received necessary consideration as it is hoped to contribute immensely to positive change and improvement within the school as an organisation (Bush, 2018 cited Bush 2008). Bush (2008) affirms that there is a fast-growing international focus on leadership development as an important component of school improvement. In addition, it is believed that a good preparation for school Principals brings about a positive difference in their leadership practices. This is because they get being exposed to leadership training which is anticipated to help them learn to perform their jobs well in order to bring about improvements and benefits to their schools and, eventually, to fulfil their roles and duties in serving the needs of their learners.
Mushaandja (2014); Sukawati, Gunawan, Ubaidillah, Maulina, and Santoso, (2020) argues that it has been found that novice Principals in Namibia find their job difficult, stressful and trying. Also, the main findings are that new Principals find spearheading and managing human resources complex, and they are unable to put management theories into actions. They are said to use self-induction. Thus, they find it difficult to close the gap between educational management theory and practice stressed (Mushaandja, 2014).

Goff, Guthrie, Goldring and Bickman, (2014) cited Hale, and Moorman, (2003). observes that academic leaders like school Principals were ill prepared, oriented and trained in skills required for their ranks. Hence, the quality of education and research in Africa is diminishing. This leads to the fact that the relevance of teaching and research is not kept. Similarly, organizational quality assurance and strengthening strategies are neither in place nor sufficient. Therefore, leadership development needs should also be seen as a necessity for school Principals in Namibia due to many reasons.

Based on the above observations, Botha (2013) suggests that as a result of the increasing complexity of the school as an organisation, the school principal is subjected to changing demands, especially in aspects of management tasks. Hence, there is an urgent necessity for school Principals to receive both academic and professional training in educational management.

**Challenges in Leadership Practices Encountered by School Principals in executing their Duties**

Recent literature on school leadership indicates that more than ever before, school Principals are now faced with too many difficulties and issues in leading their schools as organisations Day, Gu, and Sammons, (2016). This is due to the fact that for the past few decades, their responsibilities have increased tremendously and running schools has become complex. There has been a paradigm shift in the principal-ship which is contrary to what some scholars postulated few years back (Botha, 2013). These claims are substantiated by Bush (2018), who has pointed out that the ranging roles of school Principals has made their roles more challenging and complex. Bush (2018) findings concur with Whitaker (2003) findings who observed that school heads are required more than before to carry their roles more appropriately, and these demands come as a result of two contrasting sources: the accountability pressures and the devolution to the school level.

Bush (2018) further argues that, the extra duties placed on the Principals’ shoulders in many countries call for great demands on these post-holders, especially the novice ones. Also, singles out that school Principals now face demanding and growing accountability pressures in several countries, with the expectation from the government, parents and public for schools to accomplish challenging results through the Principals. This is very true in the Namibian context too, as school Principals always come under heavy criticism from the public at the end and beginning of each year when grade 11s and 12s results are released respectively. The school Principals and teachers are squarely blamed for learners’ failure.

The above assertion can be substantiated by Silume (2013) findings, who have found out that school leadership in Namibia is usually subjected to critical scrutiny following the failure of many schools to produce satisfactory results in terms of grade 10 learners managing to attain grade 11 entries.

However, the main challenges that school Principals are faced with is to deal with externally imposed policies. These are policies that are imposed on schools by Government and Ministry of Education such as The Namibian Constitution, Guidelines for School Principals, Staff Rules, The Curriculum, Operational Files, Teachers’ Subject Manual Language Policy, 15th School Day Statistics, Cumulative Record Cards, Inclusive Education Policy, Education Act, Code of Conduct For Teachers, Treasury instructions, Syllabi, Continuous Monitoring, Textbook Policy, LCE policy, Pass Requirements,
Use of UPE funding, HIV/AIDS Policy, Public Service Act, National Standards, Subject Policy, Assessment policy, OVC policy, Pregnancy Policy and so on.

