

Challenges and experiences of professional development: Perspectives of secondary school principals

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Abstract

Principals are entrusted with a significant responsibility to manage schools and encounter numerous challenges in running them effectively, including limited access to ongoing professional development, which hampers their ability to adapt to changing educational demands and lead with confidence. Professional development is critical to succeed in their roles as leaders since it advances their knowledge and enhances their job performance. This qualitative study explored the realities of professional development for secondary school principals in Lesotho. The paper was grounded in the interpretive qualitative paradigm, supported by constructivism, and used phenomenology as a research design. Purposive sampling was used to identify the participants, and semi-structured interviews were conducted with five principals from five secondary schools. Thematic data analysis revealed that principals had a restricted understanding of their professional development programmes, that there was a lack of in-place programmes for school principals, and that they were expected to support professional development programs in their schools. These findings revealed the passive participation of school principals as they still needed to gain skills and knowledge that could enhance their leadership. The study recommends that the Ministry of Education and Training implement structured and continuous leadership development programmes tailored to the practical challenges faced by school principals. These programmes should include mentorship, peer collaboration, and context-specific training modules. Additionally, it is recommended that principals proactively initiate school-based professional development initiatives, such as peer learning communities, in-service workshops, and reflective practice sessions, aligned with their specific leadership and instructional needs.

Keywords: *constructivism, complexity leadership theory, professional development, professional learning, school leadership*

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1. Introduction

Professional development is referred to as a process of acquiring skills, knowledge, and attitudes for improved performance in the workplace. The professional development of school principals has been an issue of discussion in many countries worldwide. For example, Karam et al. (2020) note that school principals should be provided with advanced skills to perform their responsibilities and functions. Nasreen and Odhiambo (2018) state that schools in Pakistan are going through a transformation phase where the National Education Policy (NEC) emphasizes the importance of implementing ongoing professional development for school principals.

The principals' professional development has also been an issue of interest in Nigeria. Peretomode and Dinzei (2019) explored public and secondary school principals' professional development in Delta State. The findings reveal the need for an ongoing assessment of school principals' areas of weakness to frequently organise appropriate professional development programmes to enable them to remedy the areas of deficiency and be able to deal with the changes and challenges of this time. In South Africa, Maphoto (2018) confirmed that school principals need professional development. The study found that the Department of Basic Education seemed reluctant to ensure that principals are professionally developed. Therefore, this encourages principals to informally establish self-directed professional development strategies. To transform education and meet the needs of any developing country, such as Lesotho, it is important to capacitate principals with relevant competencies to address the growing challenges through the appropriate implementation of professional development. According to Mdodana-Zide and Mokhele-Makgalwa (2021), South Africa is no exception to the developments in education reforms; hence, the establishment of several professional development initiatives to advance teachers in schools. As indicated by these scholars, the teacher-led cluster is considered one illustration of the generally employed intervention programmes of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) in the context of South Africa for urban as well as rural schools.

In Lesotho, school principals play a critical role in managing teaching and learning processes, yet they often face significant challenges related to access, quality, and relevance of professional development (PD) opportunities. One major issue is the lack of structured and continuous leadership training, particularly for newly appointed principals who frequently assume leadership roles without prior preparation (Moloi, 2007). Most PD programmes are ad

hoc, infrequent, and centrally designed, making them less responsive to the specific needs of principals working in diverse contexts such as rural, resource-constrained schools (Mahlomaholo, 2010). Moreover, the education system in Lesotho is still highly centralized, leaving limited room for schools to develop context-specific, school-based PD initiatives. Principals also struggle with heavy administrative loads, leaving little time for self-directed professional growth.

According to the Ministry of Education and Training (2018), the following key competencies must be acquired by the principals to effectively perform their roles: leadership, organisational skills, human resource skills, vision, strategic planning, skills to manage the finances, and complex information systems and information skills. However, as expressed by Heystek and Madalińska-Michalak (2023), the education system still embraces the conventional notion that appointment for the position of the school principalship requires knowledgeable and experienced teachers as well-suited candidates, and Lesotho is not an exception as school principals are considered leaders as well as managers (Mphutlane, 2018). Despite the critical role that school principals play in driving quality education, many secondary school principals in Lesotho lack access to structured, continuous, and contextually relevant professional development (PD) (Ralebese, 2019). While educational leadership is central to improving teaching and learning outcomes, principals are often appointed without formal school management or instructional leadership training. The professional development opportunities that do exist are infrequent, centrally designed, and poorly aligned with the diverse needs of school leaders (Maphoto, 2018).

