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The Challenges Experienced by School Principals in the Implementation of QMS Performance Appraisal System in Schools within Mpumalanga Province, South Africa

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Abstract

The aim of the study was to explore the challenges that principals experience in the implementation of quality management system (QMS) in Schools within Mpumalanga Province, South Africa. The main problem which the study investigated was concerned with the factors that lead to principal's leadership challenges in implementing QMS in the Mashishila and Badplaas circuits' schools. The study utilized pragmatism as a research paradigm, this allowed for many different ways of interpreting data in this case from both quantitative and qualitative sources. The population of the study was 443 school principals of Gert Sibande District of Mpumalanga province of South Africa. The sample size was 214 and this included 8 participants who took part in a focus group discussion while the rest participated in a survey. In terms of data analysis quantitative analysis was applied for close ended questions that were drawn from responses from the survey. Quantitative data was processed using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) computer software version 2.0 and results of such analysis were presented in tables and figures. Qualitative data analysis was completed by first categorizing and discussing responses for each item according to themes (thematic analysis), before editing and coding. From the findings of the FGD study it was clear participants felt strongly regarding the Department of Education's failure to give school adequate technical support to ensure that the QMS implementation is efficient. Furthermore, evidence drew from some of the participants through the FGD voiced and severe shortages of specialists in QMS who can best advise the schools on the technical aspects of the implementation. The study also revealed that there is existence of sabotage and politics at the workplace. This scenario was regarded as one of the factors significantly influencing the

lack of effectiveness of QMS implementation by the principals. It was revealed that the inadequacy of leadership skills amongst principals was a challenge they faced in the implementation of the QMS. It is recommended that the DoE reviews the financial resource being channeled to schools for the implementation of QMS with the view of liaising with schools in order to increase the resources. An increase in the available resource will ease some of challenges especially on resources required to engage the technical support through frequent workshops for school managers to effectively implement the programmes. It was recommended that the DoE considers the engagement of the independent body or bodies to oversee and evaluate the implementation of quality management system in schools. This will bring integrity and transparency to the implementation process of QMS.

Keywords

1. Introduction

Performance appraisals present conflicting views from different organizations and individuals regarding the most suitable method an organization adopts. Adopting a method presents yet another challenge on how to implement the method. The department of education's Gert Sibande District of the Mpumalanga province, has faced serious challenges regarding the implementation of the quality management system (QMS) in schools. Recently, the Department of Education has developed Standards for Principalship, which set out key performance areas of any individual appointed as a principal in South Africa. One of these key areas is that principals must manage the performance of all educators who work under their supervision in their schools. Therefore the capacity of the principal is very crucial in the successful implementation of the QMS teacher appraisal system in South Africa. Since its inception, the performance appraisals system for teachers in South Africa has evolved in terms of conceptualization and implementation. As a school leader, the principal must ensure that there is always a conducive environment where the learners, educators and non-teaching staff can perform well and realize their full potential. This paper explores the challenges experienced by School Principals in the implementation of QMS Performance Appraisal System in Schools within Mpumalanga Province, South Africa.

2. Literature Review

There is a combination of factors that impact on the implementation of integrated management system (IQMS) in South Africa. The IQMS posed a number of challenges to the principals and educators and this was largely associated with

its implementation. It was noted by Malema (2013: p. 121) that principals have the overall responsibility of ensuring the successful and uniform implementation of IQMS. Ngema and Lekhetho (2019: p. 758) argue that principals lacked comprehensive content on how to implement IQMS successfully. In essence school leadership becomes critical in the implementation of this appraisal process. Effective school leadership rests with the principal as the school head who engages others and show direction and use distributive leadership to implement the IQMS process uniformly and successfully. Ngema and Lekhetho (2019: p. 758) argue strongly that the weak management of schools render the South African education system inefficient and wasteful.

What also makes the IQMS not to be fairly implemented has been a thorny issue with some scholars. According to Tuytens and Devos (2012) the IQMS teacher performance appraisal system and the school procedural justice and perceived feedback must find common ground. Whitley (2016) discovered that principals and teachers held negative perceptions about IQMS and therefore were reluctant to participate in the programme. Below is a discussion of key challenges of IQMS implementation that literature reveals and these are inadequate leadership by principals and teacher resistance, lack of resources, politicization of performance appraisals and unpreparedness of leadership.

