LEADERSHIP EFFICACY OF SECONDARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS IN THE FREE STATE PROVINCE OF SOUTH AFRICA

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Abstract

This study which is grounded in Self-efficacy theory, progressive leadership theories and *The South African Standard for School leadership (SASSL)*, assessed the leadership efficacy of secondary school principals in eight key leadership roles. These roles were: Instructional Leadership and Staff Development, School Climate Development, Community Collaboration, Data-based Decision making Aligned with Legal and Ethical Principles, Resource and Facility Management, Use of Community Resources, Communication in a Diverse Environment, and Development of a School Vision.

The sample comprised 84 secondary school principals from the five districts of the Free State province, that is, the Motheo, Xhariep, Lejweleputswa, Thabo Mofutsanyane and the Fezile Dabi. Data were collected by using questionnaires. The leadership efficacy of school principals was measured using a seven point Likert type scale. The results of the study revealed that the leadership efficacy of school principals in the Free State Province, ranged from moderate to high. Statistically significant differences were found when efficacy of principals in the different leadership dimensions were compared.

MANOVA was also run to determine the effect of gender, experience and the geographical location of the school on leadership efficacy of the school principals. The findings revealed that there were no significant effects of gender, experience and geographical location on leadership efficacy.

Keywords: Efficacy, Leadership, school principals, South Africa.

1. INTRODUCTION

Leadership is one of the key roles of a school principal. The South African Standard for School Leadership (SASSL) lists the following as key responsibilities of a school principal:

Leading and managing learning; shaping the direction and development of the school; assuring quality and securing accountability; developing and empowering the self and others; maintaining the school as an organization and working with and for the community (Department of Education, 2005). These roles require school principals who have the necessary skills and confidence to be able to perform these functions. This study, therefore, assessed the leadership efficacy of secondary school principals in the Free State province of South Africa.

The study is grounded in Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory which highlights interplay among three factors, namely, personal factors, environmental factors and behavioural factors. Central to Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory is the concept of self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is concerned with people's beliefs in their capability to produce given attainments (Bandura, 2006:307). It is a judgment of one's capability to execute given types of performances. Perceived self-efficacy plays a key role in human functioning because it affects behaviour not only directly, but by its impact on other determinants such as goals and aspirations, outcome expectations and perception of impediments and opportunities in the social environment. Efficacy beliefs influence whether people choose to pursue the challenges and goals they set for themselves and their commitment to them. They influence how much effort people put forth in given endeavours, and the outcomes they expect their efforts to produce. Furthermore, efficacy beliefs influence people's ability to persevere and remain resilient during difficult times. They influence the quality of one's emotional life, stress and depression experienced in coping with environmental demands, and the life choices they make and the accomplishments they realize (Bandura, 2006: 309).

Leadership efficacy is a specific form of efficacy associated with the level of confidence in the knowledge, skills and abilities associated with leading others. It can be clearly differentiated from confidence in the knowledge, skills and abilities associated with other social roles such as a teacher, that is, teacher efficacy or statesman, that is, political efficacy (Hannah; Avolio; Luthans and Harms, 2008: 669).

Principals with a strong sense of efficacy are dedicated in their efforts to achieve their goals, but they do not persist in unsuccessful strategies. Confronted with problems, principals with a high sense of efficacy do not interpret their inability to solve the problems immediately as failure. They regulate their personal expectations to correspond to conditions, typically remaining confident and calm and keeping their sense of humour, even in difficult situations. Principals with higher self-efficacy are more likely to use internally-based personal power, such as expert, informational and referent power, when carrying out their roles (Tschannen-Moran and Gareis, 2005:5).

When faced with obstacles or setbacks those principals with strong belief in their capabilities will redouble their efforts to master the challenge. Efficacious school leaders possess qualities that allow them to be more persistent in pursuing goals. However, efficacious leaders are also pragmatic in the sense that they adapt strategies to the present context so that they do not waste time on unsuccessful strategies. When confronting problems, efficacious principal interpret failure as a lack of effort, or application of an incorrect strategy rather than a lack of skill. Principals with high levels of efficacy believe by doubling their efforts or changing their strategy, they will realize success (Versland, 2009: 60, 66).

In contrast, principals with a low sense of self-efficacy have been found to perceive an inability to control the environment as failure. They tend to be less likely to identify appropriate strategies or modify unsuccessful ones. When confronted with failure, they rigidly persist in their original course of action. When challenged they are likely to blame others. Low self-efficacy principals are unable to see opportunities, to adapt, or develop support. They demonstrate anxiety, stress, and frustration and are quicker to call themselves failure. Those with a low sense of self-efficacy are more likely to rely on external and institutional bases of power, such as coercive, positional and reward power (Tschannen-Moran and Gareis, 2005:5).

