Full Length Research Paper

The impact of matriculation results on management abilities of school principals: A South African case study

Naong, Matsidiso Nehemia

School of Teacher Education, Faculty of Management Sciences, Central University of Technology, Free State, South Africa. E-mail: mnaong@cut.ac.za. Tel: (051) 507 3324. Fax: (051) 507 3367.

The advent of democracy saw a drastic increase in demands for a meaningful performance for South African schools. With principals' abilities to lead and manage these schools coming under constant severe scrutiny, with the main emphasis being placed solely on the Grade 12 final examination results as a measure of their competencies. This paper therefore, attempted to investigate the merits of this argument. The statistical results from a multi-method design (that is, mixed method) used to collect data from (N=197) purposively sampled principals of secondary schools in the Free State Province of South Africa, revealed that 57% of the respondents cited indecisiveness by authorities, unequal/unfair treatment, lack of support, ill-discipline and politicking as challenges leading to poor performance of their schools. This paper found no conclusive basis to support the argument.

Key words: Leadership qualities, management, public schools, performance, challenges, grade 12 results.

INTRODUCTION

According to Niemann and Kotze (2006), there are excellent schools within the public sector of which most are racially integrated, but there are also numerous dysfunctional schools, which achieve only a 0 - 20% pass rate and where the culture of teaching and learning has broken down. The dilemma in South African schools may be attributed to the lack of legitimacy created by apartheid policies during the previous dispensation (Department of Education, 1996; Gultig and Butler, 1999; Steyn, 2002). The apartheid school system was characterised by inequality; racially, and regionally in terms of gender (DoE, 2000). It was also administered by means of a top-down management system where principals and educators were at the receiving end (DoE, 1996). In this regard, in a regulated work environment, principals were accustomed to receiving instructions from departmental officials (Gultig and Butler, 1999). This led to poor management and the collapse of teaching and learning in the majority of schools (DoE, 1996). Features of a poor culture of learning and teaching in schools include the following: weak/poor school attendance, educators who do not have the desire to teach, tensions between various elements of the school community, vandalism, gangsterism, rape, alcohol and drug abuse, a high dropout rate, poor school results, weak leadership,

management and administration, general feelings of hopelessness, demotivation and low morale, disrupted authority, and the poor state of buildings, facilities and resources (Chisholm and Vally, 1996).

The former Minister of Education, Professor Kader Asmal (2002) argued that "the profile of our society still reflects gross inequalities in education attainment across racial lines. Many people have lost the opportunity of pursuing their education through formal schooling because of the education policies of the apartheid government, but especially 'Bantu education'. The few who were fortunate to obtain the education they could, had do to so under extremely trying circumstances, characterised by low morale and a poor culture of teaching and learning. Major unrest and dilapidated school buildings were the norm. The status quo was not to continue forever; change was definitely imminent.

Notwithstanding, these historical realities which clearly were beyond their control, school principals still continue to endure some scathing attacks. For example, former Gauteng education MEC Angie Motshekga told principals that they were responsible for the poor results and if they did not turn things around, they might as well leave the teaching profession (Ndlovu, 2007). Similarly, Mogakane (2007) also reported that the HOD for education in

Mpumalanga Province complained that "most school principals in Mpumalanga are 'mediocre' and lucky to keep their jobs'. Furthermore, the previous Minister of Education, Mrs. Naledi Pandor added her voice that "we have a leadership that cannot analyse, cannot problem-solve, cannot devise strategic interventions and plans and cannot formulate perspectives that are directed at achieving success" (Sunday Times, 2004). Finally, one newspaper clip reads "work or get out" government warns school principals who are not pulling their weight (Ndlovu, 2007).

Conversely, Jackson (2007) argued that in an era when education leaders are held accountable for raising the academic performance of all students, the job of leading today's schools has outpaced the available training, and the potential leadership role of principals is often overlooked. It is of critical importance therefore, that school principals should be both managers and leaders (Guthrie and Reed, 1986). The principal is the most important leader in the school, even though he/she is not the only person who is responsible for school improvement (Squelsch and Lemmer, 1994).

Post-apartheid education reconstruction has been driven by two imperatives: Firstly, the government has had to overcome the legacy of apartheid and provide a system of education that builds democracy, human dignity, equality and social justice; and secondly, a system of lifelong learning for South Africa has had to be established (DoE, 2000; Steyn, 2002). Schools are normally the theatres of this transformation agenda. Studies indicate that most of today's teachers and school leaders began their teaching careers under the apartheid regime where they were required to practise in racially prescribed settings (Moloi, 2007; Mattson and Harley, 2002). Many of the white minority were able to choose to live in particular communities, whereas black, Indian and coloured South Africans were required to live and work in areas prescribed by the Government under the Native Land Act of 1913, the Native Affairs Act of 1920, and the Native (Urban Areas) Act of 1923 (Johnson, 2004). According to (Johnson, 2004), these three Acts were the cornerstones of white supremacy and therefore black marginalisation in South Africa and they have had lasting effects on both the educational and social infrastructure. These effects include ineffective leadership and management practices in many of our public schools, especially those in historically black areas (Moloi, 2007).

