

Decentralised Strategic Planning and Capacity Development as Drivers of Leadership Performance in Schools

¹Lindiwe Millicent Johanna Skhosana, ²Asaph Moshikaro & ³Flip Schutte

Abstract

The purpose of this article is to determine the association between decentralised strategic planning and capacity development as driving forces of leadership for improved performance in public high schools in Mpumalanga Province, South Africa. This study used pragmatism as a research paradigm and followed a parallel convergent mixed methods research approach. The sample comprised 170 respondents consisting of 130 school governing body (SGB) members and 40 Department of Education (DoE) officials. Quantitative data were collected from SGB members through a survey while qualitative data were collected from participants using focus group discussions (FGDs) and individual interviews. The qualitative data were analysed using thematic analysis while SPSS software was used to analyse quantitative data. In testing the hypothesis, it was proven that decentralised strategic planning capacity in SGBs was associated with the effectiveness of strategic planning in Mpumalanga's high schools. The study revealed that the variables, capacity development and decentralised strategic planning, are well associated, and influence leadership for improved performance in high schools. The study also found that school leaders who can develop capacity are able to promote better performance in their schools. Meanwhile, the qualitative results concurrently supported the results of the quantitative study as the influence of capacity development on decentralised school planning proved to have improved school performance and effective decentralised school leadership.

Keywords: *decentralised strategic planning, capacity development, leadership performance, school management, performance drivers*

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1. Introduction

After almost three decades of democracy in South Africa, there has been a significant restructuring of the South African schooling system (Melaphi, 2015). The South African Schools Act of 1996 (SASA) was designed to create a new landscape for school governance based on state, parents, learners, school staff, and community participation and partnership (Heystek, 2011; Toon & Jensen, 2017). The SASA framework provided the basis for the current education system, introducing decentralisation through the establishment of school governing bodies (SGBs) in public schools nationwide. This decentralised approach was part of the transformation of the apartheid education model, where administrative and planning powers were vested in central government. SASA proposed the distribution of power to local governments and individual schools through democratic school governance in the form of SGBs (Department of Basic Education, 2018). In the case of secondary schools, SGBs comprised the principal, elected representatives of parents, teachers, non-teaching staff, and learners (Melaphi, 2015). Despite the government's intentions in decentralising decision-making, it remains questionable whether the process was as empowering as intended.

The SASA of 1996 recognized the importance of school leadership and management in developing a fully functional education system that would improve school performance (Department of Basic Education, 2018). While the effectiveness of school leadership is determined by various factors such as leadership structures, degree of autonomy, leadership qualifications, and competencies of school leaders (Bredenberg, 2018), the quality leadership skills and competencies are crucial to ensure effective strategy formulation and execution. Hence, effective school leadership is a critical condition for a successful school, and several factors contribute to it (Bryk et al., 2010; Saguin & Ramesh, 2020).

Decentralization of school planning modalities is considered necessary for improving overall student achievement, and it promotes effective school leadership by allowing schools and communities to take responsibility for decisions made at the local level (Dou et al., 2017). The decentralization of authority in school strategic planning ensures that school leaders become more involved in pointed strategies deemed beneficial to a specific school. Effective leadership establishes direction in collaboration with all key stakeholders of the school, including parents, students, teachers, and the community (Leer, 2016). It is argued that leaders need to learn and utilize behaviors consistent with leading diverse groups of people, and

capacity building has a role to play in ensuring that leaders learn both the skill sets and behavioral qualities needed to effectively direct organizations (Hargreaves & Ainscow, 2015).

Despite decentralization being introduced to promote effective school leadership, many schools in South Africa continue to underperform, as evidenced by the decline in overall pass rates for the 2020 matric cohort (Department of Basic Education, 2021). Several factors contribute to poor school performance, including the competence levels of school leaders to execute decentralization of school governance effectively (Romanowski & Du, 2020). A lack of capacity among SGB members is a common obstacle to the democratic functioning of SGBs, and it has been suggested that decentralization is not a guarantee of success (Motala & Pampallis, 2005). However, there is lack of published studies exploring decentralised strategic planning and capacity development as drivers of leadership performance in South African schools. Hence, this study aims to explore the links between decentralised strategic planning and capacity development as driving forces for school leaders in achieving better performance in Mpumalanga's public high schools.

