

Reflections on Principals' Leadership Practices in Deprived Schools: A Case of the Amathole East Education District



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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to provide reflections on the leadership experiences of school principals on leading and managing in the deprived context of the Amathole East Education District. The study thus employed a qualitative research approach coupled with an in-depth exploratory examination of the reflections of five principals in their leadership roles. The findings indicated that school principals encountered a lack of support from the government, a lack of funding and infrastructure, a lack of parental involvement, and many socio-economic issues. The study recommended that schools should be provided with additional resources and funding, community partners, and mentorship, and should design activities that engage parents and the wider community in the education process. This study contributes to scholarship by deepening understanding of the complexities of leading and managing in deprived educational contexts by offering actionable recommendations for enhancing educational equity and quality in such settings. It serves as a valuable resource for policymakers, educators, and researchers seeking to address the persistent challenges faced by schools serving disadvantaged communities.

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INTRODUCTION

One of the most crucial responsibilities of principals and other school leaders is becoming more widely acknowledged: supervising and directing teaching and learning.¹ Effective management of teaching and learning is emphasized heavily in the South African Standard for School Leadership, which outlines the fundamental goal of principalship. Providing leadership and administration in all aspects of the school to facilitate the establishment and maintenance of environments that foster excellent teaching and learning and the highest levels of student accomplishment is the fundamental goal of the principalship.² Principals at the school level have reportedly always been referred to as the primary forces behind a school's success or effectiveness, according to Myende.³ There is a general agreement that the leadership of the school principal is the primary factor in determining a school's success or failure, even though the principals

¹ Nontuthuzelo Mhlanga, *Leadership Practices of Principals in Multiple Deprived Contexts: A Case of Successful Schools* (University of Pretoria (South Africa), 2019).

² Phumlani Erasmus Myende and Selaelo Maifala, "Complexities of Leading Rural Schools in South Africa: Learning from Principals' Voices," *International Journal of Rural Management* 16, no. 2 (2020): 225–53.

³ Myende and Maifala, "Complexities of Leading Rural Schools in South Africa: Learning from Principals' Voices."

cannot be said to be the only heroes.⁴ Therefore, principals play a significant role in ensuring that schools endure.

The diverse setting that schools are positioned in makes it extremely harder to fulfil the leadership roles of principals. There are still schools in South Africa's multi-deprived context, where the study was done, that pose poor infrastructure, lack of resources, and where basic necessities like water and power are not always available. Many South African schools especially in rural provinces are not operating efficiently, lack resources, and infrastructure, and are surrounded by poor communities.⁵ It takes both social interactions within the setting and cultural traits that emerge from the interaction to either create or inhabit a culture that supports learning in the classroom.⁶ Strong school leadership may influence how difficulties related to this setting can be managed, even while the socioeconomic environment of schools is unlikely to alter. This suggests that among other things, school leadership is important for academic success.

One of the reasons some schools in contexts of multiple deprivation do effectively despite these hurdles may be school leadership. For example, the central administration of teaching and learning is the responsibility of South African principals, as reflected in the South African Standard for Principalship. They should oversee developing the structure for effective teaching and learning, solving this issue, and keeping an eye on the curriculum's execution. Bush et al. assert that one of the roles of principals is to take a school-wide perspective. Principals are directly accountable for the effectiveness of instruction and learning as well as for the academic success of their learners.⁷ This entails having high standards, keeping track of learning outcomes, and assessing their efficacy. According to Stein, principals must recognize effective instruction when they see it, support it if they don't, and provide it.⁸

