





From Classroom to Principalship: A Framework for Enhancing Leadership Capacity of Novice School Principals for A Smoother Transition

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Abstract: The lack of well-thought-out procedures and pre-principalship training for newly appointed school principals in many African secondary school systems negatively impacts their leadership effectiveness. This study explores the challenges newly appointed (novice) school principals experience in South Africa and proffers strategies to mitigate their effects. Adaptive leadership framework and social capital theory underpin this paper. The study adopted Torraco's integrative literature review approach to synthesise related literature and theoretical perspectives. The findings revealed the significance of pre-principal leadership training. They indicated challenges novice principals face, including difficulties adapting to broader leadership responsibilities, deficiencies in financial management, inability to navigate school micropolitics, and a lack of emotional intelligence. The study also proposes that the criteria for recruiting school principals, and the transition process are inconsistent with the world's best practices. Hence, this study proposes a framework as a strategic blueprint for addressing the transition challenges among novice school principals. The framework also guides policy initiatives and educational reforms to improve novice principals' experiences and elevate educational standards nationwide. The study concludes that equipping novice principals with adaptive, emotional and collaborative leadership competencies is essential for sustainable leadership and systemic improvement.

Keywords: Adaptive Problem-Solving, Pre-Principalship Training, Principal Emotional Intelligence, Principal Appointment, New Principals

1. Introduction

Effective school management has long been recognised as critical in achieving positive educational outcomes globally (Darling-Hammond et al., 2012; Leithwood, Harris & Hopkins, 2020). The literature indicates that school leadership ranks second among many factors influencing student outcomes, especially in developed economies where structured and standardised training for aspiring and novice principals is standard practice (Leithwood et al., 2020). Hence, investing in the development and training of school principals has garnered attention and resources across various countries (Stronge & Xu, 2021).

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Conversely, the narrative differs in developing economies, particularly in Africa, where novice principals encounter challenges from a lack of formal pre-principalship leadership training before transitioning from classroom teaching to school leadership. These challenges include complexities in work–life balance, isolation, navigating micro-political dynamics within schools (Edwards, 2016; Melamed, 2024), strained relationships with stakeholders (Pineda-Baez et al., 2019), struggle to reform organisational culture (Arar, 2017), and leading improvements in teaching and learning (Meyer & Patuawa, 2022). Furthermore, novice principals grapple with managing administrative and pedagogical tasks and adapting to educational reforms (Sepuru & Mohlakwana, 2020).

In South Africa, novice principals often find themselves ill-prepared to meet the multifaceted demands of their roles (Sepuru & Mohlakwana, 2020). According to Myende, Samuel and Pillay (2018), principals have insufficient experience in leadership and management related to curriculum implementation, human resources, school finance, stakeholder relations and policy interpretation. These deficiencies are linked to a lack of structured pre-principalship leadership training (Meyer & Patuawa, 2022).

Note that the criteria for principal appointment are a minimum of a three-year diploma in education and seven years of teaching experience (Ahiaku, 2019). Scholars have criticised these selection and appointment criteria because they do not guarantee effective school leadership (Myende et al., 2018). Experts in school leadership and management have indicated the indirect but profound impact of leadership on school effectiveness, which necessitates formal and structured pre-principalship training for novice principals (Bush & Glover, 2016). For instance, Naidoo and Mestry (2019) advocate for structured preparation programmes to continuously enhance principals' skills and attributes. However, the absence of standardised pre-principalship training leaves a vacuum in South Africa's school leadership practice.

While we acknowledge the plethora of studies on school principals' experiences in different dimensions, a critical examination reveals a gap in the literature regarding the challenges novice principals face as they transition from classroom teachers to school principals. Notable among these studies are the works of Mestry (2017), Myende et al. (2018) and Blose et al. (2022), each of whom contributes to the broader discourse on school leadership. For example, Mestry (2017) explored the critical need for effective leadership and management training for principals in South African public schools. The findings partly indicate that the novice principals of schools were ill-equipped for their professional and administrative roles. Consequently, the author recommends that education authorities introduce compulsory, comprehensive training and development programmes for school principals to prepare them with the skills to navigate and manage the complexities of the educational environments of the 21st century. As laudable as this recommendation sounds, it does not address contextually adaptable strategies novice principals can adopt to effectively manage peculiar challenges in their schools.

Myende et al. (2018) investigated the dynamics of principals' leadership within five socioeconomically disadvantaged schools in South Africa. The study adopted the financial management skills of the principals as units of analysis. The results showed that the five novice principals demonstrated competency in financial management, contrary to popular opinion and previous findings. However, the authors admitted that their findings (based on the experiences of five school principals in financial management) do not meet the criteria for generalising the results. Another notable gap in the study is that effective school



management transcends financial management skills to include other professional and administrative functions.

Blose et al. (2022) explored how novice principals perceive and construct their leadership identities in three schools within the Pinetown district in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. Based on role identity theory, this study identified four meanings school principals ascribed to their leadership identity, influencing their dispositions to their duties. The meanings include “leader as a learner, re-establishing oneself as a leader, spanning boundaries, and leading to inspire” (Blose et al., 2022, p. 4). Although this study sheds light on the fluid self-conceptions of novice school principals, using three principals as samples is insufficient to generalise the findings. Furthermore, identity perception might not be challenging for other school principals.