Moloi (2007) further argues that these and many other factors in South Africa today, help to demonstrate the complexity of addressing the educational legacy of the past, including ineffective education systems, attitudes towards school principals and specifically, education management practices. Nevertheless, the Department of Education, in its recent initiatives to address these problems, states clearly that "effective management and leadership, articulated with well-conceived, structured and planned needs-driven management and leadership development, is the key to transformation in South African education" (DoE, 2004).

From 2004 - 2006, the South African government assembled a team called the Education Management Task Team (EMTT), which was commissioned by the Directorate of Education Management and Governance Development in the National Department of Education. Their work drew upon the South African Schools Act (SASA) of 1996 and, specifically, the recommendations of the Ministerial Task Team on Educational Management (DoE, 1996). The EMTT's brief was to develop a policy framework for school leadership and management development, training, and implementation, and to devise a South African Standard for School Leadership (SASSL) which would inform professional educational leadership programmes, leading to a National Professional Qualification for Principalship (SANPQP). The SASSL would provide a clear role description for principals, set out what is required of principals, and identify key areas of principalship (Moloi, 2007).

School improvement in South Africa

According to Fleisch (2006), the South African literature on school improvement is thin, but contains a number of stimulating studies. Grobler, Moloi and Loock (2001) and Harisparsad, Moloi and Eiselen (2002) have begun to explore the effectiveness of mandated or bureaucratic improvement strategies. Taylor (2001), and Taylor et al. (2003), while not specifically focusing on bureaucratic inspection as a form of pressure, are beginning to argue for the centrality of demand-pull or accountability and a rapprochement between inside-out and outside-in approaches, rather than an exclusive emphasis on supply-push in a theory of action for school improvement.

Fleisch (2006) further maintains that people are still in the early stages of the research in South Africa and, in particular, people need to know more about the antecedent variables that may explain improvement in student performance in bureaucratic or tightly controlled interventions for low-performing schools.

The functional role of school principal as a leader and manager

Generally, emphasis amongst most leaders tends to lean towards management rather than leadership. This sometimes creates a vacuum in their day-to-day work. Leadership means influencing others' actions to achieve desirable ends. Leaders are people who shape the goals, motivations, and actions of others. Frequently, they initiate change to reach existing and new goals. Leadership takes much ingenuity, energy and skill (Cuban, 1998; Bush, 2007). Furthermore, managing is maintaining efficient and effective current organisational arrangements. While managing well often exhibits leadership skills, the overall function is toward maintenance rather than change.

Bush (2007) indicates that leading and managing are distinct, but both are important. The challenge of modern

modern organisations requires the objective perspective of the manager as well as the flashes of vision and commitment wise leadership provides (Bolman and Deal, 1997). In practice, principals in their day-to-day work are rarely aware of whether they are leading or managing; they are simply carrying out their work on behalf of the school and its learners (Leithwood, Jantzi and Steinbach, 1999) and operating within the context of the needs of the school.

The role of school principals in the traditional model was viewed as that of manager or administrator (Pretorius, 1998). School principals had more managerial and administrative tasks and fewer teaching duties. For example, a study conducted in the United States found that principals were of the opinion that decentralisation brought additional job responsibilities without removing any responsibilities (Steyn, 2002). There is, however, widespread agreement that the principal's workload in South Africa is also becoming unmanageable and that many secondary school principals lack the time for, and an understanding of, their leadership task (Budhal, 2000). In essence, the principal's role in the new educational dispensation is a balance between leadership and management (Porten, Shen and Williams, 1998). Leadership deals with areas such as supervising the curriculum, improving the instructional programme, working with staff to identify a vision and mission for the school, and building a close relationship with the community. Management includes aspects such as the budget, maintaining the school buildings and grounds, and complying with educational policies and acts (Porten et al, 1998).

Types and perspectives of leadership

Black (1998) distinguishes between three broad areas of leadership: instructional, transformational and facili-tative leadership. Instructional leadership, a concept that emerged in the 1980s, expects educational leaders to set clear expectations, maintain discipline and imple-ment high standards with the aim of improving teaching and learning at a school. This role describes the principal as a visionary, leading the school community in its development to use more effective teaching and curricular strategies and supporting educators' efforts to

implement new programmes and processes. Instructional leaders perform five functions (Parker and Day, 1997):

1. Defining and communicating a clear mission, goals and objectives: formulating, with the collaboration of staff members a mission, goals and objectives to realise effective teaching and learning. A clear sense of mission is particularly important when schools are undergoing a number of changes.
2. Managing curriculum and instruction: managing and coordinating the curriculum in such a way that teaching time can be used optimally.
3. Supervising teaching: ensuring that educators receive guidance and support to enable them to teach as effectively as possible.