According to Shoko and Dzimiri, school principals need to spend more time making sure that all stakeholders outside of the school are involved if they want to see success in underprivileged environments.⁹ While this may be viewed as an all-purpose approach to running wealthy schools, it is especially critical in underprivileged schools since building relationships outside of the school is the only way to generate resources. This is consistent with the research done by Medina et. al, who investigated leadership in high-needs schools using two principals.¹⁰ Their research showed how complex and varied the function of principals is in high-needs areas and schools. Before they can address the essential factors affecting student performance, principals in high-needs schools must consider the socioeconomic needs and unresolved intellectual, emotional, and physical difficulties. This is in support of the sentiments of Goldstone et al., who suggest that high-needs schools call for perseverance, tenacity, self-belief, and moral purpose from principals.¹¹ Based on this background, the study seeks to provide reflections on the leadership experiences of school principals on leading and managing in the deprived context of the Amathole East Education District.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Despite its demographic position, leadership in educational organizations plays a key role in a school's effectiveness.¹² The school administrator oversees the entire educational system and forges strong ties among the various components that support student success. However, research has shown that

⁴ Cal P Hauserman and Sheldon L Stick, "The Leadership Teachers Want from Principals: Transformational.," *Canadian Journal of Education* 36, no. 3 (2013): 184–203.

⁵ Mhlanga, *Leadership Practices of Principals in Multiple Deprived Contexts: A Case of Successful Schools*.

⁶ Kathi Weeks, *The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics, and Postwork Imaginaries* (Duke University Press, 2020).

⁷ Tony Bush et al., "Leading and Sustaining Zimbabwe's Private Schools: Matching Vision with Economic Reality," *Management in Education* 33, no. 3 (2019): 101–9.

⁸ John Stein, "What Is Developmental Dyslexia?," *Brain Sciences* 8, no. 2 (2018).

⁹ Shepherd Shoko and Wonderful Dzimiri, "Impression Management Tactics Employed by Primary School Heads to Influence Management and Leadership Decisions in Schools: A Survey of Two Districts in Zimbabwe," *Advances in Social Sciences Research Journal* 5, no. 5 (2018).

¹⁰ Venus Medina et al., "Principals' Perceptions from within: Leadership in High-Need Schools in the USA," *Management in Education* 28, no. 3 (2014): 91–96.

¹¹ J. Goldstone, T.R. Gurr, and F. Moshiri, *Revolutions of the Late Twentieth Century* (London: Routledge, 2019).

¹² Samuel Nguni, Peter Slegers, and Eddie Denessen, "Transformational and Transactional Leadership Effects on Teachers' Job Satisfaction, Organizational Commitment, and Organizational Citizenship Behavior in Primary Schools: The Tanzanian Case," *School Effectiveness and School Improvement* 17, no. 2 (2006): 145–77.

educational advancement has been slow in rural areas.¹³ In the management process, principals play a variety of functions. Mulaudzi asserts that principals constitute the backbone of the educational system, enabling teachers to carry out their responsibilities for fostering teaching and learning.¹⁴ Nowadays, educational institutions rely heavily on supervision to enhance the teaching strategies used by teachers at various educational levels. One of the several responsibilities of administrators in overseeing instruction and learning in schools is raising the standard of the educational process and the school's overall performance.¹⁵ Principals must employ proper tactics in managing teaching to raise teacher performance for the managing process to be more effective.

Managing can be regarded as one of the most influential variables in the quality of teaching and learning as it plays a significant part in taking on the responsibility of professionally developing instructors and boosting the quality of the educational process. Since principals are also educators, they become irritated not just when they find it difficult to control student behaviour in packed classrooms but also when teachers who share their frustrations turn to them for support.¹⁶ If proper planning and purchasing are not done, overcrowded classes result in other issues, such as seating arrangements, which have a negative impact on learners.¹⁷ This suggests that since problems involving resources could have an adverse effect on instruction and learning, principals should likewise plan. According to Brown and Pehrson, parents who are crucial role models for their children's education but are illiterate cannot support their children's learning.¹⁸ As a result, teachers and principals are responsible for making sure that learners receive effective instruction and learning even in the absence of one piece of the puzzle—parental support. Parents may be prevented from actively participating by financial constraints or demanding work schedules.

