

Staff Development in Rural Schools in South Africa: Experiences of Principals in Uthungulu District

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ABSTRACT The aim of this paper is to report on staff development practices at various rural secondary schools in South Africa. Apart from a literature review on staff development in schools, the paper reports on a study in which empirical investigation based on quantitative research paradigm was used to collect data from principals of rural secondary schools in uThungulu district. The literature findings revealed that staff development is a critical component of school practice in many schools in South Africa. The study is concluded by the submission that it is essential for principals to be trained in the provision of staff development programs, and failure can have a negative effect on new curriculum initiatives in the country.

INTRODUCTION

South Africa is faced with many challenges to be competitive with the outside world. The country's education system has not been left untouched by such challenges. An efficient system of education provides for learning and teaching, which result in the production of learners who have acquired knowledge, skills and attitudes, which in turn make provision for further education and training and work beyond schooling. Management is an important means of facilitating the system's achievement and maintenance. Educational leaders such as principals are therefore faced with a big task of managing human resources such as educators in order to make schools efficient and effective to be geared for such changes. This means, that, principals should attend to staff development in their organizations. Staff development involves processes, which are designed to enable educators to improve on their performance. It links with other human resources management functions, namely recruitment, selection, induction, evaluation, appraisal and welfare. This paper focuses on staff development as an integral part of school management.

Motivation for the Study

A cross-section of the field of staff development in schools reveals that very little research

has been conducted on the views of rural school principals on staff development in schools. The relative unavailability of literature on this research problem is itself an indication that research needs to be done in order to provide more insight and improved approaches on this issue.

Knapper (2016) opines that effective school management is centered on the principal's ability to provide direction and instruction to the people under his or her charge. Staff development is one of the human resources management functions, which play a vital role in bringing about a high level of performance on the part of staff in the school. Principals are faced with the challenge of making opportunities available for staff development activities to take place in their schools. Thus, there is a need for principals in their institutions to support and better equip staff, because such initiatives can lead to better chances of organizational success. This means that the principal should have a positive attitude towards staff development.

The researchers, having worked in rural schools as principals and currently as university lecturers, visiting these schools to lend support to the university student educators, perceive that principals have difficult experience in staff development in their schools and the support from the Department of Education is not evident.

It makes sense that such a delicate exercise needs well-trained principals in staff development. The school system requires that principals play a vital role in staff development in

schools. The demand for staff development in schools has increased significantly.

The following research problem was identified:

What are the experiences of principals on staff development in rural schools in South Africa?

Literature Review

The researchers consulted literature, which is relevant to the topic. This was done to provide a critical synthesis of what has already been written on the topic.

METHODOLOGY

To address the research problem, both literature study and empirical investigation based on quantitative research design were undertaken.

Quantitative Research Paradigm

Population and Sampling

The researchers used the simple random sampling method to select forty-one school principals of secondary schools in uThungulu district. This method was favored for its simplicity, unbiased nature, and its closeness to fulfilling the major assumption of probability, namely that each element in the population stands an equal chance of being selected (Kumar 2014). For ethical reasons, permission to conduct research in schools was sought from the relevant district offices.

Instrumentation

The quantitative methodology was chosen in the light of the purpose of the study, the kind of information that was required and the available resources. The questionnaire was deemed fit for this investigation for the following reasons:

- ♦ The respondents, such as principals, would be able to respond at their convenience. This means that there would be no disruption of administration and teaching functions.
- ♦ Instructions were clearly stated on the questionnaire. There would be no need to train administrators and this would mean considerable savings in costs.
- ♦ The chosen research instrument would permit a wide coverage at minimum expense both in terms of money and effort. Traveling costs would be minimized.

- ♦ A written questionnaire would provide a vehicle for expression without fear of embarrassment to the respondent. An effort was made to assure respondents that their answers would be kept confidential.

The researchers believed that this kind of survey would lead to some truths about staff development in rural secondary schools and it would provide information on whether certain generalizations presented in the literature were also true for this population.

Format of the Questionnaire

The questionnaire was divided into three sections, with each section focusing on the aims of the study. Section 1 consisted of questions, which focus on the biographic and general information. This section provided the researcher with an understanding and knowledge of the respondents. Section 2 had closed questions focusing on the principals' learning/developmental activities for educators. The respondents were asked to rate their responses according to the following scale of *strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree*. Section 3 consisted of open-ended questions, wherein respondents were asked to write down the problems they encounter in staff development in their schools.

Administration of the Questionnaires

The researchers conducted a pilot study with five secondary school principals in the UThungulu district. The schools were part of the general population from which the sample was drawn, but not part of the sample itself. No inherent weaknesses were discovered in the questionnaires and the data solicited confirmed the questionnaires' validity and reliability, and consequently there was no need to modify the questionnaires.