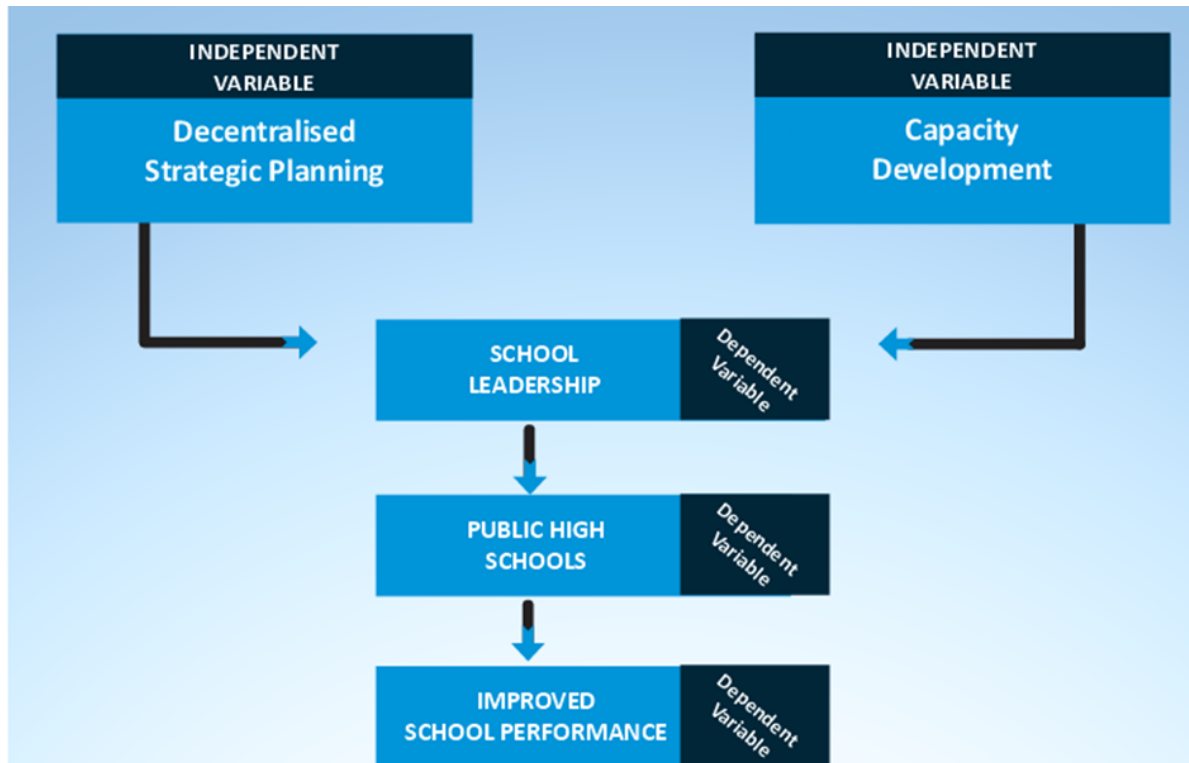
This study premises that the association of these two variables with effective leadership of public high schools is an understudied theme. Additionally, it is assumed that the research variable, capacity development as a factor influencing decentralised strategic planning in South African schools, is an area that has not been fully explored. Thus, the main objective of the study is to evaluate how the association of decentralised strategic planning and capacity development influences leadership for improved performance of public high schools in Mpumalanga.

The overall null hypothesis (H0) states that the practice of capacity building and decentralised strategic planning in schools is not associated with the level of school performance. Meanwhile, the overall alternative hypothesis (H1) is that the practice of capacity building and decentralised strategic planning in schools is associated with the level of school performance. The study also ran other supporting hypothesis tests as captured in the results section of this paper.

This study considered decentralisation and capacity development as independent variables while school leadership, public schools, and improved school performance as dependent variables, as visualised in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework



2. Literature Review

Decentralisation refers to the transfer of control of an organisation from a central location to multiple smaller ones (Kochupurackal et al., 2021). This entails that the planning and execution of strategies can occur in various locations rather than just one. However, for this to be successful, capacity-building is essential. Capacity-building, as defined by Gilmer et al. (2021), is a process that enhances an organisation's ability to accomplish its objectives or mission by employing effective management practices, ensuring strong governance, and prioritising performance assessment and achievement. It is, therefore, an initiative aimed at reinforcing an organisation's infrastructure.

2.1. Capacity development to support decentralised strategic planning

Capacity development within an educational system is aimed at enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of education personnel (Jacobson et al., 2011; Yavuz & Robinson, 2018). Recent research in Tanzania by Yohana (2017) examined the impact of public high school heads' capacity development on students' academic performance. The study revealed that school management seminars for principals and teachers were crucial in enhancing the leadership skills of principals, improving their supervision of daily academic duties, and

strengthening their planning and management of school leadership. Dahnke (2019) confirmed these findings, highlighting the need for schools to address both technical and adaptive elements of change to effectively engage in strategic planning and develop resilience. To ensure consistent performance and execution of decentralised strategic plans, performance management tracking systems were also deemed necessary. According to Lvonon (2017), decentralisation has a significant and positive long-term impact on school and community success.

In another geographical setting, Hert (2010) conducted a study in the United States, examining the impact of capacity development in urban schools. The results indicated that principals viewed professional development as a valuable experience, contributing to their effectiveness as school leaders. The study findings support the use of a leadership capacity development programme as a tool for supporting and developing urban school principals (Clear, 2015).

2.2. Association of strategic planning and capacity development on effective leadership

In South Africa, Vyas-Doorgapersad (2012) conducted a study on decentralisation and capacity building, with a particular focus on paradigm shifts in local self-governance. The study revealed that a lack of administrative capacity and complementary resources hindered the anticipated efficiency that decentralisation promised. To ensure the successful implementation of decentralisation policies, Vyas-Doorgapersad (2012) argued that it was essential for the national government to develop the required capacity for local authorities to undertake and fulfill their assigned responsibilities. If capacity is adequately developed, rural schools could potentially benefit significantly from controlling their own destinies, provided that the right competencies are available to school leadership.