According to Tingle et al., school leaders serve as curators and custodians of their institution's vision, mission, and values because they inspire others to carry out the institution's goals by pointing them in the right direction.¹⁹ As a result, to create and maintain outstanding schools in challenging situations, they must exhibit specific leadership traits. These complicated circumstances also suggest that school leaders need to have "multifaceted skills" which are necessary for effective leadership.²⁰ According to the Wallace Foundation's "How Leadership Influences Learning" report, "there are essentially no documented cases of failing schools being turned around without assistance by a powerful leader. Racial disparities in education were a hallmark of apartheid-era South Africa.²¹ This school system's main flaw was its inadequacy: low funding, high teacher-to-student ratios, poor infrastructure, insufficient infrastructure training, insufficient management training, and a dearth of resources, particularly in historically Black township schools. According to Govender, most Black school principals and teachers working today started their careers during the apartheid era.²² The White population's school system, on the other hand, was distinguished by sufficient financing, resources, a fully functional infrastructure, and sufficient training for teachers and principals. Teachers who were unprepared for teaching and management were the consequence of educational inequality. Additionally, several Apartheid statutes such as the Native Land Act of 1913, and the Native Affairs.

Setokoe and Ramukumba reported a serious lack of government support for the villages in many economic activities like the tourism industry, businesses, education, etc, as a result, this shows the

¹³ Zoe A Barley and Andrea D Beesley, "Rural School Success: What Can We Learn," *Journal of Research in Rural Education* 22, no. 1 (2007): 1–16; Norma Nel et al., "Research Partnership between South Africa and China: Emergent Literacy Teaching and Learning in Early Childhood Education in South Africa," *Per Linguam: A Journal of Language Learning= Per Linguam: Tydskrif Vir Taalaanleer* 32, no. 1 (2016): 102–22.

¹⁴ F.G. Mulaudzi, "Challenges That Heads of Departments Face in Managing Teaching of Tshivenda Home Language in Rural Primary Schools of Dzindi Circuit Vhembe District" (University of Zululand, 2019).

¹⁵ B.B. Mpisane, "The Role of High School Heads of Department as Leaders of Learning" (2015).

¹⁶ Mulaudzi, "Challenges That Heads of Departments Face in Managing Teaching of Tshivenda Home Language in Rural Primary Schools of Dzindi Circuit Vhembe District."

¹⁷ Rupert Brown and Samuel Pehrson, *Group Processes: Dynamics within and between Groups* (John Wiley & Sons, 2019).

¹⁸ Brown and Pehrson, *Group Processes: Dynamics within and between Groups*.

¹⁹ Eric Tingle, Antonio Corrales, and Michelle L Peters, "Leadership Development Programs: Investing in School Principals," *Educational Studies* 45, no. 1 (2019): 1–16.

²⁰ Parvathy Naidoo, "Perceptions of Teachers and School Management Teams of the Leadership Roles of Public School Principals," *South African Journal of Education* 39, no. 2 (2019).

²¹ Mhlanga, *Leadership Practices of Principals in Multiple Deprived Contexts: A Case of Successful Schools*.

²² D.R. Govender, "The Role of the Principal in Leading and Managing Teaching and Learning: A Case Study of Distributed Leadership in Two Secondary Schools in Gauteng" (University of the Witwatersrand, 2012).

government is unresponsive to the needs of communities in which many schools are located.²³ There is no service delivery to many deprived schools even though people are voting in every general election of each term. The majority of South African schools in underprivileged environments are located in rural areas, and one of their challenges is that they lack the resources necessary for proper operation.²⁴ In a similar vein, those assigned to managerial and leadership roles might not be able to acquire all the necessary competencies.²⁵ As a result, these leaders must acknowledge and make use of the strengths of those they collaborate with. This entails recognizing the abilities that stakeholders, both inside and outside of the classroom, possess. Myende and Chikoko posit that even if the surroundings may be impoverished, there may be a lot of valuable resources there that are underutilized.²⁶ Maringe and Moletsane contend that asset-based leadership is essential for leaders operating in impoverished South African environments.²⁷ In these situations, schools are also under additional pressure to enhance their partnerships with the community and make sure that their primary goal is to serve. Thus, the literature indicates that leaders must be servants before they can be leaders in the setting of deprivation.²⁸ These leaders' primary concern is their followers, which implies that the followers are the leaders' primary concern.²⁹

