

# Role of the Whole School Evaluation in Enhancing Instructional Practices: A Case Study of Selected Schools in the Eastern Cape

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## ABSTRACT

This study investigated the role of Whole School Evaluation (WSE) in improving instructional practices within selected schools in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa. Particularly focusing on rural schools, the research seeks to understand how school leaders and educators interpret WSE feedback and how this feedback influences their teaching practices and professional development. Using a qualitative research approach, the study employed a case study design. Data were gathered through structured interviews and focus group discussions involving principals, Heads of Department (HoDs), and teachers from three purposefully selected schools in the Amathole East District, with 18 participants included in the study. The key findings indicate that WSE plays a vital role in identifying areas for enhancement in instructional practices, especially concerning professional development and teaching strategies. Educators reported positive transformations in their teaching methods, including adopting learner-centred strategies and differentiated instruction, as a direct consequence of WSE feedback. Furthermore, the school leadership proved essential in ensuring that WSE feedback translated into actionable improvements. However, challenges such as limited resources and time constraints impeded the comprehensive implementation of these instructional changes. Recommendations include targeted support for teachers and school leaders, better resource allocation, collaborative integration of WSE feedback, and sustaining instructional quality improvements. This study contributes to the existing literature by offering context-specific insights into the effects of WSE on instructional practices in rural South African schools. It highlights the importance of leadership, professional development, and resource availability in implementing WSE changes.

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## INTRODUCTION

Whole School Evaluation (WSE) is a comprehensive and systematic approach designed to assess and enhance the overall functioning of schools, with a specific focus on teaching, learning, management, and governance.<sup>1</sup> This evaluation method is a fundamental component of South Africa's education accountability and quality assurance framework, as outlined in the National Policy on Whole School

<sup>1</sup> Kathryn Parker Boudett, Elizabeth A. City, and Richard J. Murnane, "Data Wise: A Step-by-Step Guide to Using Assessment Results to Improve Teaching and Learning," *Choice Reviews Online* 44, no. 02 (October 1, 2006): 44, <https://doi.org/10.5860/CHOICE.44-1059>.

Evaluation.<sup>2</sup> WSE is grounded in the principles of support, development, accountability, and transparency. The evaluation process includes both internal and external assessments and is guided by key performance areas (KPA), which cover learner achievement, educator development, curriculum implementation, and school leadership.<sup>3</sup> The primary objective of WSE is to foster a culture of continuous improvement within schools by providing structured feedback that can be used to enhance instructional practices and professional development.

At the core of WSE is the belief that effective teaching and learning can only thrive within well-functioning, responsive, and reflective educational environments. As such, WSE is designed not simply as an administrative audit, but as a developmental process aimed at enhancing instructional quality. However, despite its admirable objectives, an ongoing debate exists regarding whether and how WSE feedback translates into meaningful changes in instruction.<sup>4</sup> Critics argue that while WSE identifies challenges and proposes solutions, many schools often lack the necessary capacity, leadership support, or professional development infrastructure required to effectively implement these recommendations. Furthermore, there are concerns about whether educators perceive WSE as a tool for growth or merely as a compliance mechanism, which can significantly influence the extent to which instructional practices are reformed.<sup>5</sup> In the context of South Africa, particularly in provinces like the Eastern Cape, systemic underperformance, historical inequalities, and infrastructural deficiencies hinder the effective application of WSE feedback into instructional strategies.<sup>6</sup> While some schools have successfully implemented changes by leveraging WSE insights, such as refining teaching methods, aligning assessments with curriculum outcomes, and introducing reading interventions, others struggle to move beyond the evaluation stage. This stagnation can be attributed to challenges such as poor leadership, low morale, and inadequate professional support systems.<sup>7</sup> This disparity in implementation underscores a significant knowledge gap: there is a limited understanding of how educators in various contexts perceive the role of WSE in promoting instructional improvement and the factors that either facilitate or obstruct this process.

The situation is further complicated by the lack of qualitative, context-sensitive research that explores the lived experiences of school leaders and teachers as they interpret and implement feedback from the WSE. Much of the existing literature is predominantly policy-oriented or quantitative, leaving a significant void in our comprehension of the intricate realities of school improvement as they manifest in practice.<sup>8</sup> Addressing this gap is essential, particularly as South Africa endeavours to develop sustainable strategies for enhancing the quality of basic education.

This study addresses the effectiveness of WSE as a mechanism for enhancing instructional practices within selected schools in the Eastern Cape. Despite the recognised significance of WSE as a framework for assessing and improving educational quality,<sup>9</sup> there exists a considerable gap in the literature regarding the impact of its implementation on teaching strategies and student outcomes. This uncertainty raises pertinent concerns regarding the sufficiency of current evaluation practices in bolstering educators' endeavours to refine their instructional methodologies and raises questions about the extent to which these practices effectuate substantive improvements in student learning experiences.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Lehlohonolo Samuel Mlangeni, "Exploring Guidelines to Improve the Existence and Efficacy of Whole School Evaluation at a Free State Secondary School" (University of the Free State, 2023).

<sup>3</sup> Janine Le Roux, "South African Women Education Leaders' Experiences of Social Justice, Servant Leadership and Career Aspirations" (University of Johannesburg (South Africa), 2022).