2. AIM OF THE STUDY

The aim of the study was to assess leadership efficacy of secondary school principals in secondary schools in the Free State province of the Republic of South Africa.

3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What is the level of leadership efficacy of secondary school principals in the Free State province?

- What is the level of efficacy in different dimensions of their leadership roles?

- Are there differences in the leadership efficacy of school principals differentiated by gender, experience as school principals and geographical location of the school?

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research design

This is a survey. Cluster sampling followed by random sampling was used to select 100 school principals from the five districts of the Free State province.

Participants

Participants were secondary school principals. The sample comprised 84 secondary school principals from the five districts of the Free State province, that is, the Motheo, Xhariep, Lejweleputswa, Thabo Mofutsanyane and the Fezile Dabi. Of the 84 school principals 84.5% were males and 15.5% were females. There was a noticeable gender imbalance in the sample and still points to under-representation of females in managerial positions especially in secondary schools. All the principals in the study had a university qualification and had attended additional training in school management. Principals are now expected to do an Advanced Certificate in Education (ACE) specialising in Educational Management and Leadership.

Instruments

Data on leadership efficacy of school principals was collected using the 52 item School Administrators' Efficacy Scale (SAES). The principals' leadership efficacy was measured on a seven point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 to 7, in eight dimensions of their leadership roles. This scale was used as it was in agreement with the items that were prescribed in *The South African Standard for School Leadership* (SASSL). It was also used to validate its suitability in a South African context. The modification that was made to SAES was changing the response mode from nine to seven, the addition of a section on biographical data of respondents as well as a section on open ended questions. Open ended questions were included to the instrument to probe further on personal and contextual factors that could have an influence on the respondents' leadership efficacy. The findings on the personal and contextual factors of respondents are reported in another paper.

Data collection

The questionnaires were either posted to school principals for the schools outside Bloemfontein or hand delivered to principals in schools in and around Bloemfontein.

Data analysis

Both descriptive and inferential statistics were used to generate quantitative data. The findings relevant to this paper are reported.

Findings

Table 1. Leadership efficacy of school principals in the different leadership categories (N=84)

No	Dimensions	Means	SD	Min value	Max value	Range
1	Communication in a diverse environment	5.77	0.06	5.65	5.93	0.28
2	Development of a school vision	5.62	0.35	5.60	5.63	0.03
3	Decision-making aligned with legal and ethical principles	5.49	0.26	5.21	5.70	0.49
4	School climate development	5.31	0.33	5.12	5.44	0.32
5	Instructional leadership and staff development	5.30	0.12	4.77	5.62	0.85
6	Resource and facility management	5.20	0.26	5.11	5.35	0.24
7	Use of community resources	4.92	0.32	4.83	4.96	0.13
8	Community collaboration	4.73	0.31	4.37	5.35	0.98
	Overall Mean	**5.29**				

As shown in Table 1, the overall mean score for the full scale was 5.29, on a 7point Likert type scale. The school principals' confidence in performing their tasks ranged from moderate to high. Notably is the mean score of 5.93 (the highest mean) which relates to the school principals' ability to know that their learners and colleagues can trust them in handling sensitive information. The mean score of 4.37 (lowest mean) relates to principals' ability to identify and describe the services of community agencies that provide resources for the

families of children in their schools. For the full scale the range is 1.56. The range of 1.56 is not wide indicating that the scores did not differ much.

Furthermore, Table 1 presents the leadership efficacy of the school principals in eight dimensions or aspects of their leadership roles or functions in a rank order. The school principals in the study showed the highest level of leadership efficacy in *communication in a diverse environment* (5.77) while the lowest mean score was in *community collaboration* (4.77). Even though the latter is seen as a low mean score, it indicates a moderate leadership efficacy, on a scale of one to seven. The table further shows the minimum value, the maximum value and the range for each category.