Capacity development activities are comprised of three basic components: the development of basic knowledge and skills to effectively contribute to educational development programmes; the development of an appropriate institutional framework to function efficiently; and the development of a favourable policy environment (Nikoçeviq, 2020). Research on decentralisation demonstrates that it, in and of itself, is insufficient to transform the way a school is managed, and that school autonomy from within, combined with management capacity development, is necessary (Bruns et al., 2011; Honig & Rainet, 2011). Therefore, the ultimate objectives of capacity development include inclusive participatory

organizational governance, improved effectiveness, and increased efficiency at all levels (Becker, 2017).

2.3. Association between capacity development and organisation performance

Capacity building is a multifaceted process that involves enhancing the abilities of individuals, groups, organisations, and communities to perform core functions, resolve problems, and achieve objectives sustainably (United Nations Development Programme, 2018). According to Millar and Doherty (2016), capacity building encompasses the development of knowledge, attitude, and skills of the workforce, enabling them to achieve both short- and long-term objectives at both organisational and personal levels. This view is supported by Nikoçeviq (2020), who contends that capacity building should address the inadequacies of all employees, equipping them with the necessary skills and attitudes to perform their tasks effectively. Capacity building initiatives have been found to have a positive impact on employees' performance (Ahmad et al., 2015). As a planned, system-wide effort to foster cooperative performance, capacity building can improve organisational effectiveness. Furthermore, to remain competitive, cooperative organisations must be efficient and effective (Prakash, 2011).

2.4. Association between capacity development and leadership competence

The construct of leadership competence encompasses three distinct components: personality traits, knowledge and skill, and behaviour (Cumberland et al., 2016). Cumberland and colleagues aggregated knowledge and skill together, using an integrated evaluation tool. Prior to this, Seemiller and Cook (2014) defined leadership competencies as "knowledge, values, abilities, and behaviour that aid an individual in contributing to, or successfully undertaking, a role or task." To ensure that leaders learn the necessary skill sets and behavioural traits for effective organizational management, the concept of capacity building is critical, and it should be executed through careful and successful efforts.

The concept of capacity building is meant to improve productivity, thereby contributing to overall organisational performance (Turner & Short, 2013; Mkoka et al., 2015). It is also intended to teach leaders the necessary knowledge and skills for effective management (Hargreaves & Ainscow, 2015). Empirical studies have demonstrated that capacity building that provides leaders with new knowledge and skills can empower them and lead to better performance (Nankumbi et al., 2011; Asante et al., 2012). Conversely, leaders who do not have access to professional development opportunities have been found to be inadequate in

personnel affairs, staffing, and administration, resulting in ineffective leadership and an inability to create enabling environments for followers in complex and demanding environments (Chanturidze et al., 2015; Mkoka et al., 2015).

A lack of resources can present a significant obstacle to developing leadership capacity, which can, in turn, affect organisational performance. While various arguments have been advanced to illustrate the efficacy of capacity development in enhancing organisational performance, only a few empirical studies have investigated the association between leadership, capacity development, and performance.

3. Research Design and Methods

The present study adopted a pragmatist research philosophy, acknowledging the lack of a universal approach suitable for every research problem (Saunders et al., 2012). A mixed methods research design was utilized, specifically a parallel convergent design where both qualitative and quantitative data were collected and analyzed concurrently (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2010). The research was conducted in Mpumalanga schools.

According to the National Senior Certificate Report (2018), there are 556 registered high schools in Mpumalanga, including public and private schools. Using random sampling, the study focused on the 432 public high schools in the province, with a sample population of 10%. Probability sampling was employed to select participating schools and survey respondents, with a lottery simple random technique used to choose eleven schools from each of the four districts in Mpumalanga. Two members of the school governing bodies were randomly selected from each of the 44 schools, yielding a total of 80 school governing body members. Additionally, purposive sampling was used to select 40 SGB members from the Nkangala district to participate in interviews and FGDs, resulting in a qualitative sample of 50 participants.

Table 2

Demographic selection of participants (N=170)

Participants	Population	Instrument
Department of Education	40	Questionnaire
School Governing Body	80	Questionnaire
	40	Focus group discussion
	10	Interviews
Total	N=170	

The research adopted a mixed method approach and employed two surveys, one directed to officials from the Department of Education and another to SGB members. Structured questionnaires with closed-ended questions were used to collect data in both surveys. Qualitative data was gathered from 60 SGB members through FGDs and individual interviews. The FGDs comprised four groups, with ten participants in each group. The researcher moderated the discussions, which lasted for a minimum of 60 minutes and no longer than 80 minutes. Face-to-face individual interviews were conducted with ten participants. All FGDs were recorded with the agreement of the participants. Prior to any discussion, all participants were required to sign an informed consent form, which was preceded by formal discussions explaining the ethical considerations and objectives of the study. Key aspects of research ethics, including clearance from the university's ethics committee, the right of participants to withdraw from the discussion at any time, and the right of participants not to be exposed to any form of harm, were thoroughly discussed. All participants were voluntary and fully informed of the study's objectives.