2.1. Inadequate Leadership by Principals and Teacher Resistance

School leadership is very important in monitoring the implementation of teacher appraisals in schools. The department of education has entrusted the principal with the responsibility to manage and implement this process at school level. According to SADTU (2013) the principal has the overall responsibility to ensure that the IQMS is implemented uniformly and effectively at the school. The principal, together with the SMT/SDT, need to initiate advocacy and training at school level and to conduct workshops on IQMS. Some of them are found wanting because they were not well trained or are unwilling to implement the performance appraisal system. Other issues relate to subjectivity and lack of uniformity in the application such that others can feel aggrieved by the type of leadership that is tasked to conduct appraisals. According to Swanepoel, Botha and Mangonyane (2014: p. 2) employee performance and attitude is likely to diminish if the performance appraisal is perceived as unfair and warn against undermining such processes. They further argue that if performance appraisals are taken lightly or haphazardly, the whole process can be taken less seriously taken by management and might have legal ramifications. Employees can feel unsettled and unsure about the state of their involvement in appraisal systems and as a result develop a negative attitude and lack of trust towards the whole process. Owuonda (2020: p. 29) argues that feeling of displeasure and sense of unfair practices can cause or lead to poor attitude and perceptions about appraisal systems. Resistance then becomes the norm in that organisation because people will always oppose or suppress any effort that is implemented.

2.2. Lack of Resources

Mthembu (2017: p. 93) indicates that lack of resources limit the implementation of performance appraisal system such as IQMS. Another issue that relates to performance appraisal's failure is related to the financial resources linked to its implementation. Woyessa (2015) and Mahlaela (2012) have argued that there is a link between the implementation of performance appraisals and financial rewards or employee remuneration. Their argument however is that performance appraisal systems must be delinked from money issues. Woyessa (2015) further argues that Performance Management can support organisation in making important decisions regarding remuneration, development and workforce reduction. Another snag is that the trend in government where the appraisal systems have recently been introduced such as in Zimbabwe, governments did not avail adequate resources to school heads and teachers to effectively implement this system.

2.3. Politicization of Performance Appraisals

Literature reveals that workplace politics impact on performance management in any organization. Schools in particular become centers of this conflict. The overall intention of performance management is to improve the performance of all staff and the organization's operation. Even though the implementation of performance appraisal systems has such good aims, some scholars such as Mthembu (2017) have also noted that the process has other implications and argue that it is not free of subjectivity and emphasis on fairness, consistency and negative perceptions from teachers, their validity or reliability, and lack of adequate training for those involved (evaluators, monitors, implementers and analysts), resistance by unions, non-compliance and politicization. Elliott (2015), Pillay (2018) also identified politicization, resistance and complexity of the appraisal system as factors that impede the principal's capacity to successfully implement a comprehensive appraisal system. Organizational politics also hinder the implementation of performance appraisals in schools. According to Swanepoel, Botha and Mangonyane (2014: p. 2) certain organizational processes lend themselves to being viewed more political than others. It is a case of power struggles that play out and naturally become manipulative in nature. In the work place the principal of a school can find it difficult to manage performance of teachers if the environment is highly politicized. Swanepoel et al. (2014: p. 2) make reference to manipulative practices in appraisals that unquestionably undermine the desired purpose of review, and sacrificing fairness and benefiting some at the expense of others.

2.4. Unpreparedness of Leadership

The essence of professional development of teachers and its impact on the improvement of teaching is widely studied by many scholars. Bassett and Robson (2017: p. 20) state that middle leaders' task of pedagogical leadership impact on

student learning yet they are not ready or are unprepared for this complex task. Tsotetsi & Mahlomaholo (2013: p. 89) maintain that leadership is a cornerstone for the provision of quality teaching and learning in an education system of a country. According to Danku, Soglo, Dordor and Borkor (2015) performance appraisal is a very important human resource practice in organisations. In other studies, teachers have been categorized as an important driver and staff that is central to the improvement of the education industry (Hartinah, Surhaso, Uman, Syazali, Lestari, Roslina and Jermsittiparsert, 2020: p. 235).