4. Monitoring learner progress: monitoring and evaluating the learners' progress by means of tests and examinations. The results are used to provide support to both learners and educators to improve, as well as to help parents understand where and why improvement is needed.
5. Promoting an instructional climate: creating a positive school climate in which teaching and learning can take place. In a situation where learning is made exciting, where teachers and learners are supported and where there is a shared sense of purpose, learning will not be difficult.

Transformational leaders motivate, inspire and unite educators on common goals (Black, 1998). They have the ability to persuade followers to join their vision and share their ideals. They also have the ability to achieve productivity through people (Armstrong and Armstrong, 1996). The actions of transformational leaders convey the beliefs and commitments that are spoken. Facilitative leaders are at the centre of school manage-ment and they involve educators, learners, parents and others in adapting to new challenges, solving problems and improving learners' performance (Black, 1998). It also means that principals have to accommodate team meetings where they participate as members of a small group (Pretorius, 1998). Unfortunately, principals who have been trained under power-centred role expecta-tions often lack the skills and knowledge necessary to practice facilitative leadership (Portin et al, 1998). Moreover, facilitative leadership requires considerable time and energy, and may create confusion and ambiguity as educators and others become accustomed to their new roles and responsibilities.

The following encapsulates the role of the educational leader in the new millennium (Senge, 1996; Mestry and Singh, 2007):

People are coming to believe that leaders are those persons who 'walk ahead'; people who are genuinely committed to deep change in themselves and in their organisations. They lead through developing new skills, capabilities, and understandings. And they come from many places in the organisation.

Research on effective schools has produced numerous types of leadership behaviour leading to the attainment of high academic achievement. Some of the most important tasks that have been identified include the following (Squelch and Lemmer, 1994; Ubben and Hughes, 1992): (i) emphasis on achievement; (ii) building a positive learning climate; (iii) ensuring safety and order in the school; (iv) monitoring students'

progress continuously; and (v) collegiality. Furthermore, Kunene as cited in Jackson (2007) adds another two more tasks; (vi) principals should be involved in implementing and managing the curriculum and academic content, and should (vii) maximise available educational techniques for the benefit of the students. They must collect, analyse and use data in ways that fuel excellence and rallies students, teachers, parents, local health and social service agencies, youth development groups, local businesses and communi-ties around the goal of raising student performance.

They must also lead successfully in an atmosphere of constant change.

Purpose

The Grade 12 final results in South Africa always generated lot of interest, getting everybody on the edge of their seats, as the country anxiously awaits the release of the results. Regrettably, for a number of years now, public schools have been the least of performers. Subjecting principals of these schools to an assortment of scepticism and critique of their management abilities, something that prompted the question: "Are poor matriculation results a consequence of poor leadership or management skills? The main aim of this research paper therefore, is to explore not only the critical role played by school managers in as far as Grade 12 final examination results are concerned, but also reflect on the impact of external factors, especially of historical nature, to the effective and successful execution of these principals' core functions.

METHODOLOGY

Sampling and data collection

A multi-method design was applied of quantitative (that is, a self-developed semi-structured questionnaire) followed by qualitative (that is, interviews with the focus group) data collection and analysis procedures. The methodological purpose of the triangulation was to examine validity by converging, corroborating and establishing correspondence of results (Darlington and Scott, 2002; Mampane and Bouwer, 2006). The pragmatic purpose was to compare the reliability/trustworthiness of the data types, in order to find the most feasible explanation to the role played by principals with regard to their schools' Grade 12 final performance.

A purposive sampling strategy targeting principals of secondary schools was used to collect data from (n=282) respondents, with a return of 70%, that is, a total of (n=197) fully completed questionnaires. The data collection was done in two stages, first stage consists of a total of (n=132) responses, which was collected during these principals' Annual Congress held in Bloemfontein in 2006. The second stage, was conducted nearly six months later by means of distribution of extra (n=100) questionnaires to secondary school principals from mainly Lejweleputswa and Moqhaka districts, of which (n=65) of those questionnaires were returned fully completed.

Given the small size of this sample, this paper does not intend making any generalisation from the findings of this study; however, an indication of the principals' views concerning the challenges of their job could provide valuable insight into this debate.