<sup>4</sup> Fred C. Lunenburg and Allan C. Ornstein, "Educational Administration Concepts & Practices," *New-York: Thomson Learning Inc* 273 (2008).

<sup>5</sup> John Nyamunda, "Assessing Educational Outcomes in South Africa Relative to Economically Comparable Countries: A Comparative Analysis," *South African Journal of Education* 44, no. Supplement 1 (December 31, 2024): S1–12, <https://doi.org/10.15700/saje.v44ns1a2220>.

<sup>6</sup> Martin Gustafsson and Carol Nuga Deliwe, "How Is the COVID-19 Pandemic Affecting Educational Quality in South Africa," *Evidence to Date and Future Risks* (Department of Economics, University of Stellenbosch, 2020).

<sup>7</sup> Tony Bush and Derek Glover, "Research on School Leadership in South Africa: A Systematic Review," in *Systematic Reviews of Research in Basic Education in South Africa* (African Sun Media, 2021), 115–40, <https://doi.org/10.18820/9781991201157/05>.

<sup>8</sup> Pierre Du Plessis, "Decolonisation of Education in South Africa: Challenges to Decolonise the University Curriculum," *South African Journal of Higher Education* 35, no. 1 (2021): 54–69.

<sup>9</sup> Department of Education (DoE), "The National Policy on Whole School Evaluation," *Government Gazette* 13, no. 24 (January 1, 1929): 153–55, <https://doi.org/10.1177/019263652901302451>.

<sup>10</sup> Linda Darling-Hammond et al., "Implications for Educational Practice of the Science of Learning and Development," *Applied Developmental Science* 24, no. 2 (2020): 97–140.

Consequently, this study aims to investigate these dynamics to elucidate the role of WSE in cultivating a culture of continuous improvement in instructional practices.

The primary objective of this study is to explore educators' perceptions of the role of WSE in enhancing instructional practices within selected schools in the Eastern Cape province. Furthermore, the research aims to identify the instructional changes implemented as a result of WSE feedback, as well as the contextual factors that influence this process. By incorporating the insights of principals, heads of departments (HoDs), and teachers, this study contributes to the broader discourse on school improvement, offering valuable perspectives on how accountability mechanisms can not only measure but also bolster educational quality. The objectives of the study are to:

- To investigate educators' views on how WSE contributes to enhancing teaching methods.
- To identify the instructional adjustments made in reaction to feedback from WSE in specific schools.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

WSE is a well-established framework within educational quality assurance systems, particularly in developing contexts like South Africa. The literature on WSE encompasses policy evaluations, empirical research, and theoretical discussions regarding its purposes, implementation, and impact on teaching and learning. This section consolidates the principal findings of the study, situates them within the broader academic discourse, and provides evidence-based recommendations aimed at informing practice, guiding policy formulation, and directing future research initiatives.

### Educators' perspectives on WSE's impact on teaching methods

#### *Impact of WSE on Teaching Practices*

WSE plays a crucial role in shaping teaching practices by providing a structured framework to enhance educational quality. It encourages educators to engage in reflective practices, allowing them to critically assess their instructional methods and adjust their classroom management strategies as needed. Research by Haug et.al. indicates that WSE inspires teachers to more deeply evaluate their effectiveness, leading to increased student engagement and improved learning outcomes.<sup>11</sup> The feedback generated from these evaluations is essential for fostering a culture of continuous improvement among educators, ultimately contributing to their professional development and enhancing their pedagogical approaches.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, WSE promotes collaboration and professional dialogue among educators, fostering an environment that encourages the sharing of best practices. As noted by Fullan and Edwards, this collaborative spirit inherent in WSE empowers teachers to address common challenges and develop innovative solutions collectively.<sup>13</sup> By cultivating a supportive community of professionals committed to improving educational practices, WSE plays a crucial role in enhancing overall educational standards. Through this collaborative approach, teachers not only receive personalised feedback but also benefit from a community-oriented perspective that enriches their teaching effectiveness.<sup>14</sup>

#### *Teacher Perspectives on Evaluation Frameworks*

Teacher perspectives on evaluation frameworks are crucial in shaping effective educational practices and policies. Educators often perceive evaluation not merely as a tool for assessing student performance, but also as a means to foster professional growth and enhance instructional strategies. Research by Bartanen underscores the significance of integrating teacher input into evaluation processes to ensure that

<sup>11</sup> Berit S. Haug and Sonja M. Mork, "Taking 21st Century Skills from Vision to Classroom: What Teachers Highlight as Supportive Professional Development in the Light of New Demands from Educational Reforms," *Teaching and Teacher Education* 100 (April 2021): 103286, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2021.103286>.

<sup>12</sup> Maxwell M. Yurkofsky et al., "Research on Continuous Improvement: Exploring the Complexities of Managing Educational Change," *Review of Research in Education* 44, no. 1 (March 21, 2020): 403–33, <https://doi.org/10.3102/0091732X20907363>.

<sup>13</sup> Michael Fullan and Mark Edwards, *Spirit Work and the Science of Collaboration* (2455 Teller Road, Thousand Oaks California 91320 : Corwin, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781071845455>.