The societal setting of deprivation provides leaders with a number of difficult issues that work together to make teaching and learning impossible. These elements can occasionally be found outside of the school and the classroom, so leaders who are not servants would not feel the need to pay attention to them. Nonetheless, Bhengu and Mkhize's study revealed that local authorities must be mindful of the factors influencing educators and students outside of the classroom and school.³⁰ In the researchers' opinion, this is indicative of leaders who care about the individuals participating in the process as much as the teaching and learning process. Using this phrase here, asset-based leadership and this kind of leadership acknowledge the various leaders that exist in the neighbourhoods where schools are situated and the potential influence that these leaders may have as residents in resolving certain school-related issues. This is supported by Myende, who discovered that to establish a school-community collaboration, leaders in underprivileged contexts figuratively breach school walls.³¹ In an environment like South Africa, where issues in schools are mirror images of societal issues, this is especially pertinent. As Lumby notes, addressing these issues calls for leaders to engage with local communities.³²

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The paper provides reflections on the leadership experiences of school principals of the Amathole East Education District using the Context-Responsive Leadership theory as its foundation. The study's setting is crucial because all these schools are in areas of extreme poverty, some of which lack permanent structures, resources, and necessities like power and water.³³ The neighbourhoods where these schools are located are impacted by socioeconomic problems like unemployment, poverty, drug and alcohol misuse, and violence.³⁴ Context-responsive leadership was used to comprehend how principals modify their

²³ Tshepiso J Setokoe and Takalani Ramukumba, "Challenges of Community Participation in Community-Based Tourism in Rural Areas," *WIT Transactions on Ecology and the Environment* 248 (2020): 13–22.

²⁴ Vitallis Chikoko, *Leadership That Works in Deprived School Contexts of South Africa* (Nova Science Publishers, Incorporated, 2017); Vuyisile Msila and Tshilidzi Netshitangani, "Women and Leadership: Learning from an African Philosophy," *Africanising the Curriculum: Indigenous Perspectives and Theories* 2, no. 1 (2016): 83–95..

²⁵ Phumlani E Myende, "Leadership for School-Community Partnership: A School Principal's Experience in a Deprived Context," *Leadership That Works in Deprived School Contexts of South Africa*, 2018, 121–42.

²⁶ Phumlani Myende and Vitallis Chikoko, "School-University Partnership in a South African Rural Context: Possibilities for an Asset-Based Approach," *Journal of Human Ecology* 46, no. 3 (2014): 249–59.

²⁷ Felix Maringe and Relebohile Moletsane, "Leading Schools in Circumstances of Multiple Deprivation in South Africa: Mapping Some Conceptual, Contextual and Research Dimensions," *Educational Management Administration & Leadership* 43, no. 3 (2015): 347–62.

²⁸ T T Bhengu and B N Mkhize, "Leading to Serve: Lessons from School Management Team Members in Deprived Contexts," *Leadership That Works in Deprived School Contexts of South Africa*, 2018, 143–59.

²⁹ Robert S Dennis, Linda Kinzler-Norheim, and Mihai Bocarnea, "Servant Leadership Theory: Development of the Servant Leadership Assessment Instrument," in *Servant Leadership: Developments in Theory and Research* (Springer, 2010), 169–79.

³⁰ Bhengu and Mkhize, "Leading to Serve: Lessons from School Management Team Members in Deprived Contexts."

³¹ Phumlani E Myende and Dipane Hlalele, "Framing Sustainable Rural Learning Ecologies: A Case for Strength-Based Approaches," *Africa Education Review* 15, no. 3 (2018): 21–37.

³² Jacky Lumby, "Leading Schools in Communities of Multiple Deprivation: Women Principals in South Africa," *Educational Management Administration & Leadership* 43, no. 3 (2015): 400–417.

³³ Myende and Hlalele, "Framing Sustainable Rural Learning Ecologies: A Case for Strength-Based Approaches."