The measuring instrument and its validity and reliability

The measuring instrument "Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI) = 30 items" originally developed by Kouzes and Posner (1993) was adapted to suit the purpose of this study. This questionnaire measures leadership practices and reveals the leader's behaviour concerning challenging processes, inspiring a shared vision, enabling others to act, modelling the way and encouraging the heart of others, was found to be the most appropriate for this study. The LPI revealed a significant test/retest reliability of >0.90 and internal reliability of 0.80 (Kouzes and Posner, 1993). The questions in the questionnaire portrayed 'real-life' situations,

which was a positive attribute of content validity (Kerlinger, 2000; Kouzes and Posner, 1993), and the items measured were related to the kind of statements participants generally made about their own and other's experiences of best practices (in this case with regard to their own leadership styles as its impacts on Grade 12 performance), thus, contributing to the construct validity of the instruments (Cooper and Schindler, 2003; Kouzes and Posner, 1993; Niemann and Kotze, 2006).

RESULTS

Sample characteristics analyses– Demographic variables

Table 1 shows that historical tendencies are still rife, where management positions at most South Africa schools still being dominated by males (84%), women making a measly (16%). The mean age of study participants was 39.2 years and they had a mean of 12.3 years of work experience, with the qualification ranging from 4 years university degree to a PhD. An overwhelming majority of participating schools (74%) situated in urban areas, while (26%) being at peri-urban areas.

Generally, a body of knowledge suggests that leader-ship and management style of males usually differs to that of females. Smit et al. (2007) sums up this distinction very clearly "although, women also possess assertiveness, initiative, and aggressiveness, they tend to engage in leadership behaviour that can be called "interactive". An interactive leader is concerned with consensus building, which is open and inclusive, encourages participation by others, and is more caring than the leadership style of many males.

### Leadership practices in terms of their significance

They priorities their leadership practices as follows: "encouraging the heart of others" = 95%; inspiring a shared vision = 88%; enabling others to act; 80%; modelling the way = 55%; and challenging the process = 40%. Evidently, Figure 1 shows that most principals placed a high premium on "encouraging others" as well as inspiring a "shared vision".

Despite this revelation, one principal remarked that "if politics can be taken out of education, teachers will teach and learners will learn, things have changed for the worst in our education, if only people could get (education) authorities to comprehend the difficulties brought by the misuse of learner rights and teacher rights, an absolute mockery of our democracy – how do you model the way when you have no support?".

Similarly, another principal complained that "apportioning blame is easy, and yet, when we call upon both parents and authorities early in the year to assist us with problematic pupils, no one is willing to play ball, yet, the same people are the ones to point fingers at principals when the results are below expectation."

Table 1. Characteristics of respondents.

Demographic variables	N	Total sample (n=197)%
Gender		
Male	165	84
Female	32	16
Age		
25–35	32	16
36–45	73	37
46–55	88	45
56–65	4	2
Ethnicity		
Black	142	72
White	10	5
Coloured	45	23
Other	0	0
Type of school		
Secondary school	197	100
Highest qualification		
Diploma/Degree	65	33
Post-graduate degree	132	67
Location of school		
Urban	146	74
Peri-urban	51	26
Work experience		
Between 1 – 5	23	5
Between 6 – 10	59	34
Between 10 – 20	88	49
More than 21 years	27	12
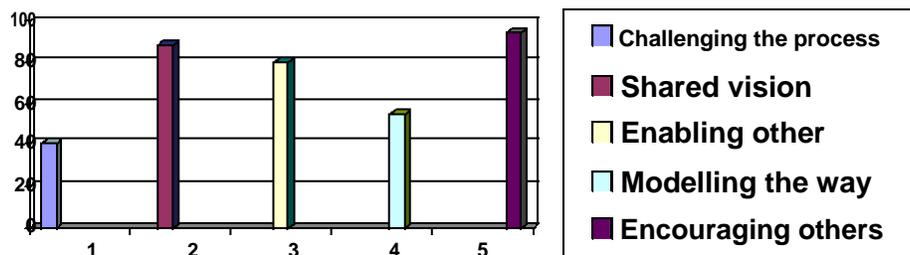
Figure 1. Rating leadership practices (Kouzes and Posner, 1993).

DEDUCTION

From the above remarks, it is safe to deduce that from Table 1, majority of the respondents come from the era of apartheid and oppression. Conversely, the types of learners and to some degree teachers as well, are from a different era – democracy and respect for human rights. The apartheid education system was charac-terised among others by submissiveness, obedience and strict compliance to the rules, policies and authorities, hence, "challenging the process" is being rated lower by majority of these principals.

It is a common knowledge that ill-discipline and disobedience were previously easily dealt with through corporal punishment, which is now abolished. Paradigm shift requires breaking away from comfort zones and embracing change, a struggle some of these principals might be battling with.