<sup>14</sup> Stella Timotheou et al., "Impacts of Digital Technologies on Education and Factors Influencing Schools' Digital Capacity and Transformation: A Literature Review," *Education and Information Technologies* 28, no. 6 (2023): 6695–6726.

frameworks align with the realities of the classroom and provide meaningful feedback.<sup>15</sup> This collaborative approach can bolster teachers' commitment and encourage them to engage more deeply with their professional development. Additionally, the development of evaluation frameworks must consider the varied contexts in which teachers work. As emphasised by Zimmerman, effective evaluation systems acknowledge the nuanced differences in teaching environments and the specific challenges that educators encounter.<sup>16</sup> By recognising these factors, evaluation frameworks can be better designed to meet teachers' needs, ultimately leading to enhanced student outcomes. Involving teachers in discussions about these frameworks not only empowers them but also yields valuable insights that can help refine educational practices as a whole.<sup>17</sup>

## **Instructional adjustments made in response to WSE feedback**

### ***Collaborative Teaching Practices in WSE***

Collaborative teaching practices are vital components of WSE, as they cultivate an atmosphere of shared knowledge and collective responsibility among educators. Research demonstrates that when teachers collaborate, they have the opportunity to exchange effective pedagogical strategies and insights, thus directly enhancing their teaching methods. Admiraal et. al. highlight that collaborative approaches within schools foster a culture of continuous improvement, where educators feel supported and are more inclined to experiment with innovative teaching practices.<sup>18</sup> This collaborative environment not only empowers teachers but also enhances student engagement, as learners benefit from a richer and more diverse educational experience. The impact of WSE on student outcomes is notably significant when collaborative teaching practices are effectively implemented. According to a study by Hattie, collaboration among educators fosters a positive learning environment that enhances student achievement.<sup>19</sup> WSE encourages schools to collectively assess their practices, facilitating targeted professional development that aligns with the specific needs of both students and the learning community. By collaborating, teachers can analyse data on student performance, adjust their instructional methods, and implement interventions that are more likely to succeed. These collaborative efforts ensure that teaching is aligned with student needs, ultimately leading to improved educational outcomes.<sup>20</sup>

### ***Impact of WSE Feedback on Teaching Methodologies***

The influence of student feedback, particularly through mechanisms like the WSE, plays a crucial role in shaping teaching methodologies. When instructors receive consistent input regarding course content, delivery, and the overall classroom experience, they are able to make timely adjustments that enhance student engagement and improve learning outcomes. Stevens and Levi suggest that these feedback mechanisms not only help educators pinpoint areas for improvement but also empower students by acknowledging their experiences and opinions.<sup>21</sup> This responsive approach to teaching fosters a more inclusive and supportive learning environment, cultivating a culture of continuous enhancement in which both students and faculty actively contribute to the educational process. Furthermore, implementing WSE feedback can foster innovative pedagogical practices that more effectively address the diverse needs of

<sup>15</sup> Brendan Bartanen, "Principal Quality and Student Attendance," *Educational Researcher* 49, no. 2 (March 13, 2020): 101–13, <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X19898702>.

<sup>16</sup> Barry J. Zimmerman, "Dimensions of Academic Self-Regulation," in *Self-Regulation of Learning and Performance* (New York: Routledge, 2022), 3–21, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203763353-1>.

<sup>17</sup> Deepika Nambiar, "MIMIC Model of Teachers and Students Attitudes towards Online Learning during Covid-19: A Gender Perspective," *Knowledge Management & E-Learning: An International Journal*, June 10, 2023, 174–91, <https://doi.org/10.34105/j.kmel.2023.15.010>.

<sup>18</sup> Wilfried Admiraal et al., "Schools as Professional Learning Communities: What Can Schools Do to Support Professional Development of Their Teachers?," *Professional Development in Education* 47, no. 4 (August 8, 2021): 684–98, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19415257.2019.1665573>.

<sup>19</sup> Dave Yan, "Visible Learning: The Sequel: A Synthesis of over 2,100 Meta-Analyses Relating to Achievement Visible Learning: The Sequel: A Synthesis of over 2,100 Meta-Analyses Relating to Achievement, by John Hattie, Abingdon, Routledge, 2023, 510 Pp., £18.39 (Pbk), ISBN 9781032462035," *Teacher Development* 27, no. 5 (October 20, 2023): 664–67, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13664530.2023.2237484>.

<sup>20</sup> Andy Hargreaves, "Teacher Collaboration: 30 Years of Research on Its Nature, Forms, Limitations and Effects," in *Policy, Teacher Education and the Quality of Teachers and Teaching* (Routledge, 2021), 103–21, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003141907-8>.

