




Strategies that leadership employ to support teacher professional development in Namibia



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Background: Namibian education is faced with a concern of poor-quality teaching and learning. One way of seeking to address this is through the professional development of teachers. Therefore, this study examined strategies used by school leaders to support teachers for improved subject knowledge and pedagogy.

Aim: The study aims to provide a fresh repository of information tailored for policymakers, political leaders and administrators to avail resources to capacitate and support school leaders towards innovative and creative strategies geared towards teachers' professional development.

Setting: This article provides insights into the various strategies employed by principals and heads of departments (HODs) to support teacher professional development in the Namibian context.

Methods: This was a mixed-method study in which quantitative findings were used to guide the development of questions used during interviews. During the quantitative phase of the study, data were obtained from nine principals, 32 HODs and 62 teachers, while 23 participants comprising school principals, HOD and teachers participated in the qualitative phase of the study.

Results: The findings revealed that Namibian principals and heads of departments use multiple strategies employed by the leadership to support their teachers' professional development efforts.

Conclusion: Namibian principals and heads of departments play a significant role in supporting teachers' professional development and hence have established various strategies for improved subject knowledge and pedagogy.

Contribution: The study contributes to a body of knowledge on school leadership and teacher professional development by unveiling the current practices and relationships between school leaders and their teachers' professional development in Namibia.

Keywords: school leadership; teacher professional development; professional development strategies; school principals; heads of department; leadership.

Introduction and background

Contemporary researchers, policy makers and political leaders are focusing their discussions on the provision of meaningful leadership support to teachers to promote continuous teacher learning (Darling-Hammond, Hyler & Gardner 2017). Hence, there is extensive research output on the impact of school leadership on teachers' professional learning (Ismail et al. 2018; Mehdinezhad & Mansouri 2016; Ozmusul 2015; Ross & Cozzens 2016; Stevenson et al. 2016). Researchers also agree that for increased efficacy, school leaders should assume full responsibility towards the development of teachers' professional competencies (Gutierrez & Kim 2018; Li, Hallinger & Ko 2016; Louws et al. 2016; Pambudi & Gunawan 2019; Postholm & Wæge 2015). In addition, literature (Mehdinezhad & Mansouri 2016; Ross & Cozzens 2016; Tehseen & Hadi 2015) show that the effectiveness of teachers is directly proportional to school leadership efforts. Previous studies have pointed out that teachers may not always have access to high-quality and relevant professional development opportunities (Smylie 2014). In some cases, the available programmes may not align with the specific pedagogical needs of teachers and the constantly changing subject content knowledge because of curriculum review (Smylie 2014). School leaders are urged to adopt strategies that ensure teachers have access to continuous and meaningful professional development (Darling-Hammond et al. 2017; Mehdinezhad & Mansouri 2016; Ozmusul 2015). Therefore, there is a need to understand ways in which school leaders support teachers to improve their professional competencies.

In the Namibian context, school leadership teams comprise the principals who are the overall accounting officers and the heads of departments (HODs) who play a pivotal role in providing meaningful leadership and management support to teachers (Ministry of Education [MoE] 2006). The recruitment criterion for these school leaders is simply based on their years of experience and their successful presentation of knowledge of Namibian education policies and processes, which are assessed through written tests and oral interviews. The preliminary short-listing of candidates for HOD posts requires a teacher to have a teaching qualification and a minimum of 6 years of teaching experience (Ministry of Education 2006). Similarly, candidates for principalship should have at least 3 years of teacher training and 7 years of teaching experience, including being an HOD (Ministry of Education 2020). As school leaders, Namibian principals and their HODs have the core mandate of providing 'in-service development, inspection and guidance of staff members at their school' (Ministry of Education 2020:1), which is the focus of this article.