Table 2. General factors attributable to Grade 12 performance.

Item	Frequency	%
Poor discipline – educators and learners (drug abuse, violence, and pregnancies)	17	63
Inadequate resources including infrastructure	11	41
Learners' focus and interest is not on education anymore	10	37
No support from all stakeholders, especially parents	9	35
Demotivated educators, division, cliques or camps	5	20
Educators not willing to go the extra mile	4	14
Powers to hire and expel are limited	4	14
No appreciation/recognition for principal's work	2	8
Political interference in schools	0.8	3
Recruiting and retaining quality, experienced staff	0.8	3
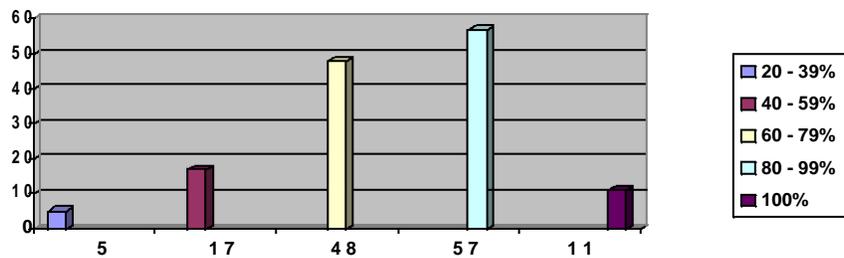
Figure 2. Grade Twelve results (2003 to 2008).

Matriculation results in the previous five years

Strangely, from Figure 2, very few (n=11) schools reported consistent pass rates of more than 100% for their Grade 12 results for the period 2003 - 2008. Followed by even paltry (n=5) performing consistently between 80 and 99%. Interestingly, these top schools include (n=8) former white schools and (n=3) urban township schools. Evidently, majority of the schools still perform on average and lower.

One principal argued that "my school do not have a functioning science laboratory, even worse, for a period of nearly two years we've being operating with temporary teachers for some subjects, tell me how do you motivate a temporary teacher for such a long time?". Who do you blame in that situation, the principal or the department? I am sure you know the answer to that." "The delivery of books and stationery is still a big challenge for our authorities, tenders are given to people who cannot deliver on time, and schools suffer as a result. Some schools are in a state of disrepair, no windows, no doors; thugs roam around the school yard as they please. You report and report and forever hit a brick-wall. How can normal teaching and learning take place under these conditions?" complain another principal.

DEDUCTION

Disparities in terms of distribution of resources have being an on-going complaint by most schools in this country. A definite causal factor for the likely dismal performance by any school caught in this situation. Yearly Grade 12 statistics continue to prove that the historical performance pattern of schools still persists, with former Model C schools (which are all located within affluent urban areas, with sufficient resources and infrastructure) continue to maintain their impeccable record of outstanding performances. Whilst a sizeable number of township (both urban and semi-rural) schools still battle to achieve over a 50% pass rate in their final matriculation results. Surely, without basic resources, very little can be achieved by these schools, and the principal cannot solely shoulder the blame for this performance as a consequence of this.

School performance

When requested to rate the overall performance of their schools using the criterion 'excellent, good, average and poor', 15% of the respondents rated their schools' performance as excellent, 44% as being good, while 41% rated them as average, with none rating their school poor (Figure 3). This view is consistent with Figure 2 above, seeing that only a small number (15%) of respondents claim their school to be excellent. The majority (44% and 41%) claim their school to be "good" and "average", respectively. One principal from a former model C school explains the reasons for such a performance as a "relatively privileged environment, long standing tradition of excellence, superior staff commitment, high expectation, academic focus, and
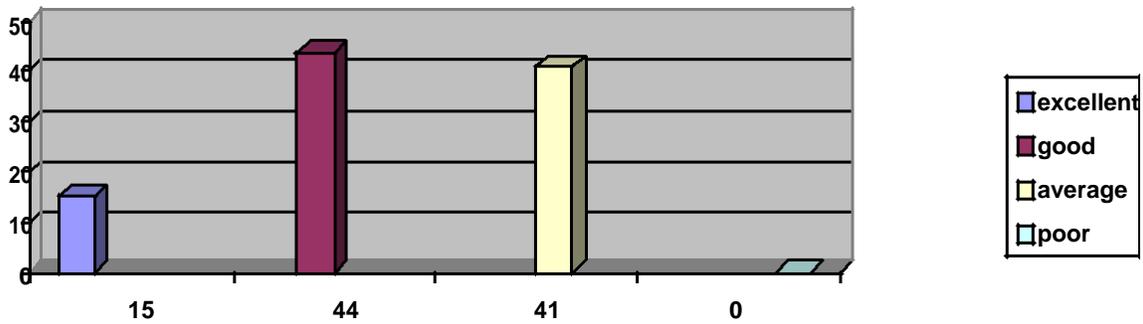
Figure 3. Rating the school performance over 5 years.

accountability".