The disconnect between policy expectations and practical realities leaves many principals ill-prepared to navigate the complex challenges of modern school leadership, including curriculum reform, staff development, learner discipline, and community engagement. Furthermore, limited funding, logistical barriers, and high workloads constrain principals' ability to participate in or initiate PD initiatives (Sefeane, 2013; Kaphe, 2017; Mphutlane, 2018). The absence of school-based, peer-supported, and practice-oriented PD models exacerbates the problem, contributing to stagnation in leadership capacity and hindering efforts to meet national education goals and international commitments such as Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4). Kaphe (2017) and Sefeane (2013) suggest the need for continuous professional support by the Lesotho Ministry of Education and Training to enhance effective school management. The study, therefore, aims to explore the realities of

professional development for Lesotho secondary school principals. It is against this problem that this paper responds to this question: What professional development challenges are experienced by secondary school principals in Lesotho?

2. Literature Review

Ekinci and Acar (2019) define professional development as a technique used to support the improvement of knowledge, values, and attitudes. According to Antley (2020), professional development is referred to as continuing education and career training after being employed in an organization to assist in the development of new skills to stay updated on current trends. Principals' professional development has generally been a concern globally (Jayaweera et al., 2021; Rodriguez et al., 2021). During the 1990s, in the United States, numerous participatory research versions were intended for school principals to explain the challenges they met in their daily practice. School principals, like teachers, require ongoing professional development in line with changing demands in the education system (Acton, 2021; Pentang, 2022).

According to Ng and Szeto (2016), there is a critical need to equip novice principals with opportunities for continuous professional development to face the effects of reform and globalisation on school advancement. In Hong Kong, for instance, the study by Wong and Liu (2018) revealed the significance of equipping the newly appointed principals with the administrative and human resources skills to manage school finances, handle legal matters, and manage curriculum and leadership of classroom instruction (Wong & Liu, 2018). In line with this view, Campbell et al. (2017) stressed the implication of providing principals with external support and mentoring at various career phases. Networking with other principals is regarded as the most significant part of high-quality professional development to critically reflect and assist in identifying gaps in skills and knowledge (Service & Thornton, 2021).

In Australia, Riley et al. (2021) explored the impact of COVID-19 on school principals, and the recommendations have been to consider the professional development of school principals. This observation aligns with Harris and Jones (2020), who opined that several available training programmes and courses before COVID-19 were insufficient to conquer the contemporary problems facing principals. The COVID-19 situation demonstrated that schools require leaders who can take more rapid and strong actions and take responsibility for the consequences and uncertainty during the pandemic. In Kazakhstan, school principals' professional development was not given much attention (Sum, 2022). This had a negative

effect on their practice of educational leadership as school principals. However, the advent of the coronavirus pandemic exposed the need for school principals to be equipped with skills to deal with unpredictable situations.

School principals work under a lot of pressure to achieve goals and offer individual learners support to achieve instructional goals. Therefore, professional development and ongoing education for principals are significant to enable them to succeed in their career goals and improve their practice (Antley, 2020). Professional development for principals is directly linked to the process of continuous learning to enhance knowledge and skills (Mourao, 2017). According to Kheswa et al. (2014), the professional development of principals facilitates the achievement and attainment of educational goals for learners, performance improvement for teachers, and overall school effectiveness. Therefore, principals' professional development incorporates numerous stages such as enrolment, induction, preparation programme, licensure, as well as ongoing support (Gordon, 2020; Steinberg & Yang, 2020). As posited by these scholars, effective initiation programmes for novice principals encompass coaching, mentoring, and participating in collaborative clusters and peer networks to exchange thoughts and perspectives with co-workers. The scholars further demonstrate that programmes such as coaching and mentoring are essential and need to be given special attention in the appointment of mentors to deliver professional development. However, Gordon (2020), and Steinberg and Yang (2020) suggest that job-embedded support and training are required for several principals.

