

RESEARCH TITLE

A study of the leadership approaches of principals heading National Strategy Learner Attainment (NSLA) schools in the Metro Central Education District in the Western Cape Province

Name: Dr Rudolph Peter (R.P.) Cornelissen
Supervisor: Professor Juliana (J.) Smith
Co-supervisor: Dr Thandi (T.) Ngcobo
Institution: University of the Western Cape, South Africa
Year of Award: 2019
Qualification: PhD

ABSTRACT

This thesis investigated the leadership approach associated with sustained improved academic performance of principals heading National Strategy for Learner Attainment (NSLA) schools. The research problem addressed the leadership practices and personality traits that characterised the leadership approaches of principals heading high schools which have achieved long-term academic improvement amongst the schools undergoing the NSLA interventions. The main research question was: What leadership practices and personality traits characterised the leadership approaches of principals heading schools who have achieved long-term academic improvement amongst the schools undergoing the NSLA interventions? Thereafter, four subsidiary research questions guided this research. Firstly, what were the leadership practices of principals in selected successful NSL schools? Secondly, what personality traits characterised these principals? Thirdly, what learning and teaching challenges did principals heading these schools face? Lastly, how did these principals address the learning and teaching challenges in these schools? The literature and past research supported and provided information that leadership at schools plays a pivotal role for teaching and learning to be successful. However, the literature does not prescribe a specific leadership approach, but recommended a contingency leadership approach. The contingency leadership approach was used as the theoretical framework for this study. This approach recognises that there is no single preferred style of leadership and that the situational context must be taken into account for leadership to be effective. The study was guided by the qualitative methodological paradigm which is embedded in the interpretivist approach in order to develop rich and in-depth descriptions and meaning, feelings and experiences gathered from respondents. The case study as a qualitative research design was used to collect, analyse and interpret data from principals, teachers and selected members of the School Management Team (SMT). The population comprised of fifteen high schools in the Metro Central Education District, Cape Town that underwent the NSLA intervention. However, the investigation took place at five schools in the Metro Central Education District and participants remained part of this initiative for more than three consecutive years. These schools are resident in a wide area on the Cape Flats. All principals

at the time, were permanently appointed. Two research instruments were used. A questionnaire to collect data about the leadership of principals was completed by post level one teachers. This questionnaire covered three areas, the biometric information of the respondent, the leadership behaviour of the principal and the leadership approach promoting teaching and learning. A semi-structured interview was done with the principal and selected members of the Schools Management Team (SMT). Descriptive statistics were used to analyse the questionnaire. To analyse the semi-structured interviews, categories and themes were used to maximise the information collected. Through qualitative research the researcher was able to develop rich and in-depth descriptions of meaning, feelings and experiences through analysis. The study concluded that to achieve long-term academic improvement amongst NSLA schools an integrated leadership approach for principals is recommended. This approach encapsulates the various leadership approaches and the leadership personality traits or characteristics of the principals as well as taking into account the situational context for effective leadership and decision-making. Limitations in respect of this research were enumerated. Finally, recommendations based on the conclusions were highlighted including recommendations for further investigation.

Keywords: leadership; secondary school principals; National Strategy for Learner Attainment (NSLA); leadership theories and approaches; global trends; change; academic performance; Contingency theory

The full thesis can be found at <http://hdl.handle.net/11394/7241>