Conversely, a principal from a semi-rural school cites the following as some of the reasons for his school's lacklustre performance, "Senakangwedi is situated in a disadvantaged area; there are no resources and educators are battling to achieve good results"; furthermore, "poor pass rates and poor teaching in lower grades; an inability of learners to cope with the demands of Grade 12, unqualified educators in Science and other learning areas".

The following remarks are a consolidated summary of expressed feelings by an overwhelming majority of the principals concerning their castigation: "playing fields have not been levelled, and yet disadvantaged schools are expected to produce miracles. Did you see the resources of schools in town?"; "no support for principals by the authorities; for example, you hold an educator accountable for poor results, and institute punitive measures where necessary to try and encourage him or her to improve, instead of the authorities giving you support, they side with the union and always cook up a story to find fault in what you did. We are the laughing stock of our own educators and learners, because they know we are toothless dogs that bark only. Yet, at the end of the year, when the results are bad, your head, as the principal, is on the block. It is really painful, the next thing you are being threatened with redeployment or with being fired, by the very same authorities. You try to bring stability and order in school by punishing unruly learners; everybody is against you and educators are afraid to go to jail, so they leave these learners alone. Those who want to study will study and the ones who do not want to, nothing can be done to force them, unless you want to go to jail. Look at the rate of teenage pregnancy. Parents are not playing ball also. It can get very frustrating at times".

The question is whether it is fair to attribute the performance of the school to the principal, and to what degree. The study found that 48% of respondents said "no", 11% are uncertain/unsure, and 41% concur with the statement. Given the current situation as described in their chronicles above, it may be safely inferred that their leadership abilities are clearly beyond reproach. After all, leadership performance depends as much on the organisation as it depends upon the leader's own attributes. Moreover, it is simply not meaningful to speak of a leader who tends to be effective in one

situation and ineffective in another (Coleman, 1994).

Underlying causes to the school's dismal performance

Table 2 shows the ten factors which featured prominently among the twenty-seven concerns raised by most of the respondents, which are listed in an ascending order. Significantly, none of the concerns raised by the respondents referred to their abilities to lead, even though it is a known fact that any institution more often than not succeed and fail through its leaders or managers.

However, it's noteworthy that issues raised by the respondents in Table 2, are consistent with what was reported by the DoE (1996) and Steyn (2002), in the earlier section of this study as mainly issues emanating from the legacy of apartheid policies.

DEDUCTION

It is evident that among many of the issues clearly impacting on the overall performance of the respon-dents' schools, with specific reference to Grade 12 results, are: indecisiveness; a lack of discipline (for both learners and educators); inadequate resources; poor cooperation and support from all stakeholders (for in-stance, parents, the DoE, educators, etc); limited power or authority (to hire and fire), politics, are dominant. It is safe to conclude then, that respondents have not, as yet, found a way of tackling these challenges which have a direct bearing on their schools' performance.

Need for further management and leadership training

From Table 3, it is clear that the majority (58%) of the respondents do not have any specialised qualification in leadership. Fortunately, 70% have received leadership training since becoming principals. One principal remarked that the "Free State Department of Education organised 3 – 4 day workshops, especially for principals on leadership topics".

An overwhelming majority of respondents (92%) are

Table 3. Need for further training on leadership aspects

Statement	Yes		No		Uncertain	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Do you have any specialised qualification in leadership?	60	30	115	58	22	11
Have you received any specialised training in leadership since becoming a school principal?	138	70	37	19	22	11
Are you aware of the "ACE in Leadership and Management" programme?	182	92	2	1	13	7
Does this ACE programme address your managerial needs?	108	55	14	7	75	38
Would you be interested to enrol and know more about this ACE programme?	182	92	10	5	5	3
Do you take the blame for your school's poor Grade 12 final results/performance?	8	4	153	78	36	18

aware of the ACE: Leadership and Management for principals. However, only 55% of the respondents feel its positive impact, while 38% are uncertain of its impact. Interestingly, 92% of the respondents are interested to pursue this qualification, with the hope that it will help them improve their schools' performance. One principal said "I hope this ACE will come up with something new and meaningful to us, if we don't feel the impact, you will start seeing numbers dwindling by the day."

Another principal complained that "how are we going to attend, during school hours or after school, the very authorities will be complaining that we must do further study during our own time, the time we don't have, I only hope that we could have flexible hours so that these interventions are meaningful and make an impact."