Based on the above listed policies, one can entirely agree that school Principals have much to deal with. Research activities have also shown that school leaders in the developing countries are known to be facing even more pressures than those in the developed world (Tintoré, Cunha, Cabral, and Alves, 2022). Some examples can be seen in certain countries, such as African countries, where the school Principals have to lead schools with dilapidated buildings, with insufficient equipment, ill prepared teachers, absence of basic facilities such as water, power, sanitation, and hungry learners (Beam, Claxton and Smith, 2016). The above findings concur with the situation in Namibia as a developing country as asserted by Angula (1993) who observes that lack of physical facilities is the greatest challenge that comes along with Towards Education for All, such as the unavailability of classes. Angula further argues that to provide education for all, there comes a challenge of building more schools from the limited budget.

Aravena and González, (2021) summarises the challenges for the school Principals by elaborating out the fact that intensified workload increases the Principals’ roles and increasing accountability—both old and new in their day-to-day activities. Amongst the many challenges faced by the school Principals, they are teaching and learning, that contradict with the concept of ‘self-management schools. This brings an intensified workload for school Principals, who are supposed to be more concerned with management and administrative tasks than leading teaching and learning processes.

Targeted strategies which can be implemented to enhance the leadership development of School Principals in the Oshikoto Region

The challenges faced by school Principals in executing their duties, particularly in the context of the Oshikoto Region, are indeed significant. To enhance the leadership development of school Principals in this region, targeted strategies can be implemented.

According to Illeka, (2017) Stated that the Oshikoto educational directorate under the CPD section can initiate and facilitate regular professional development programs specifically tailored to the needs of school Principals in the Oshikoto Region. Additionally, these programs can cover areas such as effective leadership, strategic planning, conflict resolution, and change management. Furthermore, establish mentorship programs where experienced school Principals can provide guidance and support to novice Principals. This mentorship can help in navigating the complexities of the role and provide valuable insights into effective leadership practices (Bertrand, Stader and Copeland 2018; Sciarappa and Mason 2014). Also, encourage networking among school Principals within the region and beyond. This can be achieved through workshops, conferences, and collaborative projects. Sharing experiences and best practices can contribute to professional growth and problem-solving.

Collaborate with education authorities to advocate for policies that consider the unique challenges faced by school Principals in the Oshikoto Region (Illeka 2017). This may involve addressing issues related to infrastructure, resource allocation, and accountability measures.

According to Stronge and Xu, (2021) school Principals can actively engage with local authorities and educational stakeholders to ensure their schools receive the necessary resources. Furthermore, develop and implement leadership training programs that focus on enhancing the specific skills needed for effective school leadership. This can include modules on instructional leadership, team building, communication, and time management.

Truong, and Diep (2023) stated that, promote the integration of technology for administrative tasks to streamline processes and reduce the administrative burden on Principals. This can include training on educational technology tools and systems. Furthermore, implementing a combination of these strategies
can contribute to the leadership development of school Principals in the Oshikoto Region, ultimately improving the overall educational environment and outcomes for students.

METHODS

This study adopts a mixed method, convergent parallel research design through the use of a qualitative and quantitative research incorporated in one study. The target population of this study consisted of twenty (20) school Principals from Schools in Omuthiya Circuit in the Oshikoto Region to participate in the study. This study adopted expert purposive sampling method, only principal who have been principal for 5 and more years who were selected to participate in the study. The study used two data collection instruments, namely interviews and questionnaires. A face to – face in-depth interview with Twenty (20) Principals aimed at getting Principals’ in-depth information on leadership development needs, Leadership challenges and strategies that can be implemented to enhance leadership development.

As indicated earlier, this study was a mixed method. The researcher used a questionnaire as the second data collection instrument to gather information on the leadership development needs of School Principals. The researcher prepared a questionnaire with both closed ended and open-ended questions. The researcher obtained a permission letter from the Director of Education for Oshikoto Directorate of Education. The researcher made appointments with the school Principals to schedule days for their interviews to avoid interfering with their duties. The researcher captured all interview answers with the voice recorder, which was later transcribed. The same procedure was applied with participants on questionnaires. The researchers distributed the questionnaire to themselves and collected it back after one week. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistical analysis, while qualitative data were analysed using the thematic analysis method.