A preliminary study was conducted to ensure the content validity of the questionnaires and interview items by testing their wording and making necessary adjustments prior to administering them to the study participants. In addition, the construct validity of the research instruments was evaluated during the pilot study to ensure that they were accurately measuring the intended data. The pilot study was conducted in three schools that were not included in the final study, using a sample of 12 SGB members. A small sample size was used to assess the stability of data collection procedures.

Following the pilot study, items that were found to be unclear were rephrased to enhance clarity and relevance, while items that were considered inappropriate or overly complex were revised. To assess the reliability of the questionnaire items, Cronbach Alpha coefficients were employed. The Cronbach Alpha coefficient estimates the proportion of variance in test scores that are consistent or can be attributed to true score variance (Cronbach, 1970). The Cronbach Alfa coefficients of 0.72, 0.74, and 0.78 indicated that the research instruments were suitable for the intended research.

4. Results and Discussion

The quantitative analysis utilised many statistical tests including correlation analysis to review the degree of linear relations among variables and regression analysis to determine the degree of causation some variable had on others. Furthermore, the chi-square tests were run to

test the hypothesis set in the initial stages of the study. In this section the quantitative data is summarised.

4.1. Decentralised Strategic Planning and Capacity Development Relationship Influence on School Performance

A Pearson's Chi-square test of association hypothesis testing was carried out at a chosen significance of $\alpha = 0.04$. The test was carried out to determine strategic planning and Capacity Development association on school performance.

H₀: Practice of capacity building and decentralised strategic planning in schools is not associated with the level of school performance.

H₁: Practice of capacity building and decentralised strategic planning in schools is associated with the level of school performance.

Table 2

Chi-Square test on Decentralised Strategic Planning and Capacity Development Relationship

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	96.148 ^a	4	.000
Likelihood Ratio	67.778	4	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	11.086	1	.001
N of Valid Cases	80		

a. 4 cells (44.4%) have expected count less than 4. The minimum expected count is .61.

The results showed a Chi-square test value of 11.086 (n=80) and a degree of freedom of df = 1. The test showed a p-value of $\alpha = 0.01$, $p < 0.04$.

Decision: Since the p-value is less than the chosen significant level of 0.04, the null hypothesis is rejected and therefore it can be concluded that there is a strong association between practice of decentralised strategic planning and capacity development on the improvement of school performance.

4.2. Capacity building on DSP and effectiveness of school leadership

The study tested the association between capacity building as a mitigating factor and the effectiveness in school leadership under a decentralised strategic planning dispensation. The first test using Chi-Square was run on SPSS on the association between capacity development on strategic planning and effectiveness in decentralised strategic planning in public schools. The following hypothesis was proposed for testing. The test was on the SGB sample (n=80).

H₀: Capacity development on SP by schools has no association with the effectiveness of DSP in schools.

H₁: Capacity development on SP by schools has association with the effectiveness of DSP in schools.

Table 3

Chi-Square test on Capacity building on DSP and effectiveness of school leadership

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	80.000 ^a	2	.021
Likelihood Ratio	47.474	2	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	66.859	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	80		

a. 2 cells (33.3%) have expected count less than 4. The minimum expected count is .61.

The results showed a test value of 80.000 (n=80) and a degree of freedom of df = 2. The test showed a p-value of $\alpha = 0.021$, thus $p > 0.04$.

Decision: Since the p-value ($p = 0.021$) is less than the chosen significant level of $p = 0.04$ the null hypothesis is accepted. There is enough evidence to support the hypothesis that SGB members believe that capacity development on strategic planning by schools has influence the effectiveness of DSP in schools. It is therefore concluded that SGB members believe that capacity development in strategic planning on SGB members influences the effectiveness of school leadership in implementing decentralised strategic planning.

4.3. Extent of public schools' role in Strategic Planning under Decentralised School Planning policy on effective leadership in schools

The study tested from the DoE sample (n=40) using Chi-Square if there is no association between the extent of public schools' role in strategic planning and the level of effectiveness of leadership in schools.

H₀: The extent of public schools' role in strategic planning under decentralised strategic planning policy does not affect the level of effectiveness of leadership in schools.

H₁: The extent of public schools' role in strategic planning under decentralised strategic planning policy affects the level of effectiveness of leadership in schools.

Table 4

Chi-Square test on extent of public schools' role in strategic planning and school effectiveness.

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	8.388 ^a	2	.015
Likelihood Ratio	9.813	2	.007
Linear-by-Linear Association	8.162	1	.004
N of Valid Cases	40		

a. 2 cells (33.3%) have expected count less than 4. The minimum expected count is 2.24.

The results showed a Chi-square test value of 8.388 (n=40) and a degree of freedom of $df = 2$. The test showed a p-value of $\alpha = 0.015$, $p < 0.04$.

Decision: Since the p-value ($p = 0.015$) is less than the chosen significant level of $p = 0.05$, the null hypothesis is rejected. There is no evidence to support that the extent of public schools' role in strategic planning does not affect the level of effectiveness of public schools' management. The alternative hypothesis is accepted, suggesting that the extent of the role of public schools in strategic planning impacts positively on the effectiveness of leadership in schools.