³⁴ Mhlanga, *Leadership Practices of Principals in Multiple Deprived Contexts: A Case of Successful Schools*.

behaviour to the various deprivation circumstances. Bredeson et al. developed the context-responsive leadership theory as a practical wisdom that reveals a complex mix of knowledge, skills, and dispositions that effective leaders appropriately deploy as they engage in fluid conversations with dynamic environments.³⁵ Furthermore, context-responsive leadership theory is communicated through the leader's behavior and actions. Context-responsive leaders are conscious of the fact that different settings can both facilitate and constrain their behaviour.³⁶ In this study, context variations of context-responsive leadership were adapted to suit principals of the chosen multiple impoverished schools. This theory links the behaviours of principal leadership to achieving organizational goals in deprived environments. As the schools in the Amathole East Education district are deprived of resources for the betterment of learner success, principal leadership should respond to the operations in the context related to geographic and economic issues. This theory allows principals to find a balance between the context and their leadership in the schools they lead to achieve success in the learners.³⁷

METHODOLOGY

Research Paradigm and Approach

The study used a qualitative research methodology that was based on construct theory and the interpretative paradigm.³⁸ According to this theory, people form their own conceptions of the universe and utilize them to interpret their experiences and observations. The interpretive paradigm was selected due to its focus on how individuals provide meaning to their surroundings and how their perspective shapes their interpretation of it.³⁹ Interpretivists seek to comprehend the meaning that underlies behaviour in people. Henning claims that because the opportunity to control factors is typically not offered, a qualitative research approach allows for the unfettered and natural emergence of themes that the researcher desires to identify in the study.⁴⁰

Research Design and Participants

A participatory research design was used in the study. With the help of this approach, academics and those experiencing the issue can work together to identify answers.⁴¹ All voices can be heard through the dynamic, flexible, and non-hierarchical participatory research approach.⁴² Numerous sectors, including education, health, community development, and environmental protection, have effectively used this kind of study.⁴³ Building rapport and trust with participants, obtaining precise and timely data, and identifying viable solutions that are sensitive to community needs are just a few benefits of the participatory research design. Therefore, the participants involved in the study were given the opportunity to assess the problem and the possible solutions to their problem. The participants for this study were five principals leading in rural schools of the Amathole East Education district. Three of them were secondary school principals, and two were primary school principals in the district.

Method of Data Analysis

The thematic data analysis was used to analyse the data from the reflections. Thematic analysis is a qualitative research method that can be used to analyse written transcripts from interview responses and topics, from personal experiences to social issues.⁴⁴ This method involves identifying common themes

³⁵ Paul V Bredeson, Hans W Klar, and Olof Johansson, "Context-Responsive Leadership: Examining Superintendent Leadership in Context," 2011.

³⁶ Bredeson, Klar, and Johansson, "Context-Responsive Leadership: Examining Superintendent Leadership in Context."

³⁷ Goldstone, Gurr, and Moshiri, *Revolutions of the Late Twentieth Century*.

³⁸ Kendra Cherry, "Personal Construct Theory Overview," *Very Well Mind*, 2020.

³⁹ K. Maree, *Shaping the Story: A Guide to Facilitating Narrative Career Counselling* (London: Brill, 2019).

⁴⁰ Elizabeth Henning, *Finding Your Way in Qualitative Research* (van Schaik, 2004).

⁴¹ P. Leavy, *Handbook of Arts-Based Research* (New York: Guilford Publications, 2017).

⁴² Ann C Macaulay et al., "Participatory Research Maximises Community and Lay Involvement," *Bmj* 319, no. 7212 (1999): 774–78.

⁴³ Mark Israel, "Services as Experience Goods: An Empirical Examination of Consumer Learning in Automobile Insurance," *American Economic Review* 95, no. 5 (2005): 1444–63; Harry R Lewis, *Excellence without a Soul: How a Great University Forgot Education* (Citeseer, 2006); Jack T Tapp, *Reinforcement and Behavior* (Academic Press, 2013).