<sup>21</sup> Dannelle D. Stevens and Antonia J. Levi, "Grading With Rubrics," in *Introduction to Rubrics* (New York: Routledge, 2023), 73–94, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003445432-6>.

students. Research indicates that when educators actively integrate feedback from their students, it often results in the adoption of more dynamic learning strategies, such as collaborative projects and inquiry-based learning.<sup>22</sup> These approaches have been demonstrated to enhance student performance and retention rates, suggesting that responsive teaching, guided by direct student input, significantly improves the effectiveness of learning experiences. Consequently, the feedback obtained through WSE not only aids in refining individual courses but also contributes to broader curricular developments within educational institutions, ultimately striving to elevate the quality of higher education as a whole.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A valuable theoretical framework for this study is Donald A. Schön's Reflective Practitioner Theory, which highlights how professionals enhance their practice through ongoing cycles of reflection. Schön differentiates between reflection-in-action, occurring during teaching or while making instructional decisions, and reflection-on-action, which takes place afterwards as practitioners critically assess their work.<sup>23</sup> The core idea of this theory is that professional learning is dynamic, not static, necessitating that educators continually engage with their experiences, evaluate their effectiveness, and adjust their strategies to meet evolving challenges. The significance of this theory in the current study lies in how WSE encourages educators to participate in reflective practice. The findings indicate that participants regarded WSE as both a diagnostic and developmental tool, enabling them to pinpoint strengths, confront weaknesses, and adopt innovative approaches to enhance their instructional practices. For instance, teachers reported implementing remedial programs, aligning their teaching more closely with curriculum requirements, and collaborating with colleagues, all of which align with Schön's assertion that reflection fosters innovation and growth. By situating this study within Schön's Reflective Practitioner Theory, WSE is positioned not merely as a compliance mechanism but as a reflective process that empowers educators to advance their professional growth, foster collaboration, and improve learner outcomes. Thus, the theory elucidates why WSE, when embraced as a reflective practice, can act as a catalyst for sustained instructional improvement.

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Paradigm and Approach

This study was framed within the interpretivist paradigm, which emphasises the importance of understanding participants' subjective experiences and their meanings. Interpretivism enables researchers to investigate how individuals interpret and make sense of phenomena, such as WSE, and its impact on instructional practices.<sup>24</sup> A qualitative approach was deemed most suitable for this study, as it allowed for a thorough exploration of educators' perceptions and the tangible instructional changes that occurred following WSE feedback.<sup>25</sup>

### Research Design

A case study approach was employed, focusing on three purposefully selected schools in the Eastern Cape province. This methodology facilitated a thorough and contextual analysis of how WSE processes were implemented, perceived, and acted upon. Case studies are frequently utilised in educational research to examine complex interventions within real-world settings.<sup>26</sup>

### Participants and Sampling

The research involved a total of eighteen (18) participants, which included:

- 3 school principals (one from each school)

<sup>22</sup> Elli J. Theobald et al., "Active Learning Narrows Achievement Gaps for Underrepresented Students in Undergraduate Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 117, no. 12 (March 24, 2020): 6476–83, <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1916903117>.

<sup>23</sup> Donald A Schön, *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action* (Routledge, 2017).

<sup>24</sup> Husam Helmi Alharahsheh and Abraham Pius, "A Review of Key Paradigms: Positivism VS Interpretivism," *Global Academic Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 2, no. 3 (2020): 39–43.

<sup>25</sup> C. A. Mertler, *Action Research: Improving Schools and Empowering Educators*, vol. 22 (SAGE Publications, Inc., 2020), <https://doi.org/10.33524/cjar.v22i2.601>.

<sup>26</sup> David E Gray, "Doing Research in the Real World," 2021.

- 6 Heads of Department (2 from each school)
- 9 teachers (3 from each school, creating a focus group)

Participants were selected using purposive sampling, focusing on individuals directly involved in or affected by WSE processes within their schools. Each participant possessed a minimum of five years of teaching experience and ranged in age from 30 to 58 years. The sample included an equal distribution of male and female educators. Inclusion criteria were based on active participation in curriculum delivery, familiarity with WSE protocols, and a willingness to provide detailed insights. This sampling approach aligns with Patton's emphasis on selecting information-rich cases for qualitative analysis.<sup>27</sup>

### Data Collection tools

Structured interviews served as the principal method for data collection, utilising a standardised interview guide for all participant groups.<sup>28</sup> The interview schedule comprised open-ended questions, enabling participants to share their views in detail while maintaining a consistent focus across the groups. Interviews were conducted face-to-face, with each lasting approximately 45 to 60 minutes. With participants' consent, all interviews were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed verbatim for analysis. The questions centred around:

- Perceptions of the role of WSE in improving instructional practices
- Specific instructional changes were implemented following WSE feedback

Field notes were also kept, capturing non-verbal cues and contextual observations during the interviews.

### Data Analysis Techniques

Data were analysed using thematic analysis, following the six-phase process outlined by Braun and Clarke.<sup>29</sup> This approach involved becoming familiar with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing those themes, defining and naming them, and ultimately producing the report. Each transcript was coded independently, with themes identified both inductively (emerging directly from the data) and deductively (informed by existing literature and theoretical frameworks).

### Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was secured from the university's research ethics committee. The following protocols were adhered to rigorously:

- Informed consent was obtained from every participant.
- Participants were guaranteed anonymity and confidentiality.
- All data were stored securely, with access restricted to the research team.

The coding system implemented (e.g., P1-A to denote the Principal of School A) was utilised to safeguard the identities of individuals while facilitating substantive reporting.<sup>30</sup> This approach not only enhances confidentiality but also ensures the integrity of data collection and analysis. Furthermore, the research study consistently adhered to the ethical principles delineated in the South African Department of Basic Education's research ethics guidelines. These guidelines emphasise the necessity of stakeholder consultation, the importance of voluntary participation, and the imperative to minimise any potential harm to participants.