DEDUCTION

Surely, success is not only dependent on the improved qualifications alone, resources and more resources coupled with genuine material support are meaningful intervention strategies for transforming public schools into efficient well-oiled institutions. External factors particularly politics – for both teachers and learners, need to be rooted out of public schools, and parents and authorities need to join the visionary school to pull and push in one direction for the restoration of teaching and learning culture.

Going forward, any professional development endeavours must be geared towards the young and aspiring principals. The experience of some of the well-performing schools could benefit this process immensely. Ways to draw on and reinvest in this wealth of experience, needs to be seriously explored in the form of mentoring and coaching for the young principals. Blending theory and experience can only yield the best results.

Conclusion

Surely, the challenge of poor matriculation results cannot be attributable to school leadership alone. A myriad of factors contribute to the dismal performance of most of the public schools in this country and elsewhere in the world. Undoubtedly, this problem is systemic, and it requires a holistic approach. Multitude of problems such as ill-discipline, non-attendance of school, political –interference, inade-quate resources, etc. are some of the challenges that
 cannot be solved overnight by even the highly qualified school manager.

Mestry (1999) rightly indicated that schools prin-cipals are now faced with situations in which effective school management requires new and improved skills, knowledge, and attitudes to cope with the wide range of demands and challenges such as: coping with multicultural school populations; managing change and conflict; and coping with limited resources (Mestry and Singh, 2007). The principal should have the authority that is commensurate with his/her res-ponsibility and accountability (Tucker and Codding, 2002; Crow, 2006). Because the leadership role of the school principal is widely regarded as the primary fac-tor contributing to a successful school (Botha, 2006).

It stands to reason that performance of Grade 12 learners is a consequence of the interplay of a number of factors, with the leadership skills of the principal being one of them. An advice by Mwamwenda (1995) needs to be heeded; "in order that people may behappy in their work (including principals), three things are important; they must be fit for it; they must not do too much of it; and they must have a sense of success in it". Support by all stake-holders; the availability of resources; the creation of a culture of teaching and learning; an integrated approach to the management of discipline; appear to be the fundamental imperatives for any successful

school. The leadership abilities of the school principal on their own, cannot necessarily guarantee success.

REFERENCES

Armstrong S, Armstrong S (1996). "The conductor as a transformational leader". Mus. Educ. J., 82(6): 22-25.

Asmal K (2002). "Briefing Notes for the Minister's Meeting with Edward B. Fiske and Helen, F. Ladd, July 1, 2002". Online available from www.hsrcpress.ac.za/download.asp?filename=2090_08_Elusive_Equity~03052005015805PM.pdf- retrieved on 18 August 2007.

Black S (1998). "A different kind of leader". Am. Sch. Board J. June, (185). 6, pg. 32-35.

Bolman LG, Deal TE (1997). "Reframing Organisations: artistry, choice and leadership". San Francisco. California: Jossey Bass.

Botha RJ (2006). "Leadership in school-based managem ent: a case study in selected schools". South Afr. J. Educ., 26(4): 341-353.

Budhal RS (2000). "The impact of the principal's instructional leadership on the culture of teaching and learning in the school". Med. dissertation. Pretoria: University of South Africa.

Bush T (2007). "Educational leadership and management: theory, policy, and practice". South Afr. J. Educ., 27(3): 391-406.

Chisholm L, Vally S (1996). "The culture of learning and detaching in Gauteng schools: Report of the Committee on the Culture of Learning and Teaching". Johannesburg, Education Policy Unit: University of the Witwatersrand.

Coleman M (1994). "Leadership in educational management". In. Bush T, West-Burnham J, The principles of Educational Management. Educational Management Development Unit. University of Leicester. Great Britain: Longman

Cooper DR, Schindler PS (2003). "Business Research Methods". New York: McGraw-Hill.

Crow GM (2006). "Complexity and the beginning principals in the United States: perspectives on socialisation". J. Educ. Adm., 44: 310-325.

Cuban L (1988). "The Managerial Imperative and the Practice of Leadership in Schools". Albany. New York: State University of New York Press.

Darlington Y,Scott D (2002). "Qualitative research in practice: Stories from the field". Buckingham: Open University Press.

Department of Education, South Africa (1996). "Report of the Task Team on Education Managem ent Development". December. Pretoria: Government Printer.

Department of Education, South Africa (2000). "School Management Teams. Managing and leading Schools". Pretoria: Government Printer.

Department of Education, South Africa (2004). "Report of the Review Committee on School Organisation, Governance and Funding". Pretoria: Government Printer.

Fleisch B (2006). "Bureaucratic accountability in the Education Action Zones of South Africa". South Afr. J. Educ., 26(3): 369-382.