The study of Okeh and Meenyinikor (2019) explored professional development packages of novice principals. The findings revealed that novice principals participated in professional development programmes such as mentoring, peer observation, conferences, staff meetings, and training on the job. The study indicated that the effects of professional development packages on the newly selected principals contributed to their effectiveness in the management of the schools. In support of this view, Anuna Magnus et al. (2019) also conducted research in Nigeria investigating the leadership needs of principals to enhance the effective management of secondary schools in Rivers State. The findings exposed that principals require skills for effective communication. In addition, the findings revealed the need for teachers' and principals' involvement in inspecting schools, administration, and ongoing professional training. The study further exposed that there is a need for provisions of continuous professional development for principals to allow them to lead schools effectively.

The issue of professional development for school principals has been a global concern in various countries, including Lesotho. This study, therefore, aims to explore the challenges of professional development for secondary school principals in Lesotho.

This study was guided by the constructivist theory of Jean Piaget. Constructivism theory provides a conceptualisation of the perceptions of principals on their professional development through their interaction with their social contexts. Piaget's (1973) constructivist theory emphasises that individuals create knowledge and produce meaning based on their experiences. According to this theory, individuals actively receive knowledge and form new knowledge from previous forms of knowledge. Nugroho et al. (2024) assert that constructivism may be used as a strategy to support professional development, and further to this, Cole and Duffy (2024) argue that the constructivist theory is an appropriate model for professional development as it acknowledges participants as experts. Constructivism was used to guide principals' construction of their perceptions from their settings. The constructivist theory is relevant in this study since it stresses that the construction of knowledge occurs when individuals relate to their natural environment. In this study, the principals' perceptions of their professional development needs were constructed from their interaction with the school environment.

3. Methodology

The study employed a phenomenological qualitative research approach in seeking to understand secondary school principals' perceptions of their professional development needs. School leadership is a lived experience of principals, and professional development is a reality that is required in their daily leadership practice. The study used semi-structured interviews to gather data on the realities of professional development for principals. This technique allowed probing, so we gathered enough data that responded to the research question. The research sites were five secondary schools in Lesotho from one purposively selected education district, and the participants were five purposively selected secondary school principals, one from each school. While the small sample size may limit generalisability, the study prioritised depth and contextual understanding. The findings of the study offer valuable insights that may be transferable to similar educational settings through purposive sampling, rich qualitative data, and participant validation. The participants were deemed suitable for this study due to their leadership roles and responsibilities within their respective schools. The education district was

purposively selected to ensure that the study focused on a context that is both relevant and information-rich in relation to the research objectives, and thematic data analysis was used to analyse the data. Pseudonyms were used to ensure the confidentiality of the identities of participants and research sites. Through interviewing different participants on the same phenomenon, we achieved triangulation, as guided by Denzin (2012). Data were analysed using thematic analysis by identifying, analysing, and interpreting themes as they emerged from the qualitative data. The tables below provide an overview of the research sites' demographic details and the research participants' profiles.

Table 1*Research sites*

School	District	Number of Deputy Principals	Number of DHs	Number of Teachers	Number of Learners	Number of classrooms
School 1	District 1	0	2	14	332	13
School 2	District 1	1	8	45	1038	26
School 3	District 1	1	4	33	814	17
School 4	District 1	1	6	33	850	18
School 5	District 1	1	4	29	836	16

Keys: DH = Departmental Head

Table 2*Research participants' profiles*

Participants	Gender	Age	Experience as a teacher (in years)	Experience as a principal (in years)	Highest qualification	Teaching Subjects
P1	M	50	30	5	BA Ed.	Life Sciences
P2	M	58	38	14	MSc Ed.	Life Skills
P3	M	52	30	12	B.Ed. Hons	Life Skills and Accounting
P4	M	42	15	6 months	B.Ed.	English Language
P5	M	62	42	13	M.Sc. Ed.	Agriculture

Keys: B.Ed. = Bachelor of Education, B.Ed. Hons = Bachelor of Education Honours, BSc Ed. = Bachelor of Science in Education, MSc. Ed = Master of Science in Education, BA Ed = Bachelor of Arts in Education

Table 1 provides an overview of the demographics of the staff establishment in the five research sites. The number of learners determined the number of School Management Team

(SMT) members. It is worth noting that pseudonyms have been used to indicate the school principals who were participants in the study, as presented in table 2. The following pseudonyms are used in this paper to identify participants: Names of the five schools – School 1 to School 5; and Principal 1 to Principal 5 – P1 to P5

Before conducting the research, we obtained ethical clearance and a permission letter from the Lesotho Ministry of Education and Training to conduct the interviews in secondary schools. Permission was also sought from the principals of the selected schools where the research was conducted. Participants were requested to fill in the informed consent forms and were made aware that their participation was voluntary. The data was stored in a password-protected device.