The same test was conducted on the SGB members sample (n=80) and produced a test value of 27.796, $df = 3$ and a $p = 0.000$. The outcome between the two samples corroborates with each other. It is therefore concluded that SGB members and DoE officials concur that the

extent of public schools role in strategic planning influences leadership effectiveness. Table below presents the Chi-Square test results on the SGB members' sample.

Table 5

Chi-Square test on public schools' role in strategic planning influences leadership effectiveness

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	27.796 ^a	3	.000
Likelihood Ratio	33.743	3	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	16.098	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	80		

a. 3 cells (37.5%) have expected count less than 4. The minimum expected count is 1.92.

4.4. SGB members' competency level in effective DSP

Table 6

Correlation between SGB members' understanding of Strategic Planning and their competence to formulate strategic plans

		Not understanding decentralised Strategic Planning	SGB has little competence to formulate Strategic Planning
Kendall's Tau-b	Not understanding decentralised Strategic Planning	Correlation Coefficient	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.627**
		N	.000
		N	80
SGB has little competence to formulate Strategic Planning		Correlation Coefficient	.627**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	1.000
		N	.000
		N	80

***.* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The relationship between the level of understanding of strategic planning by SGB members and their competency to perform their role was analysed using Kendall's tau-b correlation coefficient. A 2-tailed test at a 0.01 level resulted to a significant correlation coefficient of 0.627 (n=80). This finding indicates that a higher level of understanding of strategic planning processes has a positive impact on the competency level of SGB members.

Those SGB members with a low level of understanding of strategic planning are less likely to be competent in the formulation of strategic plans. It was found that the majority of the SGB members in this study had both low understanding and low competence in decentralized strategic planning. This is consistent with Sindhvad's (2021) suggestion that school leaders who are not provided with training often lack competence and are inefficient in executing decentralized school management systems. Bhue and Paltasingh (2020) similarly observed in India that some school leaders lacked competence and were unaware of their roles, responsibilities, and powers under the new decentralized system school management policy.

Table 7

SGB members' role clarification by SASA effect on SGB members' competency in strategic planning

Model Summary^b				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.149 ^a	.022	.010	.782

a. Predictors: (Constant), Awareness of roles in strategic planning by SGB members

b. Dependent Variable: SGB members' level of competency in strategic planning

R value shows a simple insignificant degree correlation between the variables of 0.149. The R-square shows that the total variation in the dependent variable cannot be strongly explained by the independent variable by a small degree of 2.2%. It is therefore concluded that the level of awareness of strategic roles by SGB members does not significantly impact the level of SGB members' competency level in strategic planning.

Table 8

Effect of capacity building on SGB members' effectiveness in strategic planning

Model Summary^b				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.820 ^a	.777	.155	.403

a. Predictors: (Constant), Capacity building provision by the DoE to SGB members

b. Dependent Variable: SGB members effective and competent in Strategic Planning

R value shows a simple high degree correlation between the variables of 0.82. The R-square shows that the total variation in the dependent variable can be strongly explained by the

independent variable by a large degree of 77.7%. It is therefore concluded that the degree of capacity building strongly impacts the level of SGB members' effectiveness in strategic planning.