Grant (2024) offers a broader lens on school leaders’ preparation and development in South Africa by highlighting the inadequacies in systematic principal socialisation processes. Drawing on data from 29 school leaders across diverse school types and sociocultural contexts, the study reveals that many principals assumed their roles without formal induction or training, often left to sink or swim. This lack of structured professional and organisational socialisation left novice leaders relying on informal learning, self-motivation and retrospective meaning-making based on childhood, schooling and early teaching experiences. Grant’s study suggests that effective school leadership requires a holistic approach that includes financial management, anticipation, and professional and identity-based development processes that prepare principals to lead in complex, resource-constrained environments.

This study addresses these gaps through an integrative literature review (ILR) and insights from the adaptive leadership framework (ALF) and social capital theory (SCT). Given the integration of this theoretical perspective, this study aims to provide an in-depth analysis of novice school principals’ challenges and advance a proposed framework to facilitate their transition.

2. Research objectives

This study’s objectives are the following:

1. Examine the significance of formal and structured pre-principalship training for novice principals.
2. Explore the novice principals’ challenges while transitioning from teaching to school leadership.
3. Examine novice school principals’ transition process from being classroom teachers to becoming school principals and the existing leadership models in schools.
4. Propose a framework that counteracts the existing normative leadership models that merely maintain the status quo.

3. Literature review

3.1 Evolution of School Leadership Training

School leadership training has evolved over the years. The impact of effective school leadership on school effectiveness and student achievement has garnered significant scholarly attention since the 1970s. Acquaro and Gurr (2022) highlight the importance of principal training, which resonates with the reasons



for forming specialised research groups and networks on educational leadership in the early years of this millennium. One such initiative is the International Successful School Principal Project (ISSPP), founded in 2001 by Christopher Day. The group initially comprised members from eight nations, which later expanded to include 14 countries. The primary objective of the ISSPP is to study the practices underlying effective school leadership and their impact on educational outcomes.

Michael Cowie and colleagues launched a similar international study of principal preparation in 2004 during the American Educational Research Association's annual meeting in San Diego. The research group focuses on novice school principals' induction and initial experiences. The network aims to provide insights into these teachers' training and early career challenges. The group draws its members from 15 countries across five continents. Bruce Barnett and Howard Stevenson initiated the International School Leadership Development Network in 2008. The group focuses on educational leadership within underprivileged schools, emphasising social justice issues related to school leadership development. Collectively, these networks demonstrate a global dedication to understanding and improving the preparation of school principals. Therefore, recognition is ascribed to leaders' influence on educational frameworks and student success.

Most African countries remain laggards in standardised school leadership training despite the mentioned research groups' efforts on school leadership. Bush, Maringe and Glover (2022) explored and reviewed empirical research on school leadership in Africa to identify what constitutes effective school leadership and continuous professional development (CPD) for school leaders in Africa. The authors noted that "few African countries have a school leadership policy in place and there is little evidence of government 'ownership' or 'buy-in' for large-scale leadership Continuous Professional Development (CPD) across Africa" (Bush et al., 2022, p. 5). Their findings also indicate a lack of research and knowledge production on school leadership in Africa, and most literature comes from the Global North. They noted key competencies and practices associated with effective school leadership in Africa, necessitating effective and scalable CPD for school leaders and forming policies on leadership practice in Africa. Hence, the paper concludes with recommendations for establishing the African Centre for School Leadership to support the development of effective school leadership in Africa. Notably, the evolution of school leadership training sets the stage for understanding the significance of pre-principalship training, particularly regarding the challenges confronting novice principals.

4. Theoretical Underpinning

Two theories underpin this study: the ALF and the SCT. The joint operationalisation of these theories will engender a pragmatic approach to leadership, unlike normative leadership models.

4.1 Adaptive Leadership Framework (ALF)

Heifetz, Grashow and Linsky (2009) proposed the ALF. The framework was developed to address complex and uncertain situations that require pragmatic changes in management. The ALF was conceptualised in Heifetz's (1994) work titled *Leadership Without Easy Answers*. Adaptive leadership challenges the conventional centralised leadership structure by promoting leadership distribution. This approach empowers leaders at all levels to make independent and strategic decisions (Sott & Bender,



2025). Adopting the ALF is justified because it provides a solid theoretical foundation for exploring the complex challenges novice school principals face in the early stages of their roles (Dunn, 2020). This framework equips leaders to navigate dynamic environments effectively by emphasising adaptive strategies. Furthermore, the framework aligns well with the complex leadership dynamics in South African school settings. The principles of the framework are presented in the following section.

4.1.1 Principles of Adaptive Leadership Framework

The ALF is built on five core principles enabling leaders to navigate complex challenges: get on the balcony, identify adaptive challenges, regulate distress, maintain disciplined attention, and return the work to people.