4. Findings

The findings are presented using the table and the verbatim quotes from the participants.

Table 3

Themes from the data

Objectives	Themes
1. To determine the understanding of Professional development (PD) by school principals	Theme 1: Understanding of PD for School Principals
2. To investigate what PD programmes are already in place for schools	Theme 2: Lack of professional development programmes for principals
3. To determine how school principals monitor the implementation of PD programmes in their schools	Theme 3: Principals' support of professional development programmes in schools

Table 3 presents the themes as they emerged from the data, and through the verbatim quotes of the participants, the sections below present the data findings according to the three main themes that emerged: understanding of professional development for school principals, lack of professional development programmes for principals, and principals' support of professional development programmes in schools.

4.1. Understanding of PD for School Principals

When the participants were asked about their understanding of PD, the responses indicated that they understood PD as a programme that improves and upgrades their leadership and management skills in areas such as communication and financial management to effectively perform their roles as principals. The participants further disclosed that PD could be achieved through refresher courses and training provided for principals. P1 shared that:

Professional development is about equipping principals with skills in the areas of management, which I think includes communication, financial management, and others, to help them coordinate the effective performance of schools.

P3 further shared that enhancing leadership skills could be achieved by providing refresher courses for principals to perform their daily work effectively. This is what he shared:

Professional development is the improvement of the leaders or school principals. It may be by holding refresher courses for them to remind them of their responsibilities and to equip them with new skills that they can use in their day-to-day work in their schools.

The data generated from the participants revealed that the principals held a similar understanding of PD for school leaders. The participants' understanding of PD outlines that if they are equipped, improved, and upgraded in areas of management and leadership, they could be effective leaders. Furthermore, the discussions revealed that PD could be improved by programmes such as in-service. In-service training for principals would be school-based and include activities and programmes that assist the principal, which are initiated and customised to each school (Mantilla et al., 2024). Additionally, the availability of PD training could assist in advancing effective school leadership. From the participants' responses, it could be deduced that they lacked capacity through different PD programmes. To effectively run the schools, principals are required to exercise skills in several areas of management, such as financial, communication, and legal issues, to mention a few. Lack of capacity in these areas contributes to ineffectiveness in their work. Therefore, PD for principals is crucial to enhance school leadership.

According to Kennedy (2016), professional development is viewed as a series of organised training activities to capacitate individuals to increase their job experience. In line with the participants' responses, Kumar (2015) defines professional development as a

technique used to support individuals in the workplace to understand more about their work environment, the job they do, and how to improve it. Bjekić et al. (2016) postulated that professional development aims to keep staff equipped, disciplined, and empowered. This view resonates with the participants' view of professional development for school principals. Therefore, there is a need for education administrators to prescribe professional development for principals through the provision of in-service training workshops (Johns & Sosibo, 2019). This is in line with constructivism theory, which, according to Brau (2020), is the perspective on learning concerned with how people actively construct and create knowledge out of experiences. Brau (2020) perceives individuals at the centre of the knowledge creation and acquisition process through the interaction between their experiences and ideas.

4.2. Lack of Professional Development Programmes for Principals

To find out about the PD programmes that are already in place for schools, the participants alleged that such programmes on professional development are not available for principals. They indicated that such programmes used to be offered in the past. P2 stated this as evidence:

We don't have such programmes. There are no workshops arranged for us so that we can know that they will be addressing different issues as they used to happen.

P3 also indicated that they used to be capacitated through attending workshops on leadership in the past. He responded as follows:

There are no such programmes here. I'm saying this because it was long ago when the Ministry of Education held a leadership workshop. I think it was in 2012 or 2013 if I remember well. We were capacitated on how to handle leadership, and that was the last time I heard about this.

When P5 responded to a similar question on the PD programmes in place for school leaders, he revealed that since he was new in the office, he had not been exposed to such programmes. These were his words:

Since I am new in this office, I haven't heard of such programmes.

Another perspective shared by P4 in responding to the question was that:

It doesn't happen. There are no programmes that principals engage in to be equipped with skills relevant to school leadership and how they should handle the challenges they face in their day-to-day running of schools.