Ethical Considerations

The researchers, firstly, obtain the permission letter from the Director of Education in Oshikoto Region to carry out research in schools in the Region. Furthermore, distributed the consent form to the participants, and information sheet respectively, the researcher explained the purpose of the research, participants’ rights, how results would be handled and how confidentiality would be maintained. The participants were asked to feel free to ask if they wanted further clarification. It was also made clear to the participants that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time. It was only after this process that the participants were asked if they wanted to be part of the study by signing the informed consent form.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Gender of participants

The participants were requested to indicate their gender. The figure below presents the results.

![Figure 1. Gender of the participants](image_url)
In the figure 1 above, 45% of the participants were males, while 55% were females. This indicates that there was a gender imbalance among the School Principals, which depict that females were 10% more than males.

**Staff development training sessions attended by Principals**

The participants were requested to indicate whether school Principals have received staff/leadership development training or not. The obtained responses are illustrated below.

![Figure 2: Principals leadership training status](image)

Figure 2 above indicates that 80% of the participants indicated that Principals had not received leadership development training, while 20% affirmed that principal(s) received leadership development training. This implies that the majority of the Principals have not been equipped with prerequisite leadership skills. These findings are supported by Gurmu, (2020), who observes that academic leaders like school Principals are ill prepared, oriented and trained in skills required for their positions.

**Leadership development needs of School Principals in Omuthiya Circuit in the Oshikoto Region, Namibia**

The respondents were requested to indicate Principals’ general developmental needs. The results obtained are illustrated below.

![Figure 3. Principals leadership development needs](image)

Figure 3 indicates that the participants identified six development needs of Principals. The top three areas of need were general school management (80%), financial management (70%) and co-curricular management (60%). Human Resources Management was identified by 55% of the respondents as another critical leadership development need for Principals. The least two leadership development needs were identified as Public Relations Management and Instructional leadership (45% respectively).
These results are supported by Khan, Zeb and Imad (2023), who explains that, school Principals have a responsibility in four areas; school management; school ministry communications; school community relations and instructional supervision. School management entails procurement of resources, recruitment of teachers and allocation of subjects, gathering of salient information and safe keeping of important records. Bolden, (2016); Byrne, Crossan, and Seijts, (2018) further allude that leadership development within management education should develop the ‘character’, integrity, skills and discursive intelligence to equip them with adaptive skills. Furthermore, leadership development must incorporate elements of more typical management and self-development programs such as time management, project-management, delegation, self-awareness, and critical thinking (Bolden, 2016; Byrne, Crossan, and Seijts, 2018). According to Berkovich, (2016) in the study titled School leaders and transformational leadership theory postulate that transformational leadership theory advocate for principals to be developed in general school management, financial management, and co-curricular management in ways that inspire and motivate others, foster innovation, and create a shared vision for the school community.

**Leadership challenges encountered by School Principals in their execution of duty in Omutyiya Circuit in the Oshikoto Region, Namibia**

The respondents were required to indicate major challenges affecting their execution of duty. The obtained responses are illustrated below.

![Figure 4. The challenges of Principals in executing duties](image)

From figure 4 above, seven challenges affecting Principals in executing their normal duties emerged. The strongest challenges were; inadequate teaching and learning materials (75%), poor infrastructure; inadequate training and high levels of indiscipline among learners, all at 60% respectively. Mhonyiwa (2014) argues that school effectiveness can be promoted via quality, relevant, up-to-date and sufficient supplies of teaching and learning resources, in particular text books. This concurs with Angula (1993) who observes that lack of physical facilities is the greatest challenge that comes along with Towards Education for All, such as the unavailability of classes. Angula (1993) further argues that to provide education for all, there comes a challenge of building more schools from the limited budget. Furthermore, Aravena and González, (2021) anchored that many challenges faced by the school Principals, they are teaching and learning, that contradict with the concept of ‘self-management schools. This brings an intensified workload for school Principals, who are supposed to be more concerned with management and administrative tasks than leading teaching and learning processes.
The importance of leadership development training or program to school Principals

The participants were required to identify the importance of leadership development training or program to School Principals in the study area. The obtained responses are illustrated below.

Figure 5. The importance of leadership development training or program to School Principals

Result on figure 5 above shows that leadership development is important in six ways. The best four importance were; to meet the Principals’ leadership needs (100%), to equip school Principals with necessary knowledge and skills (100%), to help them fit well into the new job (75%) and to help school Principals to cope with the challenges they face daily (75%).