Get on the balcony: This principle typifies the importance of leaders momentarily distancing themselves from the immediate pressures of a situation to gain a broader insight. According to Heifetz et al. (2009), getting on the balcony is a withdrawal diagnostic strategy that enables leaders to observe underlying issues not readily observable by others. Viewing a situation from such a standpoint allows leaders to identify “adaptive challenges” requiring nonconventional problem-solving approaches. The tenet also holds that getting on the balcony leads to an informed decision and effective management.

Identify the adaptive challenge: This principle highlights the need for leaders to recognise and address the complexities underpinning adaptive challenges effectively. This step involves leaders distinguishing between technical problems requiring generic or traditional solutions and adaptive challenges needing innovative solutions. Understanding the true nature of the challenge is crucial for developing effective strategies that enable adaptive change. Adaptive challenges are complex and lack straightforward solutions. They often involve conflicting values, perspectives and interests. Hence, while addressing adaptive challenges, players should exhibit a shift in values, beliefs, habits and loyalties (Heifetz et al., 2009).

Regulating stress: This principle involves maintaining a delicate equilibrium of discomfort that motivates change without overwhelming people with resistance or fear. This stage requires a multifaceted approach encompassing guidance, protection, orientation, conflict resolution and emotional assistance (Heifetz et al., 2009). The skilful regulation of distress is crucial in cultivating an environment conducive to adaptive change. Therefore, leaders should strive to keep emotional disruption to the bare minimum while achieving the desired transformation in the organisation.

Maintain disciplined attention: This principle emphasises the ability of a leader to focus on the most crucial issues without getting distracted or resorting to scapegoating. Leaders should strive to engage in multiple approaches, including identifying hidden conflicts, challenging unproductive norms, and tackling tough trade-offs among employees (Heifetz et al., 2009). This tenet stresses the importance of a targeted and strategic approach where leaders directly confront core issues and manage complexities with a disciplined focus. Such concentrated attention is critical to promoting effective problem-solving and fostering adaptive responses within an organisation.

Give work back to the people: The responsibility for decision-making and learning is delegated to leaders at various levels. It also involves delegating authority and sharing information with subordinates (Heifetz



et al., 2009). In the final analysis, the principle mirrors a departure from traditional top-down leadership models to leadership that emphasises collaboration, autonomy and active engagement. Ultimately, people are empowered to contribute to the adaptive process and the organisation's capacity to respond to changes.

4.2 Social Capital Theory (SCT)

SCT was adopted to complement ALF in this study. The theory emphasises the importance of social relationships and structures in achieving individual and group goals in an organisation. Psychologist Pierre Bourdieu first conceptualised social capital. According to Bourdieu, social capital is comparable to economic, cultural and symbolic capital (Bourdieu & Richardson, 1986; Gilleard, 2020). The theory states that social networks and relationships inherently possess value and are essential resources for individuals and communities (Tuominen & Haanpää, 2022). Furthermore, the theory highlights the importance of social connections, trust and mutual support in achieving goals (Bourdieu & Richardson, 1986; Zhang & Zhao, 2024). The core of this theory comprises networks and relationships, trust and reciprocity, and norms and values.

4.2.1 Principles of Social Capital Theory

Networks and relationships: This principle recognises the importance of social networks and relationships within an organisation. Synergy in an organisation provides members access to information, resources and support (Lin, 2001). The principle holds that strategic networks help build valuable relationships and promote collaboration and resilience. In the context of this study, newly appointed school principals are expected to place a premium on networks with stakeholders within and outside the school because knowledgeable individuals can contribute to effective leadership. For example, the historical disparities characterising South African schools require that novice school principals be grounded in networking and relationship-building with stakeholders. This is because broader structures impact smaller ones, including the school system (Putnam, 2000).

Trust and reciprocity: This principle states that trust and reciprocity foster cooperation and collaboration within networks. It further states that high-trust environments encourage mutual support and resource sharing (Coleman, 1988). Reciprocity involves supporting colleagues in the expectation of receiving such gestures from them when needed (Putnam, 2000).

Norms and values: Besides the previous principles, norms and values are key to organisational cohesion and collaboration (Portes, 1998). This principle recognises the role of shared norms, values and beliefs in shaping the dynamics of social networks in an organisation. They help coordinate efforts and foster a sense of identity and belonging within the group (Lin, 2001). Therefore, organisations that uphold shared norms and values have a greater chance of collaboration and cohesion.

From the three principles discussed above, it can be deduced that organisations that uphold networks and relationships, trust, reciprocity, norms and values are better positioned to have effective team members who trust each other because of shared norms and values. In the context of this study, novice school principals who leverage this principle are more likely to have a smooth transition from a classroom teacher to a school principal.



5. Methodology

5.1 Integrative Literature Review (ILR)

This study adopted an ILR approach. The approach combines data from various sources to better understand a topic of interest (Torraco, 2016). Unlike a traditional systematic literature review that synthesises existing knowledge, an ILR entails a multifaceted approach to data gathering (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). This approach also differs from PRISMA because it collects data from various sources, including peer-reviewed journals, non-peer-reviewed journals, policy documents, government gazettes and relevant articles in the public domain (Nedeljko et al., 2023). A hallmark of this review approach is that it integrates different theoretical frameworks to gain deeper insights into a complex phenomenon (Torraco, 2016). More importantly, an ILR is essential in identifying gaps or clarifying grey areas around a research niche (Boote & Beile, 2005).