Problem statement

Globally, teaching and learning systems are constantly changing and the duties and responsibilities of school leaders and teachers are adjusted regularly. According to Ozmusul (2015), one of the obstacles that affect a teacher's ability to ensure quality teaching and learning is the ever-changing school curriculum. Although teacher training institutions may wish to take credit with regard to graduating academically qualified teachers, tertiary education still cannot fully prepare teachers for new challenges arising in schools (Kretchmar et al. 2012), hence the need to examine the current teacher professional development initiatives. Therefore, the strategies used by school leaders to support mechanisms for effective professional development of teachers were questioned. Hence the need to understand various support mechanisms used by Namibian school principals and HODs to help teachers overcome challenges they experience professionally in their pedagogy and subject knowledge. The central research question that guided the findings reported in this article was: *What strategies do school leaders employ to develop their teachers professionally?*

Literature review

A large body of research exists that shows scholars' efforts in understanding how school leaders can support teacher professional development with significant recent contributions coming from Eastern countries such as China, Thailand, Vietnam and Indonesia (Haiyan & Allan 2020; Hallinger, Piyaman & Viseshsiri 2017; Li et al. 2016; Meesuk, Sramoon & Wongrugsak 2020; Somprach, Tang & Popoonsak 2016; Tran et al. 2020; Wang 2016). However, apart from research conducted in South Africa, there seems to be little research done in Africa on how school leaders can support the professional development of teachers. This silence of African scholars on the topic is a concern as Africa faces

unique educational challenges, such as infrastructure limitations, teacher shortages, and socio-economic drawbacks (Du Plessis & Letshwene 2020; Shikalepo 2020). Hence, studying Teachers Professional Development (TPD) from an African perspective is essential to unearth the strategies that directly address these challenges, ensuring that professional development efforts align with local needs and priorities.

Some researchers used the concept of working conditions while studying school-based strategies for effective teacher professional development (Gaikhorst et al. 2019; Louws et al. 2016; Meesuk et al. 2020; Tran et al. 2020), while others investigated the relationship between leadership practices and various professional development programmes (Admiraal et al. 2019; Li et al. 2016; Pambudi & Gunawan 2019; Wang 2016). Leadership strategies include the synergising of resources (Alsaleh, Alabdulhadi & Alrwaished 2017; Cirocki & Farrell 2019; Gaikhorst et al. 2019; Hallinger et al. 2017; Hardman et al. 2015; Haßler et al. 2015), modelling (Haiyan & Allan 2020; Pambudi & Gunawan 2019; Soini, Pietarinen & Pyhältö 2016), a shared mission and vision (Haiyan & Allan 2020; Louws et al. 2016; Pambudi & Gunawan 2019), the creation of an enabling environment (Postholm & Wæge 2015; Wang 2016), effective monitoring and evaluation (Louws et al. 2016; Soini et al. 2016), reflective dialogue (Haßler et al. 2015; Pambudi & Gunawan 2019; Postholm & Wæge 2015), advocating for staff collaboration and collective decision-making and promoting healthy interpersonal relationship skills at the workplace (Hunzicker 2020; Svendsen 2016).

Synergising resources

Literature suggests that the effectiveness of various teacher professional development initiatives is influenced by the quality of coordination of key resources such as funds and time. If leaders plan and avail time for development opportunities (Alsaleh et al. 2017; Gaikhorst et al. 2019; Haiyan & Allan 2020; Hallinger et al. 2017; Hardman et al. 2015; Haßler et al. 2015), teacher participation is more likely to occur. For example, school timetabling and time allocation for classroom activities should be flexible enough to allow for peer coaching (Alsaleh et al. 2017).

Hardman et al. (2015) found that professional learning in schools demands sufficient funds and time as essential resources. Haiyan and Allan (2020) argue that additional physical infrastructure, such as suitable venues where teachers can collaborate and learn from each other, should be made available in schools (Haiyan & Allan 2020). It emerged from the literature cited that the availability of adequate time and financial resources by school leaders allows for sustained and deep learning experiences by teachers. Teachers need time and financial resources to engage in ongoing, reflective practices to fully internalise new strategies, pedagogies and subject knowledge.

Modelling

Recent evidence suggests that leaders' self-involvement in professional learning opportunities is one of the most common leadership strategies that encourage their followers to participate in such opportunities (Haiyan & Allan 2020; Hallinger et al. 2017; Tran et al. 2020; Wang 2016). When leaders themselves take part in development activities, it enhances collaboration and programmes initiated by teachers (Pambudi & Gunawan 2019), strengthens trust that consequently leads to teachers' acceptance of leaders' guidance (Hallinger et al. 2017). Further, it stimulates constructive dialogue and feedback among teachers and with the participating school leader (Haiyan & Allan 2020). Haiyan and Allan (2020) emphasised that modelling increases teachers' zeal for effective involvement in professional development programmes.