In other instances performance appraisal systems are not seen as stand-alone systems but are regarded as processes that feed other systems such as recruitment and selections, compensation systems, talent management, benchmarking and job profiling (Glober, Warnich, Carrell, Elbert and Hatfield, 2006 cited by Khan and Ukpere, 2014: p. 661). Another crucial factor to human resource development and performance is that performance management is intertwined with employee development. According to (Thwala, 2015) performance management is not only considered as one activity but as part of the employee's development life cycle. Therefore neither can performance appraisal be regarded as a separate entity nor can it be seen as a single fruitless activity. This means through performance appraisal systems a number of other things can be achieved. The majority of these are positive offspring to performance management. These include employee development, motivation, satisfaction, rewards, personal career progression, positive peer-supervisor relationships, and improved organizational climate and culture.

3. Statement of the Problem

The Standards for Principalship developed by the Department of Basic Education set out standards and expectations for all principals, in which eight key areas of responsibility are outlined (DBE, 2014a, 2014b). Among these, the management and development of human resources (staff) in the school is of critical importance. The involvement of Principals as head of schools in performance appraisal systems has raised a number of questions in many studies. These questions, however are largely not about their distancing from these appraisal systems but about their lack of understanding challenges of implementation (PSC, 2018) and (Mthembu, 2017); incapacity and unwillingness to implement performance management and development system and principal's leadership role (PSC, 2018). The question therefore that needs to be answered is: Are principals facing challenges in implementing QMS as stipulated in the Standards for Principalship? This research investigates the factors that lead to principal's leadership challenges in implementing QMS in the Mashishila and Badplaas circuits' schools as principals should be executing, implementing and monitoring the application of this appraisal system as part of their legal duties.

4. Research Design

The study utilized pragmatism as a research paradigm, this allowed for many

different ways of interpreting data in this case from both quantitative and qualitative sources. This was an effective paradigm to integrate more than one research methods and strategy in one study. The study was conducted using mixed method approach. In practice this meant both qualitative data and quantitative data were collected concurrently and analysed simultaneously. The study was based on a population of 443 school principals of Gert Sibande District of Mpumalanga province of South Africa. The online sample size calculator was used by the researcher to determine the population size by inserting the total of 443. The confidence level was set at 95% with a margin of error of 5% which gave a total sample size of 206, which was 50% of the total research population. The researcher used a self-designed questionnaire which adhered to principles such as keeping in mind the target population, avoiding ambiguity, confusion and vagueness, checking the length of the questionnaire, ensuring that the questions have a meaningful order and clear format.

The study distributed 245 questionnaires to principals randomly selected. The number of questionnaires returned was 226 (92%; n = 245). Of the returned questionnaires, the researcher examined and sorted them and rejected 16 of them either by reason of not being fully completed or wrongly filled. The actual questionnaires considered for analysis for the study were 210, thus an 86% response rate. Considering that the target sample size was 206, the study response rate had sufficient data to analyse for the purpose of generalizing to the whole population. The total sample was therefore 214 including 8 participants who took part in the focus group discussion. A focus group discussion was another subjective means of data collection designed to collect data from the focal group of interest. A total of 8 school managers were engaged in this discussion to provide their views in the issues at hand.

In terms of data analysis quantitative analysis was applied for close ended questions that were drawn from responses from the survey. Descriptive statistics, further statistical models such as correlation and regression analysis were used to analyse data. Data was processed using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) computer software version 2.0 and results of such analysis were presented in tables and figures. Qualitative data analysis was completed by first categorizing and discussing responses for each item according to themes (thematic analysis), before editing and coding. Such data were presented in narrative and verbatim accounts of the views, experiences and opinions of the participants. There was also document analysis which focused on the records of the QMS implementation in selected schools, the results were used to reflect the position of QMS implementation in the schools involved.

5. Discussion of Results

Using quantitative data drawn from Table 1 the study revealed the biggest challenge faced by principals in QMS implementation as the lack of resources at their disposal. Furthermore, the majority of the respondents agreed that lack of

Table 1. Summary of challenges faced by principals.