5.1.2 Methodological Rationale

The rationale for adopting an ILR in this study hinges on the complexities characterising novice principals' experiences transitioning from classroom teaching to principalship. ILRs are valuable for understanding complex topics such as the transition from teaching roles to principalship. Torraco's approach provides a structured framework for synthesising diverse literature and identifying key themes (Dhollande et al., 2021). Research suggests that the transition from classroom teaching to principalship is complex and has multiple challenges (Spillane & Lee, 2014) because novice principals often feel unprepared for their new role. They experience professional isolation, struggle with time management and difficulties navigating school culture (Slater, Garcia Garduno & Mentz, 2018). In addition, they struggle with developing a new professional identity; a process involving personal and organisational socialisation (Bush, 2018). ILR is appropriate for this study because it provides a holistic understanding of the multifaceted experiences of novice principals. It enables us to synthesise literature on transitioning from classroom teacher to principalship, including formal preparation programmes, mentoring and guidance on imbibing academic culture (Grassley & Lambe, 2015). While there are other forms of ILR, we adopted Torraco's ILR model to understand and develop an actionable model for transitioning from teaching to principalship. Torraco (2005; 2016) succinctly captures this idea:

Synthesising the literature means that the review weaves the streams of research together to focus on the core issues rather than simply reporting on previous literature. Synthesis is not a data dump. It is a creative process that generates a new model, conceptual framework, or other unique conception informed by the author's intimate knowledge of the topic. (Torraco, 2005, p. 362)

5.1.2 Torraco's Five-Step Approach to the ILR

In this study, we adopted Torraco's (2016) five-step model to conduct an ILR. The steps include 1) problem formulation, 2) literature search, 3) data evaluation, 4) data analysis and 5) presentation/writing. Following Torraco's ILR approach, we synthesised the existing literature and theoretical perspectives using the following steps. We began the study by mapping out the research objectives. Next, we embarked on a literature search on Scopus, ERIC, JSTOR, Google Scholar, and the Department of Basic Education



(DBE), Republic of South Africa's website with a view to having a balanced perspective of reviewed and grey literature (Bramer et al., 2017; Ewald et., 2022; Harari et al., 2020) on the experiences of novice principals in their early years in leadership positions.

Some of the keywords used to identify relevant studies include “novice principals”, “challenges of novice principals”, “school leadership”, “novice principals transition challenges”, “adaptive leadership theory”, “social capital theory” and “new principal”. The keywords were combined as suitable for each of the databases using Boolean operators such as “OR” and “AND” with a view to ensure relevant studies were not left out (Gusenbauer & Haddaway, 2020). We evaluated and included studies that explored the challenges faced by novice principals during their transition from teacher to principalship. We also engaged in data extraction and synthesis to identify key findings, methodologies and theoretical frameworks from selected studies and documents.

5.2 The Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

As part of the required protocol in SLR, we established inclusion and exclusion criteria to ensure that only relevant studies were included in this study. The year of publication of the included peer-reviewed was between 2000 and 2024. Our inclusion criteria included studies that examined the experiences of novice school principals as well as the formal and informal training they undertook prior to school principals (Arar, 2017; Bantwini & Moorosi, 2023; Bush & Oduro, 2006; Leithwood et al., 2020). We also included studies that examined traditional leadership practices (Heifetz et al., 2009) and transformative leadership paradigms (Fullan, 2023) from various global contexts (Köster, 2020; Maringe, 2020). In addition to peer-reviewed articles, we included policy documents, government gazette and reports (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Based on our exclusion criteria, we eliminated studies that examined veteran school principals' leadership experiences (Leithwood et al., 2020) and leadership transitioning in non-school settings (Hallinger, 2005; Torraco, 2016). We also excluded studies written in non-English languages (Petticrew & Roberts, 2006) and works that pre-date the year 2000, except seminar works that are theoretically foundational (Bourdieu, 1986).

5.3 Quality Assessment and Bias Mitigation

The hallmarks of an ILR include quality assessment of the included studies and mitigation of authors' bias (Hopia, et., 2016). In this study, we adopted the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT) to assess the methodological rigour of the empirical studies (Hong et al., 2018). The instrument employs a structured process that focuses on fundamental criteria to evaluate the integrity of the research methodologies (Hong et al., 2018). We also adopted the Assessment of Multiple Systematic Reviews (AMSTAR) to scrutinise the methodological rigour of review studies. To mitigate bias in our inquiry, the authors reviewed the studies independently and resolved areas of disagreement via consensus. Bias mitigation was achieved through triangulation (Meydan & Akkaş, 2024), incorporating systematic electronic database searches (Finfgeld-Connett & Johnson, 2013), the use of critical appraisal instruments (Tyndall, 2010; Critical Appraisal Skills Programme, 2018), and reflexive practices to illuminate alternative perspectives (Barrett, Kajamaa & Johnston, 2020). We also maintain a balanced view of the focus of the study by including grey literature, such as policy documents, government gazettes, and other publicly accessible materials. These



documents were subjected to rigorous fact-checking to ensure accuracy and alignment with the study's objectives

6. Findings and Discussion

This section presents this study's findings and situates them in the body of literature. They are presented under the following headings: the significance of pre-principalship training, challenges confronting school principals, the transitioning process and the existing school leadership model.