Gold Y, Roth RA (1994). "Teachers Managing Stress and Preventing Burnout The Professional Health Solution". London: The Falmer Press.

Grobler B, Moloi K, Loock C (2001). "Education Action Zones (EAZ/SSIP) as intervention strategy for improving the Grade Twelve examination results in the Gauteng Department of Education, South Africa". Paper presented at the 27th Annual IAEA Conference, Rio d e Janeiro, Brazil.

Gultig J, Butler D (1999). "Creating people-centred schools: School organisation and change in South Africa (Eds)". Learning Guide. London: Oxford University Press.

Guthrie JW, Reed RJ (1986). "Educational administration and policy". New York: Prentice Hall.

Harisparsad I, Moloi K, Eiselen R (2002). "A Comparison of the Academic Performance of Education Action Zone Schools in the Gauteng Province of South Africa", 1999 to 2001. memo.

Jackson D (2007). "Back to school, principals". Sunday Times, 11 February 2007, pg 21. Survey: Executive Education.

Johnson RW (2004). "South Africa: the first man, the last man". Cape Town: Jonathan Ball Publishers.

Kerlinger FN (2000). "Foundations of Behavioural Research". New York: CBS Publishing.

Kouzes JM,Posner BZ (1993). "Leadership Practices Inventory: Trainer's Manual". San Diego: Pfeiffer & Company.

Leithwood K, Jantzi D, Steinbach R (1999). "Changing Leadership for Changing Times". Buckingham: Open University Press.

Mampane R, Bouwer C (2006). "Identifying resilient and non-resileint middle-adolescents in a formerly black-only urban school". S. Afri. J. Edu. 26(3): 443-456.

Mattson E,Harley K (2002). "Teacher Identities and Strategic Mimicry in the Policy/Practice Gap". In: Lewin K, Samuel M, Sayed Y (eds). Changing Patterns of Teacher Education in South Africa. Cape Town: Heinemann.

Mestry R (1999). "The training and development of principals in the management of educators". D Ed thesis. Johannesburg: Rand University of Johannesburg.

Mestry R,Singh P (2007). "Continuing professional development for principals: a South African perspective". S. Afri. J. Edu. 27(3): 477-490.

Mogakane TE (2007). "Education boss warns lazy principals". City Press, 19 August 200, pg 5.

Moloi K (2007). "An overview of education management in South Africa". S. Afri. J. Edu., 27(3): 463-476.

Ndlovu V (2007). "Shape up or ship out". Sowetan Newspaper, 7 May 2007, pg 4.

Niemann R, Kotze T (2006). "The relationship between leadership practices and organisational culture: an education management perspective". S. Afri. J. Edu. 26(4): 609-624.

Oldroyd, D. and Hall, V. (1990), "Management Self-Development for Staff in Secondary Schools". Bristol: NDCEMP.

Parker SA, Day VP (1997). "Prom oting inclusion through instructional leadership: the roles of the secondary school principal". NASSP Bulletin, March 1997: 83-89.

Piggot-Irvine E, Locke J (1999). "Innovative schooling rests upon effective HoDs". New Zealand J. Educ. Adm. 14: 5-9.

Porten BS, Shen J,Williams RC (1998). "The changing principalship and its impact: voices from principals". National Association for School Principals Bulletin, December, (82).602, 1-8.

Pretorius F (1998). "Managing the change to an outcomes-based approach". In Outcomes-based education in South Africa, ed. Pretorius, F. Johannesburg: Hodder and Stoughton.

Senge P (1996). "Leading Learning Organisations: The Bold, the Powerful, and the Invisible". In: Hesselbein F, Goldsmith M, Beckhard R (eds). The Leader of the Future. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Smit PJ, de J Cronje GJ, Brevis T, Vrba MJ (2007). "Management Principles. A contemporary Edition for Africa (4th Edition)". Cape Town: Juta & Co. Ltd.

Squelch J,Lemmer E (1994). "Eight Keys to Effective School Management in South Africa". Durban: Southern Book Publishers (Pty) Ltd.

Steyn GM (2002). "The changing principalship in South African schools". http://www.journals.co.za/images/ejour/images/ejour/educare1/educare1_v31_n1_a15.pdf-Mircosoft Internet Explorer. Retrieved on 18 July 2007.

Sunday Times, (2004), "Som e schools not ready for matric exams", 10 September, p.1.

Taylor N (2001). "School reform: How should government, donors and NGOs relate?" memo.

Taylor N, Muller J, Vinjevold P (2003). "Getting schools working: research and systemic school reform in South Africa". Johannesburg: Pearson.

Tucker MS,Codding JB (2002). "The Principal Challenge". San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Ubben GC, Hughes LW (1992). "The principal. Creative leadership for effective schools". Boston: Allyn and Bacon.