	SD	D	N	A	SA	+Ve
Teacher resistance to my leadership	30%	18%	10%	24%	19%	42%
Inadequacy of my skills to the role	29%	16%	6%	30%	20%	50%
Lack of resources at my disposal	17%	10%	7%	40%	26%	66%
Lack of incentives to teachers and other school community members	14%	28%	10%	15%	33%	48%
Sabotage and workplace politics	15%	20%	13%	23%	29%	52%
The complexity of the performance appraisal system to me	19%	13%	12%	31%	25%	56%
Poorly skilled leadership team	20%	27%	17%	16%	20%	36%
My lack of experience in Leadership for this role	28%	37%	11%	15%	9%	24%

SD = strongly disagree; D = Disagree; N = Neutral; A = Agree; SA = Strongly Agree; +ve = Agree + Strongly Agree.

resources compromises their ability to implement QMS at their schools. The findings from the Quantitative tool is consistent with the finding made in the qualitative study which flagged lack of resources to adequately impact on the effective implementation of QMS in schools. From the findings of the FGD study it was clear participants felt strongly regarding the Department of Education's failure to give school adequate technical support to ensure that the QMS implementation is efficient. Principals expressed frustration at the lack of support and they also believed that the few workshops currently done are miles insufficient to the kind of support that schools need to make the implementation of QMS a true success. Furthermore, evidence drawn from some of the participants through the FGD voiced out and indicated the severe shortages of specialists in QMS who can best advise the schools on the technical aspects of the implementation. Such findings are very consistent with the findings of Mthembu (2017) who indicates that lack of resources limit the implementation of performance appraisal system like IQMS. Further to this Matorera (2018) makes it clear that resources are a critical element in QMS. Quality education depends on the presence of a supply of resources at the strategic, management and operational levels of the institution. Learning resources are a critical success factor for quality scholarship just as are teaching resources. If resources are not adequately supplied the chances of getting the best of any QMS in teaching and learning institution diminish significantly (Postma, 2013).

The data of the study showing challenges that principals face in the implementation of QMS in their school are summarized in Table 1 above. The findings of the study show some consistency with the findings found in literature.

The study also revealed that there is existence of sabotage and politics at the workplace. This scenario was regarded as one of the factors significantly influencing the lack of effectiveness of QMS implementation by the principals. About

52% of the research respondents agreed that sabotage and workplace politics affects their effectiveness in performance management. This kind of finding is consistent with the findings of Pillay (2018) who reveals that workplace politics impact on performance management in any organization. In the same vein Mthembu (2017) indicates that schools in particular become war zones in this kind of internal organisation politics. The overall intention of performance management is to improve the performance of all staff and the organization's operation. Elliott (2015), Pillay (2018) and Mangonyane (2011) also identified politicization, resistance and complexity of the appraisal system as factors that impede the principal's capacity to successfully implement a comprehensive appraisal system. Organizational politics clearly negatively hinder the implementation of QMS in schools. According to Swanepoel, Botha and Mangonyane (2014: p. 2) certain organizational processes lend themselves to being viewed more political than others.

The findings from the focus group discussion revealed that in some schools teachers believed the implementation of QMS was technically a witch hunt to expose teachers. This is also consistent with Swanepoel et al. (2014) who explain that if conflicts around implantation of systems such as QMS are not properly addressed they rapidly degenerate into power struggles that play out and naturally become manipulative in nature. In the work place the principal of a school can find it difficult to manage performance of teachers if the environment is highly politicized. According to Swanepoel et al. (2014) such manipulative practices in appraisals unquestionably undermine the design purpose of review, and thus sacrificing fairness and benefiting some at the expense of others. It is clear therefore that for QMS to be more effective in schools within the Mpumalanga province a lot of activism around depoliticizing the programme may be necessary.

Lack of leadership skills in the role was considered not to be a challenge faced by the principals who participated in the study. Only 50% of the principals agreed that their lack of leadership skills affect effective implementation of performance management. Over 45% of the principals disagreed that Lack of leadership skills for their role is affecting their effective implementation of the QMS in the schools they head, whereas 6% chose to be neutral. This also applies to the opinions of principals on the suggestion that poorly skilled leadership team makes it difficult to implement QMS in schools. Only 36% agreed to this as a challenge whilst a combination of 47% disagreed and 17% remained neutral (Figure 1).