6.1 Significance of Pre-Principalship Training

The modern-day educational landscape is characterised by challenges that necessitate pre-principalship training for aspiring school leaders. Such training has become urgent given the complex contemporary education settings. The realities in modern-day schools imply that school principals' roles transcend school administration; they encompass instructional leadership, community liaisons and policy implementers (Fullan, 2023). Pre-principalship training remains a beacon of hope for attaining a high level of school effectiveness and equipping school leaders with the requisite managerial and leadership skills for their new roles. Previous studies show that pre-service-trained principals effectively motivate staff, implement innovative practices and manage complex organisational dynamics (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008). Pre-principalship training has proven to empower inexperienced school leaders in educational law, budgeting, financial management, community engagement and instructional leadership (Hallinger, 2005; Ishimaru & Galloway, 2014; Smith & Piele, 2006). Jugmohan and Muzvidziwa (2017) examined the impact of mentoring and pre-principal training, particularly among female principals. The findings show improved leadership effectiveness among participants, unlike those who did not attend the training. Evidence also attests to the direct and cascading positive impact of pre-principalship training on teachers, students (Clark, Martorell & Rockoff, 2009) and the overall school effectiveness. Thomas et al. (2018) demonstrate that pre-service-trained principals create a positive school climate and maintain higher levels of teacher satisfaction.

Despite the positive impact of pre-service principalship training, a disparity exists in its manifestations in developed and developing countries. For instance, pre-principalship training in developed economies has been associated with improved instructional leadership, effective hiring, nurturing and retaining competent teachers, and the overall transformation of educational institutions (Almager, Cumby & Almekdash, 2021). In such countries, pre-service principal training includes simulations and internships, providing practical experience for participants. Consequently, novice principals are better equipped to address real-world challenges and make informed choices (Hallinger & Bridges, 2017). However, the experiences of novice principals in developing countries, particularly South Africa, leave a vacuum that requires the DBE's attention regarding pre-principalship training. Sepuru and Mohlakwana (2020) examined novice school principals' experiences in South Africa regarding their new roles. The findings show that many novice principals struggle to interpret and implement the provisions in the education law and policy documents. The study also revealed that they lack instructional supervision, stakeholder relations and human resource management. Tsharane and Bussin (2022) explored how novice school principals practice financial risk management in schools in Gauteng province. The study indicates that novice principals do not grasp financial reporting and accountability well.



While the benefits of pre-principalship training are well documented, novice principals still face challenges during their transitions in developing countries, including South Africa. Hence, well-structured pre-principalship training programmes have become essential for prospective school leaders.

6.2 Challenges Confronting School Principals

The challenges novice principals face in South Africa's school system are enormous (Bush & Glover, 2016). Although the Advanced Certificate in Education (ACE) was introduced for aspiring school principals in 2007, its efficacy was inconsistent with the intended educational outcomes (South Africa, The Presidency, 2012); therefore, it was abolished. The abolition of the ACE programme exacerbates the challenges facing novice principals in South Africa. Bush and Glover (2016) conducted a systematic review of school leadership in South Africa and they found that novice principals concentrate their efforts on school administration but pay little attention to instructional leadership. These challenges highlight the necessity of formal pre-principalship training for aspiring school principals to master instructional leadership.

Micropolitics is another challenge novice school principals face in South Africa. This challenge relates to the dual accountability of school principals to school governors (with varying interests) and the Department of Education. Therefore, novice principals struggle to balance varying interests while prioritising overall school effectiveness. According to Bantwini and Moorosi (2023), novice principals strive to balance the expectations and demands of stakeholders, including the government, unions and parents. Given the interference of politically influential parents in school processes (particularly the admission process), the authors noted that “[i]t was evident from these school principals that education has painstakingly become a very politicised space. This was not a compliment but an expression of concern, as these politics were viewed negatively” (p. 274).

The lack of emotional intelligence is a challenge novice teachers face in South African schools. Emotional intelligence entails managing one's emotions and those of others; therefore, deficiencies in it could result in misunderstanding and friction between stakeholders who are supposedly committed to a common course. For instance, managing conflicts among employees and school governing bodies and addressing student violence demand high emotional intelligence (Brackett & Katulak, 2013). Van Jaarsveld, Mentz, and Challens (2015) explored the essentials of mentoring for newly appointed school principals. The results show that novice school principals in South Africa suffer emotional strain due to insufficient support and a lack of pre-principalship training. The study highlights the role of emotional intelligence in addressing this challenge and advocates formal mentorship programmes that improve the emotional intelligence of novice principals.