The participants reveal a lack of exposure to PD programmes as they indicate that they are not available to them. The data also demonstrates that when such PD programmes were ever available, it was a long time ago. The participants' responses indicate that there was a lack of capacitation for Lesotho secondary school principals through PD programmes. The role performed by principals is demanding, which means they encounter numerous challenges in dealing with both the learners and the teachers. If the PD programmes are not available to them, it means the leadership role becomes a challenge. Therefore, exposure and participation in the PD programmes will enhance their school leadership.

As stated by Kheswa et al. (2014), the professional development of principals is significant in advancing educational practices. In support of this view, Paletta (2019) asserts that the responsibility of school principals is developing, regarding them as elements of change in their educational leadership to advance the schools. This is in line with the views of the principals on the professional development programmes, as they indicated that they need to be furnished with the relevant skills to assist them in handling their leadership roles. Furthermore, Naidoo (2019) states that it is significant for principals to possess managerial skills in areas such as finance, resources, and discipline for them to become effective leaders since these issues are regularly dealt with. According to constructivism theory, individuals construct new knowledge through contact between their previous skills, knowledge acquired from social communication with peers and instructors, and social activities (Mukhalalati & Taylor, 2019). Thus, the availability of PD for principals is a platform that enables them to engage in social interaction activities to improve their knowledge. Constructivism theory, therefore, emphasises that learners' perception of knowledge results from the search for the construction of meaning in which learners are involved in a process of creating individual understandings of their experiences (Mukhalalati & Taylor, 2019).

4.3. Principals' Support of Professional Development Programmes in Schools

When the participants were asked how they monitor the implementation of PD programmes in their schools, they indicated that they worked closely with the DHs to support

school-based PD. The participants further revealed that they have PD programmes, such as workshops, for their schools held internally and externally. They also went to the extent of inviting visitors from outside to capacitate the teachers in their schools. P4 indicated that:

We do have workshops for the school. We also have those that teachers attend regionally, which are attended by teachers from different schools in the region. I work with the DHs to support the implementation of professional development programmes.

Resonating with this view is P2, who shared that on-site professional development programmes allow them to monitor these programmes in support of the other SMT members. This is what they shared:

Whether formal or informal, the DHs report to me regarding the programmes in their respective departments so that I can support them.

The above response seems to reveal that PD is implemented in schools, and the principals' role is to support its implementation. It also indicates that principals exercise their leadership role of ensuring that teachers are capacitated for schools to improve performance. The discussions further show the principals' understanding of the significance of their role in supporting PD in their schools. Thus, a lack of capacitation for teachers means ineffectiveness in their duties. When the school's performance deteriorates, the chief accounting officer is the principal. Therefore, principals also need to be capacitated to enhance their leadership and to be able to support teacher professional development. The principals are also entrusted to assist learners in achieving the best performance. This can be achieved when the teachers are capacitated to effectively perform their teaching roles. Among all factors, leadership comes in after classroom teaching in its effect on student learning (Berkovich & Bogler, 2020). Thus, school leaders have an indirect yet powerful impact on student attainment through their interactions with teachers and their ability to shape school culture. As school leaders and managers, principals fulfil the school vision and goal through a specific approach to accomplish the target (Tedla & Kilango, 2022). This substantiates Tedla and Redda (2021), who contend that school principals are expected to lead curriculum design, differentiate the fundamentals of sound instructional practices, and coach and guide teachers professionally.

5. Discussion

From the experience and understanding of PD for school principals in Lesotho, it became clear that principals understood PD, although they lacked exposure to PD programmes. The workshops previously attended and organised by the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET) were now replaced by meetings organised by the District Education Managers (DEM), and the aim was not to provide PD for principals but to present and discuss reports on day-to-day school activities. Furthermore, other meetings are organised by the principals' associations with the sole purpose of motivating the invitation of experts. The principals seemed unhappy about their lack of experience in PD since handling leadership becomes a challenge due to the complexity of their work. From the principals' understanding, MoET is largely responsible for providing their PD. This means that beyond MoET, it is difficult for principals to visualise any other structure that could provide them with the tools they need to handle their pressing leadership responsibilities. Instead of finding initiatives to expose themselves to PD programmes, the data reveals that the principals seemed to be in their comfort zone, waiting for MoET to expose them to PD programmes. This means there was no initiative for self-initiated professional learning. According to constructivism theory, learning occurs through social interaction with the environment (So, 1964). This means the principals are expected to find ways to create their learning. Besides that, complexity leadership theory indicates that knowledge is constructed through individuals' encounters with complex situations since they need to find how they can adapt to such situations (Uhl-Bien & Marion, 2009).