Teacher resistance to leadership and lack of incentives for teachers and the community were considered not as significant challenges to the ability of principals to deliver on their duty to effectively manage employee performance levels in schools. Less than half (42% & 48% respectively) of the participants agreed whilst the rest either disagreed or remained neutral (Table 2).

Although resistance to leadership by teachers was not a significant challenge in respect of QMS implementation, the study revealed that, of those who are
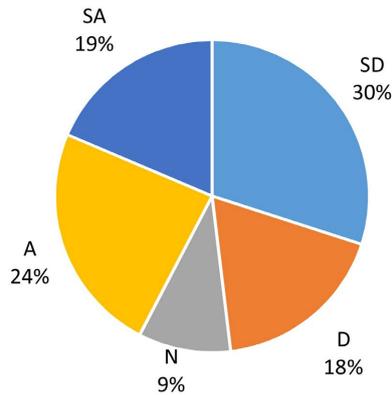
**Figure 1.** Teacher resistance to principal's leadership.

Table 2. Teacher resistance to leadership across principal's gender lines.

			Gender * Teacher resistance to my leadership Cross tabulation					
			Teacher resistance to my leadership					Total
			Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	
Gender	Male	Count	24	12	10	21	18	85
		% of Total	11.4%	5.7%	4.8%	10.0%	8.6%	40.5%
	Female	Count	38	26	10	29	21	124
		% of Total	18.1%	12.4%	4.8%	13.8%	10.0%	59.0%
	Other	Count	1	0	0	0	0	1
		% of Total	0.5%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.5%
Total		Count	63	38	20	50	39	210
		% of Total	30.0%	18.1%	9.5%	23.8%	18.6%	100.0%

affected by this as a challenge, women principals were the most affected. There was a gender gap in terms of principals' respect by teachers. Twenty four percent (n = 210) of the principals agreed that they faced disrespect from teachers as a challenge as compared to 19% for males.

On the aspect of the principals' inadequacy of their leadership to the role, the results of the study, as shown in **Figure 2** show different perspectives held by the principals.

It was revealed by the results of the survey that half of the respondents in the (50%; n = 210) submitted that the inadequacy of leadership skills amongst themselves was a challenge they faced in the implementation of the QMS. When asked whether the lack of skills in practice directly hinder the implantation of QMS over 45% of the principals disagreed that Lack of leadership skills for their role is affecting their effective implementation of the QMS in the schools they head. It was revealed during FGDs that the majority of the participants lacked QMS content knowledge to sufficiently promote the QMS objective. It was
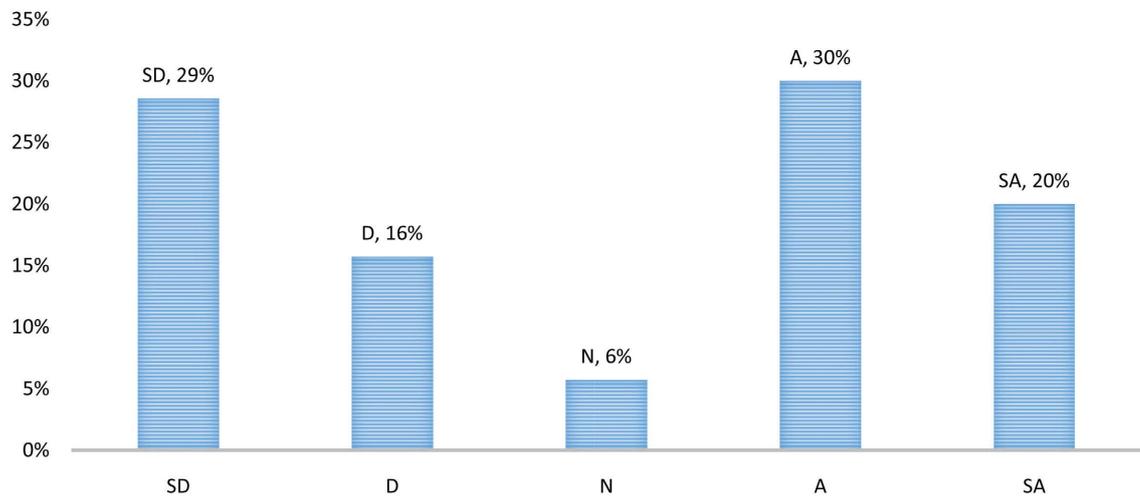
Figure 2. Inadequacy of principal's skills to the role.