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<sup>27</sup> Michael Quinn Patton, "Impact-Driven Qualitative Research and Evaluation," in *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research Design* (1 Oliver's Yard, 55 City Road London EC1Y 1SP : SAGE Publications Ltd, 2022), 1165–80, <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781529770278.n71>.

<sup>28</sup> Eleanor Knott et al., "Interviews in the Social Sciences," *Nature Reviews Methods Primers* 2, no. 1 (September 15, 2022): 73, <https://doi.org/10.1038/s43586-022-00150-6>.

<sup>29</sup> Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, "Toward Good Practice in Thematic Analysis: Avoiding Common Problems and Being a Knowing Researcher," *International Journal of Transgender Health* 24, no. 1 (January 25, 2023): 1–6, <https://doi.org/10.1080/26895269.2022.2129597>.

<sup>30</sup> Celia B. Fisher, "Decoding the Ethics Code: A Practical Guide for Psychologists," in *Ethics in Psychotherapy and Counseling*, 3rd ed. (Wiley, 2011), 361–98, <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118001875.app2>.

## Terminology and Abbreviations

- **WSE** – Whole School Evaluation
- **HoD** – Head of Department
- **DoE** – Department of Education

## PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

The Presentation of Findings section provides a detailed account of this study's results, directly aligning with its two stated objectives to ensure that the research mandate is thoroughly addressed. The first objective aimed to explore teachers' perspectives on the role of WSE in enhancing instructional practices. The findings indicate that educators view WSE as a reflective and diagnostic tool that facilitates changes in teaching methods, encourages collaboration, and supports professional growth. The second objective focused on examining the instructional changes implemented in response to WSE feedback in selected schools. The findings reveal that teachers adopted strategies for curriculum alignment, introduced remedial programs, and integrated innovative pedagogical approaches as a result of the evaluation outcomes. Collectively, these findings offer a comprehensive view of how WSE influences teaching practices and propels instructional improvement within schools.

This section offers a comprehensive analysis of the data collected from structured interviews with principals, Heads of Department (HoDs), and teachers from three selected schools in the Eastern Cape. This section is structured around key themes that emerged from the participants' responses, reflecting the impact of WSE on instructional practices. The findings are examined with respect to how WSE has influenced professional development, led to changes in instructional methods, and shaped the implementation process through leadership support. By synthesising the experiences and insights of the participants, this section highlights critical areas for improvement as well as the challenges faced in aligning instructional practices with WSE recommendations.

### Objective 1: Educators' perspectives on WSE and its impact on instructional practices

The findings emphasise educators' perspectives on WSE as a valuable tool for enhancing instructional practices. The data indicate that teachers consistently regard the evaluation process as both reflective and developmental, allowing them to identify their strengths, recognise areas for improvement, and refine their teaching strategies. Participants' insights demonstrate how feedback from WSE has guided them in adopting new pedagogical approaches, improving classroom delivery, and engaging more effectively with students. This underscores WSE's significant role in shaping teaching methods within schools.

### Theme 1: WSE as a Diagnostic and Reflective Tool

Numerous participants regarded WSE as a diagnostic process that illuminates both strengths and areas for improvement. For example, different participants responded as follows.

P1-A: *“Our school's key strength lies in how the WSE helps us pinpoint professional development needs. After our last evaluation, we introduced a reading program, leading to consistent improvement in student performance.”*

HOD2-A: *“The evaluation highlighted the need for ICT training, which we might have overlooked without the WSE's structured feedback.”*

FG1-B: *“Post-WSE meetings focused on our areas for improvement, with lesson planning being a major concern. We received the support needed to address it.”*

P2-B: *“The WSE encouraged us to reflect on teaching gaps and consider more effective lesson delivery, especially in mathematics.”*

The responses from participants indicate that educators appreciated the evaluation process for its capacity to illuminate areas of strength and reveal weaknesses in teaching practices. Their statements underscore how WSE functioned as a structured framework for self-assessment and institutional reflection, providing insights that helped teachers enhance their instructional approaches. Overall, the data portrays WSE as a mirror that allows educators to critically reflect on their work and identify opportunities for professional and instructional growth. Participants noted that WSE was instrumental in helping them identify both gaps and strengths in their teaching. This aligns with Schön's concept of reflection-on-action,

as educators utilise feedback from evaluations to critically assess their instructional practices and develop corrective strategies. Consequently, WSE serves as a structured form of reflection, guiding teachers in diagnosing areas that require improvement.

## **Theme 2: Professional Growth and Teacher Collaboration**

Educators also highlighted the role of WSE in fostering collaboration and professional growth. The participants pointed out that WSE promoted professional development and collaboration among teachers, as shown in their remarks below.

HOD1-B: *“The evaluation motivated us to collaborate as a department. We began sharing teaching strategies more freely, which enhanced our lessons.”*

FG1-A: *“Following the WSE, we initiated regular peer-observation sessions where we provide each other with feedback. This has contributed to our professional growth.”*

P2-B: *“The process encouraged us to work together more as a staff. We now plan lessons as a group, and this collaboration has reinforced our teaching.”*

FG1-B: *“The feedback from WSE fostered a culture where we learn from one another instead of working in isolation. It has made us feel more like a team.”*

The participants emphasised that WSE offered valuable opportunities for professional development and enhanced collaboration among teachers. Their feedback consistently recognised WSE as a platform that promoted peer learning, mentoring, and collaborative problem-solving. Through structured feedback and shared reflection, educators reported an increased confidence in their practices while developing stronger collegial relationships. This suggests that WSE contributed to cultivating a culture of ongoing professional growth and teamwork within schools.