4.5. Thematic Analysis

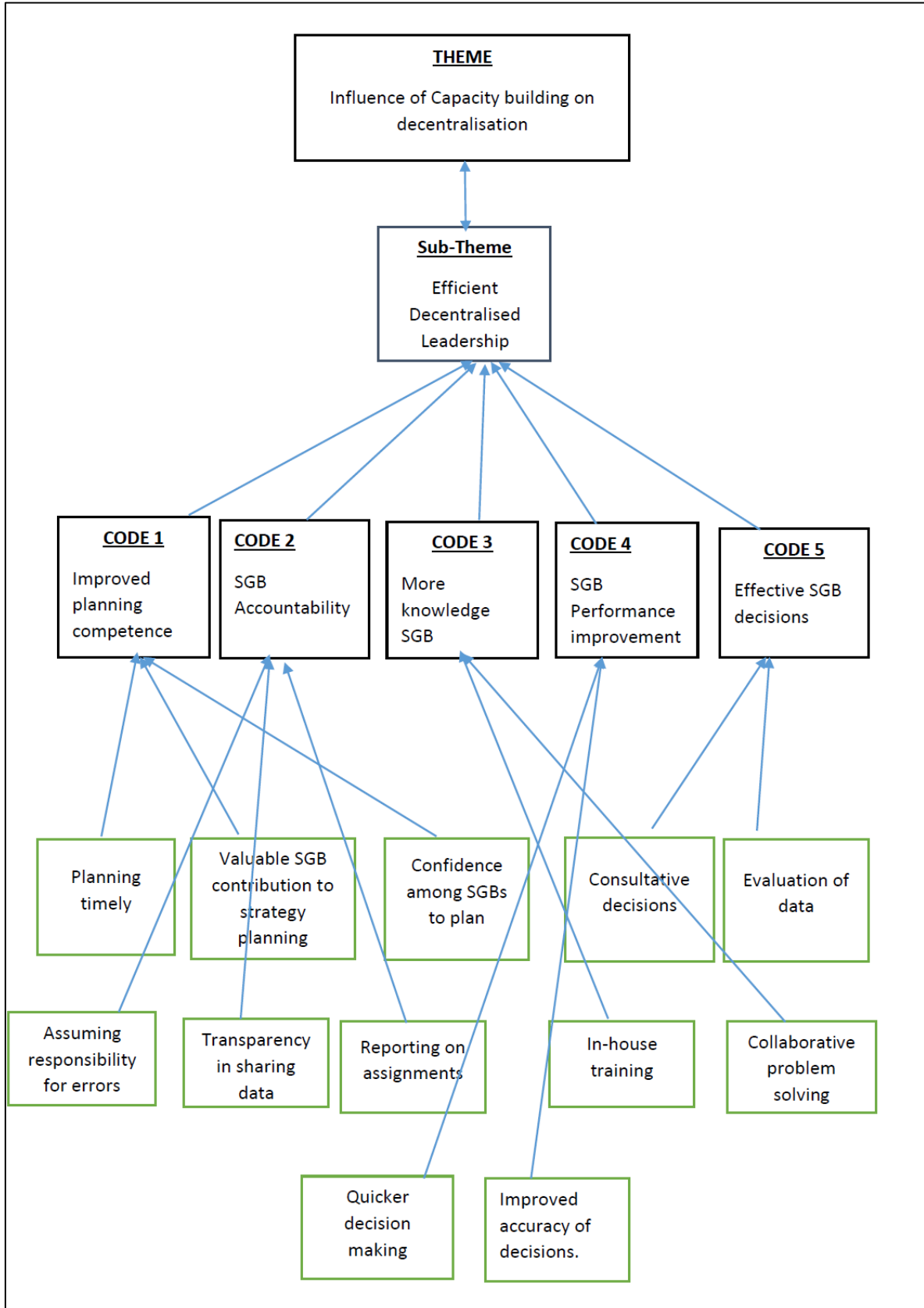
The study utilized four focus group discussions and in-depth interviews to gather data from SGB members in the Nkangala District. Each focus group consisted of ten participants who held varying positions within the SGBs. The in-depth interviews were conducted with ten participants from the same district, with all necessary precautions taken to adhere to health guidelines such as social distancing, wearing protective gear like face masks and shields, and avoiding physical contact. The Nkangala District was chosen for convenience as it was the same district where the researcher resided, and with the COVID-19 pandemic coinciding with the data collection period, it was easier to coordinate interviews within the district without the travel restrictions imposed during the lockdown period.

The study findings are presented thematically and sub-thematically, based on an analysis of the data gathered from the FGDs and in-depth interviews. The presentation of the data is reported based on the evidence collected, and where necessary, verbatim accounts are included to support the findings.

Coding. In order to initiate the process of coding, the researcher thoroughly reviewed the data, section by section, guided by the research questions. The process involved identifying recurring concepts and relevant thought patterns in each transcript, followed by adding a note with the corresponding key phrase next to each pattern. Phrases were highlighted with a text marker on paper, and keywords were added in the margin. Figure 2 illustrates the process of how codes were developed and contributed to the theme of the influence of capacity building on decentralization. During the analysis of the transcript data, several codes were developed, including SGB accountability, increased knowledge, better performance, effective decision making, and competence in strategic planning, which contributed to the identification of the subtheme of efficient decentralised school leadership, ultimately leading to the development of the main theme.