6.3 Transition Process and Existing School Leadership Model

The criteria for becoming a school principal in South Africa require possessing at least a diploma in education and seven years of teaching experience (Mestry, 2017). This process varies with the requirements to become a school principal in developed countries, such as the United States of America, Canada, China, Australia and Finland, where aspiring school principals undertake structured, prescribed courses in school leadership. For instance, the minimum requirement for becoming a school principal is a



master's degree. Describing the ideal stages in school leadership, Gronn (1999) avers that educational leaders are prepared in four stages: formation, accession, incumbency and divestiture.

Formation is where aspiring leaders develop their leadership identity and potential through formal and informal learning experiences. Accession is the stage at which they are appointed to the principalship and undergo induction and mentoring programmes. Incumbency is the stage at which they fulfil their school leadership roles and responsibilities. Divestiture is the stage where they exit principalship and reflect on their careers. Upon a critical look, the transitioning process of the class teacher-to-principalship in South Africa lacks these stages. This vacuum required the introduction of the ACE, which aimed to develop leadership skills in novice principals in 2007.

Before the introduction of the ACE, novice principals in South Africa faced difficulties accessing effective induction and mentoring programmes and CPD opportunities to support them in their new roles (Bush & Oduro, 2006; Sepuru & Mohlakwana, 2020). The DBE introduced the ACE in 2007 as a new qualification requirement for prospective school principals to standardise pre-principalship training in South Africa. The Zenex Foundation funded the programme. ACE underwent a comprehensive evaluation conducted by Bush and Glover (2012) in four phases: baseline, mid-term, impact and follow-up impact. Longitudinal research revealed that schools with at least one ACE graduate improved their matriculation examination pass rates faster than other schools. The evaluation report strongly recommended that the ACE be established as a mandatory entry-level qualification for new principals as soon as a sufficient pool of qualified candidates was enrolled (Maringe, 2021). Based on the recommendation, the Council of Education Ministers ruled that the ACE programme should become compulsory as a prerequisite for principalship. This decision aligns with the global trend where governments increasingly expect school principals to undergo specialised training before or after assuming their roles. Despite these positive developments, the ACE programme was unfortunately discontinued, raising questions about the sustainability and continuity of such initiatives in the South African educational landscape.

As indicated, novice principals rely on teaching experience and qualifications to lead. This practice does not equip them with the requisite skills and knowledge for effective school leadership and management. An effective school principal must be grounded in professional instructional leadership, human resource management, school finance, stakeholder relations and interpreting legislation (Sepuru & Mohlakwana, 2020). Unfortunately, their previous classroom teacher roles often lack leadership responsibilities. However, only those who voluntarily decided to pursue higher degrees, such as a master's or PhD, and consulted with experienced or retired school principals made progress in their transition (Myende et al., 2018).

Noting the crucial role of leadership training in school leadership, the DBE developed a concept note and a career path training programme for education leaders and managers through induction to provide a framework for supporting newly appointed principals in their first year of principalship (DBE, 2020). The program covers instructional leadership, school governance, school safety, school culture, school improvement planning, financial management, human resource management, communication and stakeholder participation. The programme also involves training, action learning projects, mentorship and professional learning communities to improve the competence and confidence of novice principals. This study argues that for this programme to be effective, it must be continuous, and school principals should



make sense of leadership beyond the prescriptive and normative induction programme provisions. They should instead embrace a pragmatic approach to deliver outcomes different from those the normative leadership model offers. Meaningful, transformational leadership requires an adaptive model that challenges normative leadership, particularly in underperforming schools.

The landscape of leadership models within South African schools has been extensively explored through various lenses, emphasising distinct models, such as transformational, distributed and teacher leadership (Bush & Glover, 2021). Despite the widespread use of transformational language in post-apartheid policy discussions, evidence validating its efficacy within schools remains limited (Bush & Glover, 2016). Singh and Lokotsch (2005) elaborate on the need for transformational leadership that recognises followers' intrinsic and extrinsic needs. However, practically implementing transformational approaches in a school system that operates within hierarchical structures is problematic (Mafora, 2013). Similarly, Botha and Triegaardt (2015) acknowledge the significance of distributed leadership as a school-based management model in South Africa's public schools. While acknowledging its normative benefits, Grant (2017) expresses concerns about oversimplifying distributed leadership. This idea reinforces Singh and Lokotsch's (2005) notion that implementing distributed leadership in schools is associated with the challenges of a top-down hierarchical leadership structure.

Given the above explication regarding the significance of pre-principalship training, challenges confronting school principals, the transitioning process, and the existing school leadership model, we propose a pragmatic framework for novice principals to navigate the challenges associated with transitioning in the following section.

6.4 Novice Principal Capacity Development Framework (NPCDF)

Drawing from the literature and principles of the ALF and SCT, we advance the NPCDF as a pragmatic strategy for mitigating the challenges associated with transitioning from classroom teachers to school principals. Central to this framework are principles such as adaptive problem-solving, collaborative leadership and engagement, and emotional and cultural intelligence.