## **Objective 2: Instructional changes implemented in response to WSE feedback**

### **Theme 3: Curriculum Alignment and Use of Assessment Data**

In response to feedback from the WSE, schools enacted specific instructional changes, including aligning teaching practices more closely with assessment outcomes. Participants shared insights that emphasise how WSE is transforming curriculum delivery and the valuable application of assessment outcomes to enhance teaching and learning.

P1-A: *“The feedback from the WSE prompted us to reassess how our curriculum aligns with the CAPS standards. We needed to ensure we were pacing and covering material appropriately.”*

HOD2-B: *“We began to utilise assessment data more intentionally, focusing not just on grades but also on pinpointing gaps and modifying our teaching methods.”*

FG1-C: *“The WSE made us understand that assessment should drive learning. Now, we monitor student performance and plan interventions based on that data.”*

P3-C: *“Since the WSE, our curriculum planning has become more structured. We analyse student results to determine if our teaching objectives are being achieved.”*

The feedback from the participants indicated a strong link between WSE insights and their efforts to align the curriculum with the needs of learners and assessment results. They highlighted how WSE prompted educators to reconsider their methods of delivering the curriculum, utilise assessment outcomes to inform instructional planning, and maintain consistency across different grade levels. Their reflections suggested a transformation in practice, where assessment data was reframed as a diagnostic resource aimed at enhancing teaching strategies and addressing educational gaps, thus promoting a more cohesive and adaptable approach to implementing the curriculum.

### **Theme 4: Pedagogical Innovation and Remedial Support**

Participants shared reflections highlighting the impact of WSE feedback on their classroom practices. Their insights underscore how evaluation outcomes motivated them to explore innovative teaching methods, adopt learner-centred strategies, and introduce remedial interventions for struggling students. These direct quotes offer valuable perspectives on how WSE influenced both instructional creativity and personalised support for learners within their schools.

HoD2-C: *“WSE pushed me to think differently about how I deliver lessons, moving beyond routine methods to more engaging approaches.”*

FG2-B: *“After the evaluation, I started introducing remedial classes for learners who were falling behind, which I had not prioritised before.”*

P2-B: *“The feedback highlighted the importance of using varied teaching strategies, and I began to integrate more learner-centred activities.”*

HOD2-B: *“WSE made us realise that innovation is not optional; we had to adjust our pedagogy and provide extra support to ensure no learner is left behind.”*

The feedback from participants underscores how WSE has driven significant shifts in teaching practices, fostering greater innovation and enhanced learner support. Many participants expressed that the WSE process encouraged them to move beyond conventional teaching methods and embrace more engaging strategies. Additionally, some highlighted the critical need to implement remedial classes for students who are struggling. The insights gained from WSE were regarded as a catalyst for integrating learner-centred approaches, emphasising the necessity for ongoing pedagogical adjustments. Together, these perspectives demonstrate how WSE feedback has served as a powerful motivator for innovation in teaching and the provision of targeted support for learners in need.

A table representing findings under Objective 1: To explore educators’ perceptions of the role of WSE in improving instructional practices. The table presents a compilation of participant identification codes, the perceptions articulated by participants, and the key themes that have been identified through analysis.

**Table 1: Educators’ Perceptions of the Role of WSE in Improving Instructional Practices**

Participant Code	Perception of WSE	Emerging Theme
P1-A	<i>“The WSE framework facilitates the identification of strengths and areas for improvement in our pedagogical practices as educators.”</i>	Reflective Professional Development
HOD1-B	<i>“It serves to ensure accountability in our pedagogical practices within the classroom setting.”</i>	Accountability and Compliance
FG1-A	<i>“The insights obtained from the WSE evaluations facilitated a comprehensive reevaluation and enhancement of our pedagogical approaches.”</i>	Instructional Improvement
HOD2-A	<i>“At times, the experience may resemble more of an evaluative process rather than one of genuine support.”</i>	Mixed Perceptions / Monitoring vs Support
P2-B	<i>“The involvement of the WSE played a pivotal role in the initiation of our reading program, which significantly enhanced learner performance.”</i>	Data-Informed Change
FG1-B	<i>“It encourages us to enhance our preparation and align our teaching with standards.”</i>	Motivation and Standardisation

A comprehensive table is presented to summarise the findings pertaining to Objective 2, which aims to investigate the instructional modifications instituted in response to feedback from the WSE. This table delineates the participant codes alongside the reported instructional changes and the subsequent outcomes or effects observed.