Another finding was that in the PD programmes that were offered by the Ministry of Education and Training in previous years, the principals played the role of just participants. The workshops were allegedly a development space for the principals as they gained skills and knowledge to enhance their leadership roles. The platform also allowed them to share their views on the challenges and successes within their leadership roles. This means that principals are supposed to continue from what the MoET has offered and find ways of initiating their own PD programmes to enhance their leadership. Such self-initiated PD programmes could encourage networking among principals to improve their leadership skills. Campbell et al. (2017) stress the importance of external support and mentoring for principals at different career paths. An important element of high-quality PD is networking with other principals who could stimulate critical reflection and assist in identifying gaps in knowledge and skills (Service & Thornton, 2021).

Social constructivism suggests the collaborative nature of learning. According to social constructivism, knowledge develops from individuals' interaction with each other and society at large (Vygotsky, 1978). From the role principals played in the implementation of school-based PD, impression is formed that principals understood their role of ensuring that teachers are capacitated for better performance in the schools. This means that they, too, can arrange their own PD to ensure effectiveness in their duties. Constructivism connects learning with meaning that is created through experience; the mind filters input from the world to produce its unique reality (Jonassen, 1991). Thus, principals must collaborate with other principals to create, share their experiences, and learn from others. In the study on the opportunities and challenges of sustainable development goals in education, Reimers (2024) indicates that Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), which aims to promote lifelong learning opportunities for all, somehow provides more challenges than opportunities regarding ways to measure its effectiveness. As school principals play a pivotal role in driving quality education and fostering inclusive, effective learning environments, as envisioned in SDG 4, many face persistent challenges that hinder their ability to lead schools effectively. In this context, continuous professional development (CPD) becomes essential to enhance principals' leadership competencies and build their capacity to implement equity-driven and learner-centred approaches.

Some of the systemic factors that impede effective professional development among secondary school principals include, but are not limited to overloaded administrative demands, as school leaders and teachers are burdened with administrative tasks, leaving little time for reflection or professional learning and PD becomes an “add-on” rather than an integrated part of their professional role. There is also a lack of follow-up and support, which means that many PD programmes are once-off workshops with little to no follow-up or coaching, and this limits the transfer of new knowledge or skills into leadership practice. According to Ertmer and Newby (1993), individual and environmental factors are critical to the constructivist learning theory. It is the specific interaction between these two variables that creates knowledge. Complexity leadership theory proposes that adaptability occurs in everyday interactions of individuals responding to triggers in the work environment (Uhl-Bien & Marion, 2009).

6. Conclusion and Implications for Practice

The paper aimed to explore the realities of professional development for secondary school principals in Lesotho. The study found that principals understood professional development, although they had limited exposure to PD programmes and failed to provide self-initiated PD programmes. The study also revealed that in the PD programmes that were offered by the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET) in the previous years, the principals played the role of just being participants when the programmes stopped. This confirmed that the principals failed to find ways to initiate and sustain the PD programmes. The study also found that the principals needed capacity in digital literacy skills. The shortage of targeted, sustained professional development for school principals presents a significant barrier to the advancement of quality education. Without ongoing training, principals are often ill-equipped to respond effectively to evolving educational demands, curriculum reforms, and the complexities of diverse school environments.

The study acknowledges school principals as the school administration and leadership pillars. Therefore, their professional development needs to be taken into consideration to support them in their leadership roles. The study recommends that the Ministry of Education and Training implement structured and continuous leadership development programmes tailored to the practical challenges faced by school principals. These programmes should include mentorship, peer collaboration, and context-specific training modules. Additionally, it is recommended that principals proactively initiate school-based professional development initiatives, such as peer learning communities, in-service workshops, and reflective practice sessions, aligned with their specific leadership and instructional needs.

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Institutional Review Board Statement

This study was conducted in accordance with the ethical guidelines set by the University of the Free State. The conduct of this study has been approved and given relative clearance(s) by the University of the Free State.

AI Declaration

The author declares the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in writing this paper. In particular, the author used Quillbot in searching appropriate literature, summarizing key points, and paraphrasing ideas. The author takes full responsibility for ensuring proper review and editing of content generated using AI.

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