Figure 2

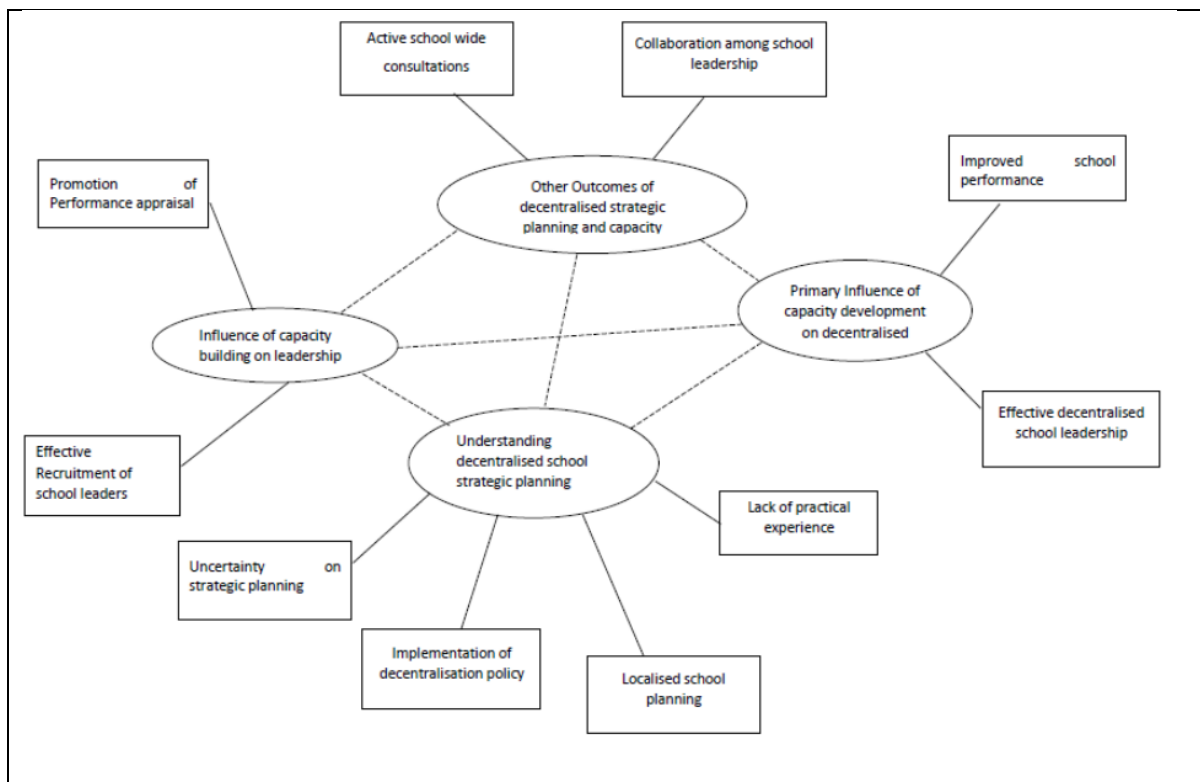
Development of codes and themes



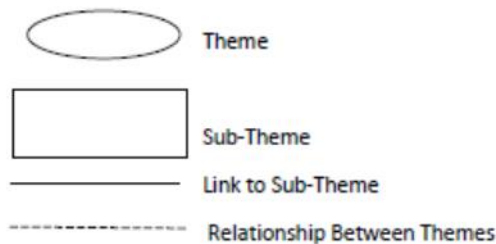
Reflexive Thematic Analysis. Thematic analysis means that by coding insights, the study will be able to identify themes, patterns emerging across multiple data sets across multiple participants' interviews. Reflexive thematic analysis is an approach to analyzing qualitative data to answer broad or narrow research questions about people's experiences, views and perceptions, and representations of a given phenomenon (Lyons & Coyle, 2016).

Figure 3

Reflexive Thematic map capturing four themes



Legend:



In figure 3, the relationship among the themes is established. Based on the evidence of the lived experience described in the transcript, the understanding of the concept of decentralised school planning is pivotal in the functionality of SGBs. The roping in of capacity development is seen as having tremendous influence on school leadership and this promotes effective decentralisation in schools.

Table 9
Themes and subthemes for qualitative findings

Themes	Subthemes
Understanding decentralised school strategic planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Localised school planning • Implementation of decentralisation policy • Uncertainty on strategic planning • Lack of practical experience
Influence of capacity development on decentralised school planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved school performance • Effective decentralised school leadership
Influence of capacity building on leadership for effective performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promotion of Performance appraisal • Effective Recruitment of school leaders
Other outcomes of decentralised strategic planning and capacity development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Active school wide consultations • Collaboration among school leadership

4.6. Discussion

The analysis conducted suggests that the alternative hypothesis, which proposes that capacity building has an impact on the effectiveness of SGBs in strategic planning should be adopted. The test showed a value of 80.000 (n=80) and a degree of freedom of $df = 2$. The p-value was $\alpha = 0.021$, indicating that $p > 0.04$. As the p-value ($p = 0.021$) is lower than the selected level of significance of $p = 0.05$, the null hypothesis is accepted. Therefore, it can be concluded that members of SGBs believe that capacity building for SGB members in strategic planning has an influence on the effectiveness of school leadership in implementing decentralised strategic planning. This finding is consistent with Yamoah and Maiyo (2013), who argue that capacity building is crucial for promoting leadership skills and organisational improvement.

A Pearson's Chi-square test of association hypothesis was conducted with a significance level of $\alpha = 0.04$ to determine whether the practice of capacity building and decentralised strategic planning in schools is associated with the level of school performance. The test resulted in the acceptance of the alternative hypothesis, which states that the practice of capacity building and decentralised strategic planning in schools is associated with the level of school performance. The test showed a value of 11.086 (n=80) and a degree of freedom of $df = 1$. The p-value was $\alpha = 0.01$, indicating that $p < 0.04$. As the p-value is lower than the selected level of significance of 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected, and it can be concluded

that there is a strong association between the practice of decentralised strategic planning and capacity development on the improvement of school performance. This finding is consistent with Bridges et al. (2014), who suggest that capacity development is at the heart of school performance improvement in decentralised settings. The research also supports the idea that training, development, and involvement of school leaders in active decentralised strategic planning are the best ways to improve competence (Rwiza, 2016; Bhue & Paltasingh, 2020).