5. MANOVA ANALYSIS

Leadership efficacy of school principals by experience

The principals with 16 and 20 years of experience as school principals showed a high leadership efficacy in instructional leadership and staff development. In community collaboration, the leadership efficacy of the principals in the same age range was slightly higher compared to principals in other age groups. In school climate and development, community collaboration and data-based decision-making, the leadership efficacy of the principals with between 11 and 15 years' and 16 and 20 years' experiences was higher compared to the other principals. In resource and facility management, the principals with 16 to 20 years' experience have leadership efficacy that is slightly higher compared to the other principals. In the use of community resources and the development of the school vision, the principals with 11 to 15 years' experience had a slightly higher leadership efficacy when compared to other principals. However, a factorial multivariate analysis of variance showed no statistically significant difference in the leadership efficacy of school principals differentiated by experience.

Table 2. Summary of Leadership dimensions by experience

Your experience as principal	Instructional leadership and staff development	School climate development	Community Collaboration	Data- based decision-making	Resource and facility management	Use of community resources	Communication in diverse environment	Development of school vision
	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean
Less than 5 years	67.58	35.68	31.68	43.00	24.94	14.00	28.39	21.55
6-10 years	67.63	37.94	32.94	42.63	26.94	14.69	28.44	22.13
11-15 years	69.29	38.53	34.94	45.94	26.71	16.00	30.18	23.82
16-20 years	74.50	38.60	35.40	46.00	27.70	15.80	29.80	23.10
Other	69.00	36.80	32.20	43.20	24.80	14.20	27.80	23.00

Leadership efficacy by gender

Leadership efficacy of male school principals was found to be slightly higher in four leadership dimensions namely, instructional leadership and staff development, school climate development, resource and facility management, and communication in a diverse environment. In community collaboration and data-based decision-making, there is no difference between the leadership of the principals based on gender. In the use of community resources and the development of a school vision, the leadership efficacy of the female principals was found to be slightly higher than that of their male counterparts. A factorial multivariate analysis of variance, however, found no statistically significant difference in the leadership efficacy of male and female principals.

Table 3. Leadership dimensions by gender

Gender		Instructional leadership and staff development	School climate and development	Community Collaboration	Data based decision making	Resource and facility management	Use of community re-sources	Communication in diverse environment	Development of school vision
		Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean
	Female	69.38	37.69	33.31	44.23	26.92	14.62	30.31	21.85
	Male	68.85	37.07	33.04	43.85	25.82	14.80	28.59	22.59

Leadership efficacy by geographical location of school

School principals in town schools had a higher leadership in all dimensions of leadership. The difference was however, not statistically significant (F=0.661; p=0.723). This means leadership efficacy did not differ between the principals from the different geographical locations.

Table 4 Leadership efficacy by geographical location of the school

Geographical location of the school		Instructional leadership and staff development	School climate and development	Community Collaboration	Data based decision making	Resource and facility management	Use of community resources	Communication in diverse environment	Development of school vision
		Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean
	Farm	53.50	28.50	30.50	34.00	22.00	14.00	26.50	21.50
	Township	68.34	36.83	32.26	43.68	25.49	14.77	28.47	22.28
	Town	71.65	38.35	34.44	45.29	27.06	14.85	29.74	22.94

6. DISCUSSION

This paper sought to answer three research questions:

- What is the level of leadership efficacy of secondary school principals in the Free State province?

- What is the level of efficacy in different dimensions of their leadership roles?

- Are there differences in the leadership efficacy of school principals differentiated by gender, qualifications and experience?

Question one

The overall leadership efficacy of school principals was found to be moderate to high. This is commendable. This level of leadership efficacy could be attributed to their mastery experiences linked to their qualifications.

Second question:

Although there were some observable differences in the leadership efficacy of school principals in the different categories, the difference was not statistically significant. However, some categories need urgent attention.

Third question

Although there were observable differences in the leadership efficacy of school principals differentiated by experience, gender, school district and geographical location of the schools, the differences were however, not statistically significant. It is noticeable that schools in towns had an edge over those in townships and farm schools. This could be linked to exposure and resources in those schools. This needs further investigation.

Research has shown that school principals with high self-efficacy remain confident and calm and keeping their sense of humour, even in difficult situations. Principals with higher self-efficacy are more likely to use internally-based personal power, such as expert, informational and referent power, when carrying out their roles (Tschannen-Moran and Gareis, 2005:5). Linked to the South African past history, schools in South Africa are not equally resourced and principals are not equally trained. It is however, good or satisfying to

see that all the school principals irrespective of geographical locations of their schools, showed confidence in performing their leadership roles. What is needed is support for all the principals.

7. CONCLUSION

Self-efficacy beliefs play an important role in the confidence of school principals and, consequently, in the performance of their roles. School principals need support from teachers and district officials to boost their leadership efficacy in the performance of their roles.

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