reported that this lack of in-depth knowledge on the QMS content prohibited most principals as school managers to effectively utilize the system. This appears to lead to the evident limited utilization among school managers. It was clear among the discussions of the participants that the principals were not accustomed and drilled on how the QMS should be implemented. A lot of criticism was mounted on how the Department has not made adequate provisions for the content of QMS to be well grounded in schools for flawless implantation.

Generally the findings reflect that the content of the QMS is not well grasped by the principals and hence principals are not confident in implementing the programme. The findings of the study may be deemed as a departure from the findings of Cruz, Galvez and Santaolalla (2016) who submit that the effective and considerable factors that improve the implementation of QMS in schools is the proactive participation of education authorities that have actively driven schools in the region to become involved in quality management, providing schools with resources, giving teachers and management teams the necessary training to set them up. The essence of professional development of school leaders and its impact on the improvement of teaching is widely studied (Bassett & Robson, 2017).

As per the submission of Cruz, Galvez and Santaolalla (2016) school leaders should be well trained and capacitated to lead from the front and yet in the current study the principals were captured as ill prepared to implement the QMS and ended up being frustrated and perhaps short changing the success the programme. Furthermore Tsotetsi and Mahlomaholo (2013) maintain that leadership is a cornerstone for the provision of quality teaching and learning in an education system of a country. When leadership is struggling with grasping the QMS content knowledge, there would be little for the entire school to can do to effectively implement a programme of such magnitude.

Additionally, as advocated by Khan and Ukpere (2014) in other instances QMS is not just a performance appraisal system. The component of performance

management in QMS can hardly be not seen as stand-alone component but are regarded as processes that feed the main QMS and other organizational systems such as recruitment and selections, compensation systems, talent management, benchmarking and job profiling. A principal who therefore lacks adequate content knowledge as submitted in the finding of the study is detrimental to the successful implementation of the programme.

6. Conclusion

From the findings it can be concluded that the implementation of QMS suffers due to inadequate resources available especially to render technical support through frequent workshops for school managers to effectively implement the programmes. It is also conclusive that the implementation of the QMS is dented by organizational politics where staff and management are constantly in a tag-of-war regarding the real intentions of QMS programme. Organizational politics clearly negatively hinder the implementation of QMS in schools. It is also conclusive that the school managers lack the leadership skills required to implement a system of this magnitude. The lack of skills in practice directly hinders the implementation of the QMS in the schools they head. Furthermore by their own admission, participants lacked QMS content knowledge to sufficiently promote the QMS objective and all this contributed to poor implementation of the QMS.

7. Recommendations

Following the findings and conclusion of the study the following recommendations are suggested:

- It is recommended that the DoE review the financial resource being channeled to schools for the implementation of QMS with the view of liaising with schools in order to increase the resources. An increase in the available resource will ease some of challenges especially on resources required to engage the technical support through frequent workshops for school managers to effectively implement the programmes.
- There is need for individual school leadership to arrange localized whole school capacity building for all school stakeholders to sensitize them on the real objectives of QMS. This will ensure collaborative efforts among the stakeholders to ensure the QMS is successful.
- There is need for the DoE to consider implementing more frequent capacity building workshops where QMS specialists equip school leaders and educators in all the key aspects on QMS in schools. This counters the evident lack of technical skills that is directly hindering the implementation of the QMS in the schools.
- It is recommended the DoE considers the engagement of the independent body or bodies to oversee and evaluate the implementation of QMS in schools. This will ensure that the negative views of the program will be countered and a fair assessment of the role of all identified stakeholders is given.

This will bring integrity and transparency to the implementation process of QMS.

- At school level it is recommended that the school governing bodies prepare a stakeholder engagement and participation sensitisation campaign to promote the role of QMS in schools. Based on the findings from the discussions the principal's re-engagement of all stakeholders is quite essential to address the current challenges of lack of full engagement at all levels and by all involved stakeholders.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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