**Table 2: Instructional Changes Implemented in Response to WSE Feedback**

Participant Code	Implementation of Instructional Change	Result / Impact Noted
P2-B	Incorporating shared assessment information into lesson planning.	Enhanced alignment of lessons and increased engagement of learners.
HOD1-A	Utilising student performance information to modify instructional methods.	Support aimed specifically at learners who are facing challenges.
FG1-A	Introduction of peer instruction and cooperative lesson planning	Improved collaboration and the sharing of effective practices.
HOD2-B	Creation of after-school assistance programs for remedial support.	Significant progress was observed in the performance of learners at risk.
FG1-B	Transition to student-focused approaches (such as collaborative activities and engaging tasks).	Enhanced student engagement and motivation in the classroom.
P1-A	Update of subject planning to align with WSE recommendations.	Enhanced curriculum breadth and increased time dedicated to tasks.

## DISCUSSION

The findings indicated that teachers perceived WSE as both a diagnostic and reflective instrument, serving as a catalyst for professional growth and collaboration. Participants consistently emphasised that WSE allowed them to critically assess their teaching practices and identify areas needing improvement. For instance, one principal noted, “*WSE made us pause and reflect deeply on why our learners were underperforming, prompting us to reassess our methods*” (P1-A). Likewise, another participant stated, “*The reports provided us with a mirror to recognise our strengths and weaknesses as educators*” (HoD1-A). These insights are corroborated by recent studies highlighting school evaluations as tools that promote reflective dialogue among educators and create opportunities for instructional enhancement.<sup>31</sup> In addition to its diagnostic role, WSE served as a platform for professional collaboration. Teachers noted that the process fostered peer learning and the exchange of best practices. As one educator described, “*We began to collaborate more closely after WSE, as the process highlighted the necessity of not improving in isolation*” (FG2-B). Another commented, “*It prompted us to come together as colleagues and share ideas on enhancing our lessons*” (HoD2-B). These insights are consistent with the findings of Mokoena (2021), who underscores that school evaluations stimulate professional dialogue and peer mentoring, both of which contribute to a more robust culture of collaborative learning.

The interplay between diagnostic reflection and collaboration holds significant importance. Schön’s theory of reflective practice elucidates why WSE had this dual effect.<sup>32</sup> The process encouraged “reflection-on-action,” allowing teachers to reconsider past instructional decisions in light of evaluation reports, while also fostering “reflection-in-action,” where colleagues engaged in collective problem-solving during planning or classroom discussions.<sup>33</sup> Consequently, WSE transcended its role as merely an accountability measure; it emerged as a professional learning tool that integrated reflection into collaborative practices.

By combining reflection and collaboration, WSE assisted teachers in refining their instructional methods while also enhancing collegial networks. These findings indicate that WSE’s dual role, as both a diagnostic tool and a collaborative platform, positions it as a significant catalyst for instructional improvement within schools.

The findings from Objective 2 indicated that WSE not only guided teachers in aligning their instructional practices with curriculum standards but also fostered innovative and remedial support strategies to meet the diverse needs of learners. Several participants highlighted that evaluation feedback

<sup>31</sup> Ming Liu et al., “Future of Education in the Era of Generative Artificial Intelligence: Consensus among Chinese Scholars on Applications of ChatGPT in Schools,” *Future in Educational Research* 1, no. 1 (2023): 72–101.

<sup>32</sup> Donald Schon, “Donald Schon (Schön): Learning, Reflection and Change,” in *Critical Essays on Major Curriculum Theorists* (Abingdon, UK: Taylor & Francis, 1983), 115–23, [https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203461884\\_chapter\\_11](https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203461884_chapter_11).

<sup>33</sup> Haleigh Machost and Marilyne Stains, “Reflective Practices in Education: A Primer for Practitioners,” *CBE—Life Sciences Education* 22, no. 2 (June 2023), <https://doi.org/10.1187/cbe.22-07-0148>.

sharpened their focus on curriculum delivery. As one teacher stated, “*The evaluation reminded us of the necessity to adhere closely to curriculum requirements and to utilise assessment data for monitoring progress*” (P1-A). Another participant remarked, “*We began to leverage learner test results more effectively to adapt our lesson plans*” (HoD2-A). These reflections echo<sup>34</sup> insights that the effective use of assessment data enhances the alignment between teaching and learning outcomes, thereby helping to bridge performance gaps.

In addition to alignment, participants noted that WSE fostered innovation in pedagogy and a heightened commitment to providing remedial support. For example, one educator expressed, “*After WSE, I experimented with new teaching methods because the traditional approach was ineffective*” (FG1-B), while another stated, “*The evaluation process prompted us to implement catch-up programs for students who were struggling*” (P2-B). These reflections illustrate how WSE acted as a catalyst for creative solutions to ongoing classroom challenges. Such perspectives are echoed by Maki, who contends that evaluative processes motivate teachers to modify their instructional strategies, ensuring that no student is left behind and promoting inclusivity.<sup>35</sup>

The integration of curriculum alignment with pedagogical innovation highlights the significant potential of WSE in influencing classroom practices. Schön’s (1983) theory of reflective practice provides valuable insight into this dynamic.<sup>36</sup> Through “reflection-on-action,” teachers utilised assessment data and evaluation reports to adjust their planning, while “reflection-in-action” enabled them to experiment with new strategies and remedial approaches during live instruction. This dual process of reflection fostered both compliance with curriculum standards and the exploration of innovative practices.