⁴⁴ Ashley Castleberry and Amanda Nolen, "Thematic Analysis of Qualitative Research Data: Is It as Easy as It Sounds?," *Currents in Pharmacy Teaching and Learning* 10, no. 6 (2018): 807–15.

that emerge from the data and organizing them into categories.⁴⁵ Six steps of doing thematic analysis by Brown and Clarke were adopted.⁴⁶ These include familiarisation with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining, and naming themes, and developing the analysis. These steps were adequately followed in making sense of the data.

Selection of Participants and Instruments

The study's participants were chosen using a practical sampling technique. People who were available and eager to participate in the study were chosen for this kind of sampling.⁴⁷ This method's primary benefit is its ease of use and speed. Those that were accessible and the continents that needed to be reached at the time of the study were chosen by the researcher. All of them, however, possessed the necessary knowledge as they were all in charge of rural schools. The participants' information was obtained through reflection. In other words, they were asked to consider how they had led and managed instruction in a setting of deprivation. This tool also prompted students to consider potential remedies for the difficulties and lack of assistance they encountered. By reflecting on all of their experiences, the participants were able to be completely honest while using reflection as a data collection approach. Conversely, this approach facilitates amicable connections free from power dynamics between participants and researchers.

Ethical Considerations

To preserve the rights and welfare of research participants, Maree argues that researchers have ethical obligations, including adhering to legal restrictions while collecting and disclosing data.⁴⁸ All research participants gave their informed consent in the context of this investigation. This indicates that they were fully informed about the study's goals, methods, potential drawbacks and advantages, and other pertinent information. In addition, participants had the freedom to leave the study at any moment and ask questions. All these actions are necessary to safeguard participant rights and guarantee ethical research practices. Most importantly, their identities were protected throughout the study and represented with codes during the data analysis. That is, the participant was represented with **P1, P2, P3, ...P5**.

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Emanating from the analysis of the data, four themes emerged indicative of a range of challenges faced by principals leading teaching and learning in deprived contexts. These are lack of support from the government, lack of funding, lack of infrastructure, socio-economic issues, and lack of parental involvement. The presentation of the field findings and discussion of the findings as per the responses of the participants who took part in this study are presented subsequently.

Lack of Support from the Government

The participants reported a serious lack of government support in their responsibility of leading and managing teaching and learning in deprived schools. This shows an unresponsive government in responding to the needs of society and in ensuring full-service delivery. These are stated in the following respondents' dialogues.

***P1** Our schools are in previously disadvantaged communities, we're facing a series of challenges in leading and managing to teach, and government authorities are not taking any responsibility for providing quality education for the children of these communities.*

***P2** I am struggling to lead teaching and learning in this school, even the entire school because I am not getting the necessary support that I am supposed to get from the government. They are not visiting our schools as it happens to schools that are in Urban/cities.*

⁴⁵ Stephanie Riger and Rannveig Sigurvinsdottir, "Thematic Analysis," *Handbook of Methodological Approaches to Community-Based Research: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods*, 2016, 33–41.

⁴⁶ Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology," *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3,no.2(2006):77–101.

⁴⁷ Heesup Han, "Consumer Behavior and Environmental Sustainability in Tourism and Hospitality: A Review of Theories, Concepts, and Latest Research," *Sustainable Consumer Behaviour and the Environment*, 2021, 1–22.

⁴⁸ Maree, *Shaping the Story: A Guide to Facilitating Narrative Career Counselling*.

The study findings reported that principals are struggling to lead and manage teaching and learning in deprived environments that often lack essential educational resources, such as textbooks, teaching materials, technology, and infrastructure. Without government support, schools in these areas struggle to provide learners with the necessary tools for learning, which can hinder their academic progress. In support of the above view, Setokoe and Ramukumba reported a serious lack of government support for the villages in many economic activities like the tourism industry, businesses, education, etc, as a result, this portrays the government as unresponsive to the needs of the communities in which many schools are located.⁴⁹ However, principals find a balance in contextualizing their leadership roles with the learner's needs as alluded to in the Context-Responsive Leadership theory. For instance, one principal alluded that though the government does not provide sufficient classrooms, the community has built some classrooms. This was possible because of the efforts of the principal to initiate a project called 'Let's build our schools'.