In the actual study, questionnaires were sent to 41 random selected rural secondary schools in UThungulu district. Principals were requested to complete their questionnaires, which were later posted to the researcher, using the self-addressed envelope supplied with the questionnaire.

The first sample population responses were 28 (68%) respondents. After the follow-ups, four more respondents returned the completed ques-

tionnaires to make a total of 32 responses (78%). That represented a satisfying response.

Data Processing

After all the questionnaires had been received, the important task was then to reduce the mass of data obtained to a format suitable for analysis. The respondents' responses were coded and frequency distributions were generated.

RESULTS

General and Biographical Profile of the Respondents

When the item of rural school principals' academic qualification was analyzed, it was realized that all the respondents had fully completed the information regarding general and biographical data.

In Table 1, a total population of 32 (n=32) responded. Table 1 reveals that a high proportion of the respondents (90%) had degree qualifications. It is, therefore, probable that the knowledge and skills that principals possess

could assist them when designing staff development programs.

Table 1: Principals' academic qualifications

<i>Educators qualification</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
Below Matric (Grade 12)	0	0
Matric + 1 (M+1)	3	10
Matric+3 and above	29	90
Total	32	100

Rural School Principals' Learning/ Developmental Activities Arranged for Educators

In this section, rural school principals were required to indicate their experiences in learning/developmental activities arranged for educators.

Table 2 presents information related to the experiences of rural school principals' learning/developmental activities arranged for educators. The respondents were asked to rate their responses according to the following scale of *strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree*.

Table 2: The principals' learning/developmental activities arranged for educators

<i>Items</i>		<i>Strongly agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly disagree</i>	<i>Total</i>
There is a need for educators to attend workshops on new teaching methods	N	23	8	1	0	32
Educators need to visit other schools as away of sharing ideason educational matters.	%	72	25	3	0	100
There is a need for educators to form study groups which could help enrich them for their teaching tasks.	N	20	12	0	0	32
	%	63	37	0	0	100
There is a need for subject educators to attend in-service training courses and seminars organised by education officers	N	14	11	4	3	32
	%	43	34	13	10	100
There is a need for personnel interviews in order to identify educators' needs.	N	23	9	0	0	32
There is a need for team teaching to help educators to learn from one another.	%	72	28	0	0	100
There is a need for subject teams to be formed for educators who teach the same subject.	N	16	13	3	0	32
	%	50	40	10	0	100
There is a need for consultants to be invited in the school for assistance fostering discipline.	N	22	10	0	0	32
	%	69	31	0	0	100
There is a need for educators to engage in research project(s) to get more understanding of their subject fields	N	21	11	0	0	32
	%	66	34	0	0	100
There is a need for educators to observe one another during classroom teaching.	N	13	12	3	4	32
	%	40	38	10	12	100
	N	18	11	2	1	32
	%	56	34	6	4	100
	N	17	13	0	2	32
	%	53	41	0	6	100

There is a need for educators to attend workshops on new teaching methods.

Table 2 revealed that a high majority of the respondents (97%) indicated their massive support for their educators to attend workshops on new teaching methods. These workshops enhance staff development and support. Knapper (2016) asserts that there is no way in which the schools can perform adequately unless they have skilled and informed personnel. This explains why principals indicated the essential need for educators to attend workshops on new teaching methods.

Educators need to visit other schools as a way of sharing ideas on educational matters.

Table 2 revealed that all the respondents (100%) indicated that educators need to visit other schools as a way of sharing ideas on educational matters. Such visits are confirmed by Selwyn (2016) as important for educators as a way of seeking information on the achievement of best results and sharing information on new methods of teaching.

There is a need for educators to form study groups, which could help enrich them for their teaching tasks.

Table 2 further on revealed that a high proportion of respondents (77%) indicated that educators need to form study groups, which could help enrich them for their teaching tasks. Jasinski and Lewis (2016) observe that study groups are significant in schools, whereby educators come together as subject committees, organized by subject heads. These subject committees usually discuss learner problems and promote interest in the subjects. Through study groups, educators with problems are easily identified and assisted to develop in the work that they do.

There is a need for subject educators to attend in-service training courses and seminars organized by education officers.

It seems that all respondents (100%) in this survey were congruent that there was a need for subject educators to attend in-service training courses and seminars organized by education officers. The in-service training courses and seminars help educators become well equipped with current educational developments (Lunenberg et al. 2016).

There is a need for personnel interviews in order to identify educators' needs.