The last two importance received half of the participants’ identification (50% each), namely; to equip them with problem-solving skills and make rational decisions and to equip them with motivation and staff development skills so that schools achieve better results. The role of the principal with regard to career management is of primary importance. Therefore, it is the responsibility of every school manager to ensure that they do everything in their power to be supportive of the development of all staff. The principal should create an atmosphere in the school which will be conducive to capacity building and teacher empowerment learning. Mestry (2017) contends that School Principals require skills in prioritizing activities and issues, conflict and tension resolution, ethical and professional conduct, and instructional supervision to promote better teaching and learning. All these skills, however, require strategic intelligence. This is the main reason why recently there has been an increased focus on the professional development of school Principals, especially in the developing countries (Mestry, 2017). According to Bolden (2005), allude that transformational leadership theory emphasised the leaders’ ability to develop and communicate an inspiring vision and motivate subordinates through a sense of shared purpose. Transformational leadership theory reinforces the notion of the leader as change agent and this calls for arming a leader (through training and development) with the prowess in communication and interpersonal skills, Bolden (2005).

Strategies that can be implemented to enhance the leadership development of School Principals in Omuthiya Circuit in the Oshikoto, Namibia

The participants were required to suggest the strategies which are needed to meet leadership development needs of Principals. The obtained responses are illustrated in figure 6. In figure 6 above, all the participants (100%) overwhelmingly indicated that induction training was of paramount importance for all new promotions, while another 75% advocated for the provision of continuous leadership training program and team building and development of teams respectively.
Figure 6: Principals’ strategies to improve their leadership needs

Through further probing, one principal echoed that the Ministry of Education must commit itself to induction training of school Principals, which focuses on general school management that covers all aspects of school leadership. Further, to mitigate the anticipated high levels of resistance from subordinate teachers, Principals must be experts in building and developing teams so that they all speak with the same voice and support each other in managing events in the whole school. Half of the participants, also cited diversity management (50%) and Total Quality Management (50%) as critical leadership development areas for all Principals. While the strategy with the least votes but very critical too was that of Resources Mobilization and management training.

The main point emerging from the above responses is that they need leadership development training as a prerequisite if they are to take their schools to greater levels. This concurs with the leadership development needs for school Principals as boldly highlighted by the Saihu (2020), under Management and Leadership that “There is urgent need for a training program in all aspects of school management”. This comes as a result of school Principals who are found wanting in the execution of their managerial and leadership responsibilities. Bertrand, Stader and Copeland (2018); Sciarappa and Mason (2014) allude that, networking among school Principals within the region and beyond can be achieved through workshops, conferences, and collaborative projects. Sharing experiences and best practices can contribute to professional growth and problem-solving. Transformational leadership theory emphasized the need and importance of leadership training programs, particularly in induction training and continuous leadership development as well as focus on building and developing teams to create an interconnected and supportive environment (Berkovich, 2016).

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings above, the researcher crafted the following recommendations; Formal Induction Training is a must for all new Principals. The Regional office should strive to conduct formal inductions for all appointed people before unleashing them into the battlefield. The Ministry of Education must establish partnerships with NIPAM or UNAM so that they offer short term courses which are customised to meet the educational leadership needs of all Cluster Principals and Circuit Inspectors must be involved in the facilitation of in-service leadership development courses for School Principals especially those have to do with leadership innovation which help schools survive in the turbulent times. Cluster Principals need to be full-time posts rather than enlarge the jobs of school Principals since it overloads some Principals who end up failing to do both jobs efficiently. This becomes a recipe for disaster in that both the school will be badly run, and it can transfer into cluster activities, meaning all cluster schools may
as well be damaged by poor management. To accomplish leadership development may come with challenges. Principals often have packed schedules, leaving little time for professional development. Solutions may be incorporating leadership development topics during the circuit principal monthly meetings. Further study could be undertaken in all Educational Regions and compare the school Principals’ development needs in a bid to improve the school management efficiencies across the country.

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Conflicts of Interest
The authors hereby declared that there is no any conflict of interest concerning the publication of this article.

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