Lack of Funding and Infrastructure

The lack of funding and infrastructure in schools is a significant issue that can have serious implications for students, teachers, and the overall quality of education. This problem is not unique to any region; it can be observed in many parts of the world, particularly in low-income and underserved communities. Here are some of the key challenges and consequences associated with the lack of funding and infrastructure in schools. These are stated in the following respondents' dialogues:

P4: *The lack of funding and infrastructure in managing teaching is a major hurdle in providing quality education to learners in deprived environments. Our school struggles to meet the basic needs of learners, such as textbooks and proper classroom facilities. It's disheartening to see our learners miss out on opportunities due to the government's negligence in allocating adequate resources.*

P1: *The lack of funding and infrastructure severely limits our teaching capabilities in a deprived environment. We struggle to provide a conducive learning environment for our learners due to overcrowded classrooms and a lack of necessary resources. The government must recognize the importance of education and allocate the funds and resources needed to bridge the gap between privileged and deprived areas.*

The above rhetoric by the respondents is in sharp contrast with the works of Mhlanga who reported that in the South African context, where the study was conducted, there are still schools that are in deprived contexts where there is poor infrastructure, lack of resources, and where basic needs such water, electricity and toilets are not part of the school facilities.⁵⁰ The perception is that half of the South African schools are not operating properly, lack resources, and infrastructure, and are situated in poor communities. Deprived areas often suffer from inadequate school infrastructure, including poorly maintained buildings, limited classroom space, and insufficient facilities like libraries, laboratories, and sports facilities. The government's lack of investment in these areas created an environment that is not conducive to effective teaching and learning which then makes it difficult for the school principals to lead and manage teaching effectively in such deprived environments.

Lack of Parental Involvement

Lack of parental involvement in schools can have significant consequences for the academic and overall development of children. Parental involvement refers to the active participation of parents or guardians in their children's education, which can include various activities such as attending parent-teacher conferences, volunteering at school events, helping with homework, and staying engaged in their child's learning progress. These are stated in the following respondents' dialogues:

P5: *Parents in our community don't seem to prioritize their children's education. It's frustrating because education is the key to a better future. I wish parents would take a more active role in their child's learning. It feels like we're fighting an uphill battle without their support.*

⁴⁹ Setokoe and Ramukumba, "Challenges of Community Participation in Community-Based Tourism in Rural Areas."

⁵⁰ Mhlanga, *Leadership Practices of Principals in Multiple Deprived Contexts: A Case of Successful Schools.*

The study findings reported that parents are not taking any responsibility for their children's education, visiting schools to check and evaluate their children's progress and well-being. This makes it difficult for the teacher component including principals to manage the teaching of their children. This is congruent to the study findings of Brown and Pehrson who reported that parents who are essential role players in the learning of their children fail to contribute towards the learning of their children due to illiteracy.⁵¹ Teachers, and consequently principals must therefore carry the burden of ensuring that effective teaching and learning take place for the learners despite the absence of one portion of the jigsaw puzzle, namely parental support. The reality is that some parents in the communities may not have received a good education themselves, so they may not fully understand the value of being involved in their child's learning. Brown and Pehrson further aver that, financial constraints or demanding work schedules may prevent parents from being actively involved.⁵² Unfortunately, they may not have the resources or time to support their child's education.