Table 2 further on revealed that a high proportion of the respondents (90%) indicated that

there is a dire need for personnel interviews in order to identify educators' needs. The educators' needs include among other things the effective use of teaching aids, curriculum development, alternative textbooks, morale or motivation and proper understanding of developmental appraisal, basic skills in handling subject matter, time management, classroom management, problem solving, human relations, self-confidence, training in handling learners of different learning abilities, strategic planning, induction program for beginning educators, laboratory equipment, team teaching initiatives, and extra reading materials to improve English competence.

There is a need for team teaching to help educators to learn from one another.

As it is shown in Table 2, all respondents (100%) indicated that there is a need for team teaching to help educators to learn from one another. Through team teaching sessions educators are helped to handle aspects that they understand better and learners get a variety of teaching methods from various educators who specialize in topics or themes they can handle best.

There is a need for consultants to be invited in the school for assistance in fostering discipline.

Table 2 further on revealed that all respondents (100%) indicated that there is a need for consultants to be invited in the school for assistance in fostering discipline. According to Knapper (2016), consultants deal with issues pertaining to child abuse, women empowerment, drug abuse, effective teaching and learning strategies that can reduce the use of a stick.

There is a need for subject teams to be formed for educators who teach the same subject.

Table 2 revealed that more than half of the respondents (78%) indicated there is a need for subject teams to be formed for educators who teach the same subject. These subject teams encourage good team spirit and improve the tone of the school and help subject heads identify educators' capabilities in particular subjects.

There is a need for educators to engage in research project(s) to get more understanding of their subject fields.

Once again, Table 2 revealed that a high proportion of the respondents (90%) indicated that there is a need for educators to engage in research project(s) to get more understanding of

their subject fields. This overwhelming majority endorsed the need for educators to engage in research project(s) or projects of investigation.

There is a need for educators to observe one another during classroom teaching.

In conclusion, Table 2 revealed that a high proportion of the respondents (94%) indicated that there is a need for educators to observe one another during classroom teaching. This shows that most principals accepted that educator observations need to be done at collegial level. The observations need to be encouraged in order to promote thorough lesson planning on the part of educators.

DISCUSSION

The study revealed that designing staff development programs have become a growing need for educators in schools. Staff development programs focus on improvement of educators' performances in their schools. Selwyn (2016) attests that the workplace, in which educators perform their duties, demands that they be informed about new instructional approaches. The study further on presented that the failure to provide staff development programs can have a negative effect on new curriculum initiatives in the country. The study also revealed that educators may need to be assisted in schools to understand learner behaviors and educators in schools may also need to be guided on how to assess learners effectively. The introduction of continuous assessment in schools requires more commitment to do the job from educators. If educators can be developed, this could ensure that the system continues smoothly without any problems.

In conclusion, the study cited the problems that school principals encounter when trying to effect staff development in their schools. These problems were ranked in the order of frequency as follows:

- ♦ Most schools are not in possession of audio-visual materials.
- ♦ Schools do not organize coaching/guidance sessions to determine educators' strengths and weaknesses.
- ♦ The teaching function and routine management tasks prevent principals from devoting attention to staff development.
- ♦ Inadequacy of office-based educators, principals and school management team to pro-

vide for various aspects of staff development.

- ♦ Some secondary schools function in isolation, and they are hardly visited by subject advisers.
- ♦ No adequate funds are available for staff development.

The abovementioned problems clearly indicated that the environment, in which educators perform their duties, demands that they increasingly become aware of what happens in the world around them. This becomes a challenge even to newly appointed educators who sometimes enter the teaching profession barely prepared for the world of work. Newly appointed educators may also experience some adaptation problems, which could eventually affect their work performance in schools.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the experiences of rural school principals in staff development in schools. The study confirms that staff development offers a process of growth to staff with regard to enhancement of knowledge, attitudes and skills. In this study it is clear that staff development offers the opportunity to improve skills for all staff members. For instance, educators in the school should be helped to improve their instructional, disciplinary, socialization and management skills. Although all the participants were supportive of staff development in schools, their experiences also illuminate challenges associated with staff development. One of the great challenges is lack of training of educators in staff development skills and strategies, as they are expected to be staff developers in their schools at all costs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

On the strength of the abovementioned conclusion, the following is recommended:

- ♦ Staff development must offer a process of growth to staff with regard to enhancement of knowledge, attitudes and skills.
- ♦ Educators must be introduced to innovations for improving the quality of classroom instruction, for instance, the use of educational television and computer-assisted instruction.

- ♦ Staff development programs must be properly designed, so that they can create an effective workforce and sound institutional image.
- ♦ Office-based educators must provide resources to schools so that educators can do the job better.
- ♦ The education district must have plans for staff development and must conduct district needs analysis for staff development.
- ♦ In conclusion, the department of education should provide funds for staff development in schools.

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