Based on the FGDs, it is generally believed that when schools adopt decentralised school planning and their leaders are well trained and equipped with the necessary capacities to implement the policy, school performance improves. This finding is consistent with Bridges et al. (2014), who argue that for school leadership to develop total capacity that addresses a school's needs and leads to tangible improvements, the school must be genuinely autonomous. Bain et al. (2011) also suggest that comprehensive capacity building, involving coherent, deliberate strategies enacted at the whole school level to positively influence the knowledge, skills, and priorities of individuals and the school as a collective, will result in positive change in the performance of the whole school.

Some participants in the focus group discussions suggested the need to establish a structured appraisal system to gauge the performance of members, which was viewed as necessary to improve the performance of the SGB. Similarly, Dahnke (2019) investigated the use of strategic planning and performance metrics to deliver continuous improvement efforts in large urban school districts. The study found that schools must address technical and adaptive elements of change to be effective at strategic planning and be resilient. Additionally, there was a need for a robust performance management tracking system to ensure that school leaders are consistent in their performance and execution of decentralised strategic plans. The study also found that school leadership needed to be actively prepared to adjust and align their strategies to achieve continuous improvement.

Chi-square tests the null hypothesis that the variables are independent. The test compares the observed data to a model that distributes the data according to the expectation that the variables are independent. Wherever the observed data do not fit the model, the likelihood that the variables are dependent becomes stronger, thus proving the null hypothesis incorrect. Among many statistical methods available to test hypotheses, the Chi-square test was found to be sufficient to determine acceptance or rejection of the hypotheses set in

determining the association of decentralised strategic planning and capacity development as drivers of leadership and performance in schools.

The first Pearson's Chi-square test of association hypothesis testing was carried out at a chosen significance of $\alpha = 0.04$. The test was carried out to determine strategic planning and capacity development association on school performance. Since the p-value is less than the chosen significant level of 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected, and it can therefore be concluded that there is a strong association between the practice of decentralised strategic planning and capacity development on the improvement of school performance. Tyagi (2011) argues that beyond orientation, intensive involvement of new school leaders in the process of planning and management is essential to build and enhance school leaders' capacities for improved performance.

The second hypothesis test was conducted to ascertain whether the involvement level of the Department of Education (DoE) in the implementation of decentralised strategic plans had an impact on the effectiveness of schools' strategic planning. The null hypothesis was rejected as the p-value was lower than the chosen significant level of 0.05. This suggests that there is significant evidence to indicate that the involvement of the DoE in the implementation of strategic plans affects the effectiveness of schools' strategic planning. Consequently, it can be concluded that decentralised strategic planning practices in schools have a positive impact on effective leadership in high schools in Mpumalanga. Based on this analysis, it is reasonable to reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis. These findings align with Lavonen's (2017) research on the governance of decentralisation in Finnish education, which concluded that decentralisation can have a considerable long-term positive impact on the success of schools and communities.

The study aimed to determine whether there was a significant relationship between the category of SGB members and their involvement in the school strategic planning process. The study employed a one-way ANOVA at a 0.05 significance level and 95% confidence interval to test whether there was a significant difference in the mean involvement of each SGB member category - principal, teacher, or general SGB member not working at the school. The independent variable was the position/category of the SGB member, and the dependent variable was their involvement in the strategic planning of the school. The results showed that the null hypothesis - that there is no significant difference between the means of the three

categories of SGB members in terms of their involvement in the school strategic planning process - was rejected. The findings indicated that SGB members who are not working full-time at the school are less involved in strategic planning than those who work at the school. This finding is in line with existing research that recommends training, development, and involvement of school leaders in active decentralised strategic planning as the best approach to enhancing competence (Rwiza, 2016; Bhue & Paltasingh, 2020).

5. Conclusion

The present study finds that there is a strong association between capacity development and decentralised strategic planning, which significantly influences the leadership of high schools. The evidence suggests that school leaders with access to capacity development are able to promote better performance in their schools. Additionally, the adoption of capacity development in decentralised strategic planning results in positive outcomes, such as wide stakeholder consultation and collaboration among school leaders. It is therefore recommended that access to opportunities for school leaders to develop their capacity be improved at both the school and provincial levels, by subsidizing strategic planning and leadership programmes.

Based on the strong association between capacity development and successful decentralised school strategic planning, it is recommended that all SGBs in South African schools utilizing the decentralised planning system should undergo capacity development programmes tailored to their needs. The DoE may incorporate such programmes into its decentralisation policy, which could include comprehensive orientation, recruitment and selection of SGB members, ethics in leadership, and monitoring and evaluation of strategic plans. This would ensure that SGB members improve their competence from the outset.

To measure the effort and improvement of specific SGBs over time, the DoE should design a national performance management framework for all decentralised schools and mandate the adoption of a specific performance measurement tool within the framework to measure the performance of SGBs consistently and fairly over set periods. Furthermore, the DoE may allocate a budget for training and development to build the capacities of new and existing SGB members, which must be properly accounted for and audited to ensure that the objectives are achieved.

Finally, the DoE, in collaboration with schools, should refine the recruitment processes for SGB members and oversee the activities and plans of their schools. It may be advisable to set basic competence requirements for joining an SGB, which would be the first critical step in improving the quality of contributions made by SGBs given their responsibility for formulating and driving autonomous school plans.

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