Socio-Economic Issues

Socio-economic issues in schools refer to the challenges and disparities that arise due to the varying economic backgrounds of students and their families. Students from low-income backgrounds may have limited access to quality education due to factors such as underfunded schools, lack of resources (e.g., textbooks, technology, extracurricular programs), and inadequate facilities. These issues can significantly impact the educational experiences and outcomes of students, potentially perpetuating inequality and hindering social mobility. These are stated in the following respondents' dialogues:

P3: *Socio-economic disparities in deprived areas can contribute to significant educational inequalities. Learners from low-income backgrounds may face barriers to accessing quality education, including limited opportunities for extracurricular activities, advanced courses, and college preparation resources. This can perpetuate a cycle of disadvantage and limit their future prospects.*

P1: *Deprived areas may experience high rates of student mobility, as families may frequently move due to economic instability or housing issues. This mobility can disrupt learners' education, making it challenging for educators to maintain continuity in their learning and address their specific needs.*

P4: *Parents in deprived areas may face economic pressures, long working hours, or lack of educational opportunities themselves, limiting their ability to actively engage in their child's schooling. This lack of involvement can further exacerbate the educational gaps for learners in deprived areas.*

The study reveals that socio-economic issues such as unemployment, economic mobility and status, and illiteracy hinders principals' progress towards leading and managing to teach in deprived contexts as they are unable to address their learner's background needs and maintain continuity in their learning. This resonates with Medina et al. who utilized two principals to explore leadership in high-needs schools.⁵³ His findings suggested that the work of principals in high-needs schools and communities is complex and multifaceted. Principals in high-needs schools are required to consider first the socio-economic needs and unaddressed academic, emotional, and physical issues before they can attend to the critical of learner success. School principals need to work towards creating a more equitable and inclusive education system that supports the needs of learners in deprived areas and helps break the cycle of disadvantage. According to Shoko and Dzimiri, school principals need to spend more time making sure that all stakeholders outside of the school are involved if they want to see success in underprivileged environments encountering socio-economic issues.⁵⁴ However, Goldstone et al. suggest that high-needs schools call for perseverance, tenacity, self-belief, and moral purpose from principals.⁵⁵

⁵¹ Brown and Pehrson, *Group Processes: Dynamics within and between Groups*.

⁵² Brown and Pehrson, *Group Processes: Dynamics within and between Groups*.

⁵³ Medina et al., "Principals' Perceptions from within: Leadership in High-Need Schools in the USA."

⁵⁴ Shoko and Dzimiri, "Impression Management Tactics Employed by Primary School Heads to Influence Management and Leadership Decisions in Schools: A Survey of Two Districts in Zimbabwe."

⁵⁵ Goldstone, Gurr, and Moshiri, *Revolutions of the Late Twentieth Century*.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the finding and discussions, it is recommended that School principals need to take the time to thoroughly understand the specific challenges and circumstances faced by learners in the deprived context. Advocate for additional resources and funding to support the unique needs of learners in a deprived context. Ensure resources are allocated strategically, prioritizing interventions that have been proven effective in similar contexts. This may include smaller class sizes, additional teaching assistants, specialized programs, and access to technology and educational materials. Prioritize student well-being by implementing comprehensive support systems. This may include mental health services, counselling, and mentorship programs, foster a positive and inclusive school culture that promotes resilience, empathy, and respect for diversity. Provide opportunities for learners to voice their opinions and contribute to decision-making processes. Recognize and celebrate the achievements and progress made by learners, teachers, and the wider school community. Acknowledge the unique challenges they face, and the dedication required to overcome them. Highlight success stories to inspire and motivate others. Actively involve parents and the wider community in the education process. Organize regular meetings, workshops, and events to keep parents informed and engaged. Seek community partnerships and collaborations to provide additional resources, mentorship, and extracurricular opportunities for learners. Remember that change takes time, and perseverance is key. With a strong commitment to equity and excellence, leaders can create transformative educational experiences for all learners, regardless of their background or circumstances.

CONCLUSION

The reflections shared by the school principals in the Amathole East Education District underscore the vital importance of effective leadership and management in navigating the complexities of deprived educational contexts. As stewards of change, these principals exemplify the transformative power of education when coupled with visionary leadership and a commitment to fostering inclusive, supportive learning environments. By prioritizing the needs of learners from deprived backgrounds and cultivating a culture of resilience and collaboration, they not only overcome challenges but also pave the way for meaningful educational outcomes and opportunities for all students. Their insights serve as a beacon of inspiration for educators worldwide, highlighting the profound impact that dedicated leadership can have on shaping the future of education and empowering communities.

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