Adaptive problem-solving holds that novice principals should “get on the balcony” for a panoramic view of their schools' prevailing challenges. For example, such diagnostic observations could reveal a situation related to declining student engagement and a lack of teacher morale. Such situations could be classified as adaptive challenges from changing educational landscapes, unmet community expectations, previous student-on-teacher violence, and changing student demographics. In this case, the novice principal's ability to uncover these challenges leads to adopting innovative solutions rather than a generic problem-spotting approach. In another probable scenario where a school faces the challenge of declining student enrolment, novice principals tend to resort to canvassing strategies among parents and students. Conversely, addressing such a situation requires an adaptive problem-solving strategy to understand the complexities. These complexities could include cultural shifts within the community, the spiral effect of the former principal's poor relationship with the community, and the need for inclusive educational practices. We posit that possessing the above abilities enables novice school principals to differentiate between technical problems and adaptive challenges.

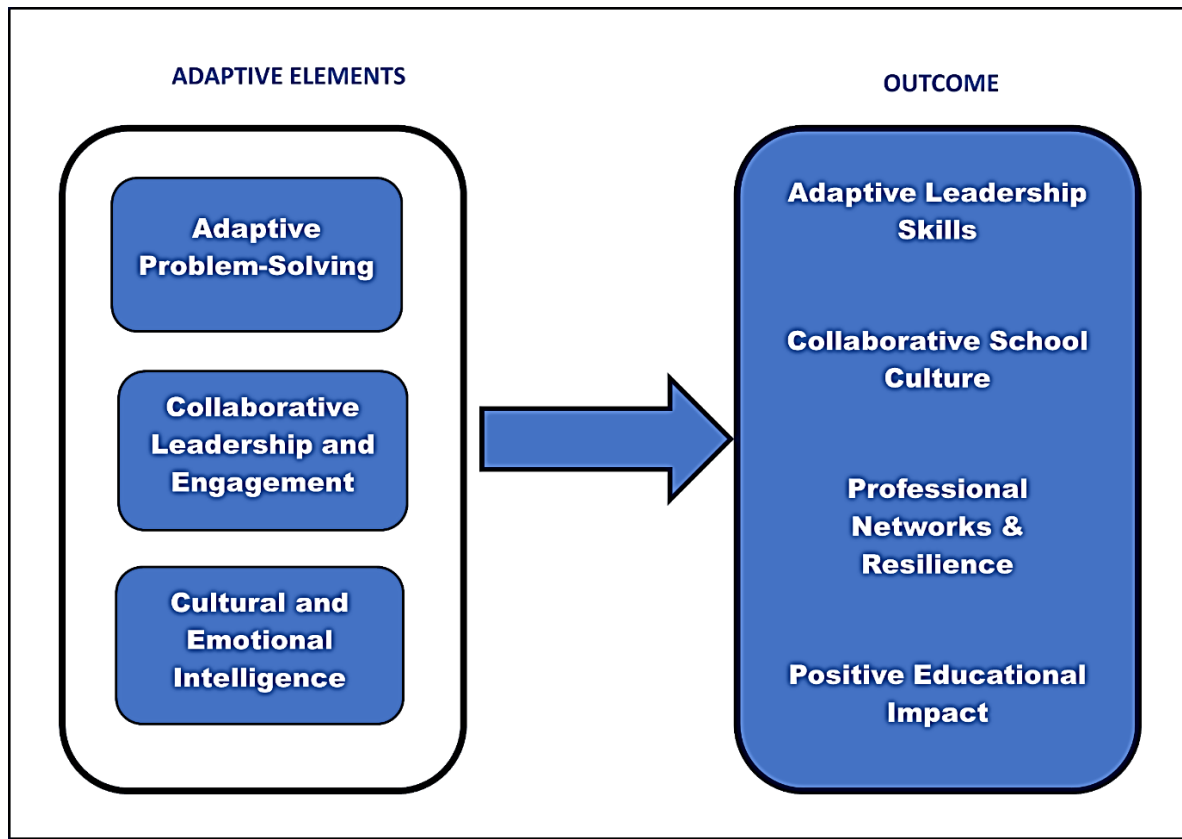


Figure 1: The Novice Principals Capacity Development Framework (NPCDF)

Collaborative leadership and engagement principle hold that novice school principals should leverage the resourcefulness of stakeholders when addressing adaptive challenges. For instance, school principals should prioritise collaboration and engagement with teachers over the traditional hierarchical leadership models to mitigate resistance during curriculum reform initiatives. This approach entails soliciting contributions from teachers and non-teaching staff. This principle is consistent with Spillane and Sherer's (2004) distributed leadership model, which advocates that leadership should be distributed to subordinates instead of having power domicile in a positional leader. Evidence shows that this leadership model engenders power devolution and improves stakeholder commitment (Herawati et al., 2022). This strategy also aligns with Coleman's (1988) SCT, highlighting the benefits of robust social networks in organisations.