These themes collectively indicate that WSE fosters a balanced approach to improvement: it ensures adherence to curriculum requirements while simultaneously encouraging adaptive innovation to address the diverse needs of learners. By doing so, WSE not only holds schools accountable but also establishes a framework for responsive, learner-centred teaching.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### Suggested Theoretical Guidelines

#### 1. Incorporate Transformational Leadership Theory into WSE practices

Recognising the crucial impact of school leadership on teachers' reactions to WSE, the Department of Basic Education (DBE) should focus on training school leaders to become transformational figures who inspire and direct instructional change. Evidence suggests that transformational leadership enhances teacher engagement, fosters professional development, and promotes innovation within schools. By integrating this approach into WSE, feedback can be viewed as a valuable opportunity for growth rather than as mere criticism.

#### 2. Utilise the Constructivist Learning Theory for Professional Development.

The processes associated with WSE should inherently foster the professional development of educators in a manner that is consistent with constructivist theory. This theoretical perspective posits that teachers function as active participants in the learning process, engaging in reflective practices and social interactions to enhance their pedagogical effectiveness. Consequently, post-WSE interventions must be designed to facilitate reflective dialogue, promote peer learning, and encourage collaborative planning sessions, all of which are essential components for substantive instructional improvement.

### Practical Recommendations

#### 1. Establish mechanisms for converting feedback into actionable steps

The study found that although feedback is typically provided after evaluations, it is not always acted upon consistently. Therefore, it is advisable for the DBE to create formal "Feedback Action Plans" (FAPs) that schools are required to submit and review on an annual basis. These plans

<sup>34</sup> Peggy L. Maki, *Assessing for Learning: Building a Sustainable Commitment across the Institution* (Routledge, 2023), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003443056>

<sup>35</sup> Maki, *Assessing for Learning: Building a Sustainable Commitment across the Institution*.

<sup>36</sup> Schon, “Donald Schon (Schön): Learning, Reflection and Change.”

should detail how the feedback from the WSE is incorporated into instructional strategies, training sessions, and classroom practices.

## **2. Broaden Professional Development Tailored to Context**

Teacher training informed by WSE results should be customised rather than generic, focusing on specific subject areas and the unique contexts of each school. For instance, in cases where a school identifies weaknesses in learner literacy outcomes, it would be beneficial to provide targeted workshops on phonemic awareness or effective reading strategies.

## **3. Foster School Environments that Support Evaluation**

The WSE should be reconceptualised from a regulatory instrument to a mechanism for professional development. It is essential for school principals and Heads of Department (HoDs) to cultivate an environment in which educators perceive evaluations as constructive rather than punitive. This paradigm shift can be facilitated by actively involving teachers in pre-evaluation planning processes and in sessions dedicated to the analysis of feedback. This collaborative approach not only enhances the perceived utility of evaluations but also promotes a culture of continuous improvement within the educational setting.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study examined educators' perceptions regarding the role of WSE in enhancing instructional practices within selected schools in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa. The findings indicated that school-based educators generally view WSE as a constructive tool for identifying professional development needs and fostering instructional improvement. Participants recognised that feedback from WSE led to meaningful changes in classroom practices, including the implementation of targeted reading programs and enhanced lesson planning. Furthermore, the study revealed that the effectiveness of these instructional changes largely depended on how WSE feedback was managed, interpreted, and supported by school leadership. Teachers responded positively when WSE was approached as a collaborative, growth-oriented process rather than a punitive measure. The study concludes that WSE can serve as an effective mechanism for improving teaching quality and learner performance if it is systematically followed by structured professional development and accepted as a developmental tool rather than merely evaluative. The findings underscore the necessity for a sustained, context-driven approach to utilising WSE feedback to inform instructional decision-making at the school level.

## **SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

### **Comparative Studies Across Provinces and Schools**

Further research is warranted to compare the implementation of WSE programs and their associated outcomes across various provinces, with particular emphasis on disparities between rural and urban educational institutions. Such comparative analysis could illuminate patterns of success as well as existing gaps in support, ultimately contributing to more equitable improvements within the educational system.

### **Results for Learners Associated with WSE Practices**

Future research ought to establish empirical connections between targeted instructional modifications informed by WSE and longitudinal student performance metrics. This would enable a thorough examination of causality and the enduring impacts of such educational interventions.

### **Teacher's Emotional Reaction to Evaluation**

A qualitative investigation into educators' emotional and professional responses to the WSE processes is essential for enhancing the design of support systems. Such research can contribute to the improvement of teacher retention rates and overall morale within the educational environment.

## **Creative Methods and Original Solutions**

### **1. Utilise digital platforms for oversight**

Implement digital solutions, like dashboards or mobile applications, to monitor the application of WSE feedback in real-time. This will improve accountability, enable adjustments during the year,

and foster transparency at all school levels. The Western Cape Education Department has tested similar systems as part of its e-Education strategy, yielding encouraging outcomes.

## 2. Encourage Networking for Peer Learning.

The promotion of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) within educational institutions is essential for disseminating effective practices informed by WSE feedback. PLCs cultivate a collaborative environment that fosters a shared commitment to continuous improvement and enhances the pedagogical competence of educators. By engaging in collective inquiry and mutual support, these communities facilitate the professional growth of teachers and promote a culture of accountability and excellence within schools.

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