Cultural and emotional intelligence (CEI) holds that emotional and cultural competencies equip novice school principals with the ability to navigate diverse and multicultural school environments. This attribute helps them foster positive relationships among stakeholders. The emotional intelligence components of the principle imply an individual's ability to become aware of their emotions and their impact on others. Hence, CEI enhances principals' ability to empathise, communicate and resolve disputes effectively with an attendant positive impact on teachers' job performance and student outcomes (Afzal, Naz & Khan, 2023; Blose et al., 2022; Fernandes, Wong & Noonan, 2023; Gokalp, 2022). The CEI principle aligns with ALF by enabling novice school principals to tackle adaptive challenges through empathy and cultural sensitivity (Heifetz et al., 2009). For instance, in South Africa's complex educational landscape, where



schools often reflect diverse cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds, CEI addresses adaptive challenges, including managing stakeholder conflicts and promoting inclusivity. Aldhaheri (2017) shows that cultural intelligence training enhances leadership adaptability in diverse educational settings, a finding applicable to South Africa's multilingual schools. Given the foregoing, we advance that by imbibing CEI in their practice, novice principals can create an inclusive school culture, improve teacher morale and enhance stakeholder collaboration.

Outcomes: Effectively implementing NPCDF will yield positive outcomes in schools. First, NPCDF will equip novice principals with adaptive leadership skills, enabling them to tackle complex challenges innovatively rather than generic fixes. Second, it can foster a collaborative school culture by promoting stakeholder engagement and shared decision-making. This practice would enhance commitment among teachers and reduce resistance to change. Third, we advance that CEI would engender the development of resilient professional networks and enhance principals' ability to navigate diverse environments. Finally, the framework purports that NPCDF principles foster a positive educational impact, including improved student outcomes, higher teacher satisfaction and a more cohesive school community.

6.4.1 Bridging Gaps in Principal Preparation

We acknowledge the seminal theories, models and frameworks that shaped scholarly and policy discourse on principal preparation in the domain of school leadership. These leadership models include the transformational leadership development model, which emphasises leaders' charisma, vision-setting and motivation to inspire school communities (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006). Additionally, the instructional leadership capacity-building framework by Hallinger and Murphy (1985) advances curriculum leadership, instructional supervision and the promotion of a learning-focused environment. We also take cognisance of the recent RAND Corporation's logic model approach. The model identifies six evidence-based leadership interventions, such as principal preparation, strategic staffing and professional learning, linking them to learner outcomes through structured logic model pathways (Daugherty, Herman & Unlu, 2017).

While these models are foundational, they often reflect established paradigms with limited emphasis on the adaptive, sociocultural and emotionally responsive dimensions of leadership. The uniqueness of the NPCDF lies in the integration of the ALF (Heifetz et al., 2009) and SCT (Coleman, 1988) principles. The ECI components in leadership hold a promise for novice school principals. Furthermore, unlike traditional models, the NPCDF addresses technical competencies and equips novice principals to navigate real-world complexities, build trust-based collaboration and foster inclusive, context-sensitive leadership practices, which are vital in diverse and evolving educational landscapes.

6.5 Implications of the NPCDF for Novice Principals

The Novice Principal Career Development Framework (NPCDF) has implications for newly appointed principals if enacted effectively. The framework equips novice school leaders with innovative problem-solving skills. This is because embedding cultural and emotional intelligence elements in leadership will equip novice principals to navigate the challenges they face during their initial years of principalship. In addition, adherence to NPCDF enables novice principals to develop shared decision-making among stakeholders and establish trust-centric relationships. Moreover, NPCDF principles will contribute to



novice principals' social capital, emotional intelligence, and cultural competence. Finally, the NPCDF offers a blueprint that equips novice principals to effectively lead their schools during their formative leadership years.

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study examined the experiences of novice school principals to propose an adaptable framework for navigating challenges associated with transitioning from teacher to principalship. The findings highlight the importance of structured pre-principalship training for new school principals and exemplify the challenges novice principals face. They also highlight the importance of pre-principalship training and support systems. Novice principals' transitioning from being class teachers to becoming school principals were also examined. The study contributes to practice, policy and body of knowledge by proposing a novice principal's capacity development framework as a strategic response to these findings. The framework blends theoretical extractions with practical leadership skills to foster a breed of school leaders driving positive changes in schools. The insights derived from this study hold promise for shaping future educational policies and leadership training programs. Given the foregoing, we recommend that educational policymakers, training institutions and school boards recognise our framework proposition to ensure a smooth transition for novice principals. This concerted effort will be strategic in developing a new breed of school leaders equipped to deal effectively with educational challenges in their schools.

8. Limitations

The primary limitation of this study is its conceptual nature. The NPCDF has not yet been empirically tested. Hence, its reliance on secondary data and theoretical constructs might restrict our understanding of long-term outcomes. These methodological constraints highlight the need for future validation and do not undermine its potential as an actionable framework for leadership development. Additionally, since the framework was derived from the South African context, it might require adaptation to other cultural or policy environments. Nevertheless, its core principles are applicable and adaptable, offering a strong foundation for future empirical and longitudinal research.

9. Suggestions for future studies

Based on the identified limitations, future research should prioritise the empirical validation of our proposed framework, the NPCDF, across school environments to assess its real-world effectiveness and practical utility. Furthermore, longitudinal studies would be needed to examine the influence of pre-principalship training on novice principals' performance. Future research should explore the framework's adaptability in diverse educational contexts. Additionally, investigating the integration of technology-enhanced learning and mentorship programmes within the NPCDF could provide insights into modernising the principal preparation strategies. Future studies could examine the impact of cultural competence training on novice principals' ability to lead effectively in increasingly diverse school environments.



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