Shared mission and vision

Researchers have proposed that school leaders should consult and engage teachers in the development of their school's mission and vision (Admiraal et al. 2019; Haiyan & Allan 2020; Pambudi & Gunawan 2019; Somprach et al. 2016; Wang 2016). Researchers argued that school mission and vision play an integral part in providing a clear pathway for both school leaders and teachers to know the envisaged position of the school in the future (Louws et al. 2016; Somprach et al. 2016). It is argued that regularly communicating the vision creates an atmosphere that inspires teachers to seek opportunities for self-growth in pedagogical knowledge and skills (Hallinger et al. 2017). Similarly, Admiraal et al. (2019) concluded that professional development efforts could not be successful if the main objectives and goals of the programmes are unknown to teachers.

Collective decision-making and reflective dialogue

Wang (2016) recommended that decision-making in schools needs teacher involvement to increase accountability. Sharing a similar argument, Haiyan and Allan (2020) contend that engaging teachers during decision-making times enhances accountability and ownership among teachers for the planned staff development activities.

Reflective dialogue emerged as a strategy in studies of workplace conditions, teacher learning and learning-centred leadership (Gaikhorst et al. 2019; Hallinger et al. 2017; Postholm & Wæge 2015; Tran et al. 2020). These studies pointed out that the establishment of platforms for open discussion between leaders and teachers is vital (Gaikhorst et al. 2019; Postholm & Wæge 2015). Other authors indicated that informal conversations with principals allow teachers to share about their needs (Tran et al. 2020) and that by knowledge of such needs, principals can improve the quality of school-based professional development (Postholm & Wæge 2015).

Promoting staff collaboration

Research findings have indicated that leaders can enhance teacher learning by promoting teamwork among staff. For instance, Goodyear (2017) argued that sustained learning during a continuous professional development programme for teachers was possible because teachers who are teaching the same subject within a department collaborated and the department heads initiated this symbiotic relationship. In addition, while identifying this strategy as a cultural working condition, Gaikhorst et al. (2019) assert that principals who participated in their study motivated teachers to observe other colleagues during their lessons and evaluate their teaching and learning practices to improve their own teaching practice.

Promoting healthy interpersonal relations

There is general agreement in the literature on the importance of good interpersonal relations among teachers and school leaders (Alsaleh et al. 2017; Haiyan & Allan 2020; Pambudi & Gunawan 2019; Postholm & Wæge 2015; Soini et al. 2016; Tran et al. 2020). Researchers argue that school leaders should focus on forming and strengthening relationships between them and their staff as this will improve teachers' trust and their willingness to work together (Alsaleh et al. 2017). Researchers also concluded that the formation of effective and beneficial working relations is one of the prerequisites for teacher learning (Postholm & Wæge 2015); hence principals should be able to strengthen and nurture such relations (Haiyan & Allan 2020; Tran et al. 2020; Wang 2016).

Theoretical framework

This study was framed by a blend of functional, instructional and distributed leadership theories, something that may be referred to as 'functional distributed instructional leadership'. The theories were blended because functional, distributed and instructional leadership theories on their own did not satisfy the purpose of the study and the strengths of the three theories were integrated. The model emphasises that principals and heads of departments are tasked with the function of equipping teachers (Makgato & Mudzanani 2019) and that such functions require multiple actors (Spillane 2005), hence the distribution of leadership to provide instructional leadership for improved teaching practice (Costello 2015; Day & Sammons 2016). Leaders who employ Functional Leadership Theory recognise that the development of a teacher's functional capabilities is their key responsibility (Morgeson, DeRue & Karam 2010). The theory's argument is that 'to do, or get done whatever is not being adequately handled for the group need' (McGrath 1962:5). This argument helped frame this study's aim of seeking to understand the strategies adopted by school leaders to support teachers' professional development to meet unmet needs of teachers.

Furthermore, the choice of the Distributed Leadership Theory as a lens for my study was primarily informed by the job description of the HODs and principals that requires

school leaders in Namibia to ensure effective teaching and learning (MoE 2006; MoEAC 2016). As this theory advocates for leadership that stretch across all leaders, it helped frame the need to investigate how the responsibility of teacher professional development is shared or distributed across school principals and HODs. Therefore, as a theoretical framework, distributed perspective was supportive in further understanding principals and HODs' strategies used during teacher professional development.

The adopted blend of theories also includes Instructional Leadership Theory. Some literature have associated this theory with principals only, while the concept encompasses all those in leadership positions in a school (Sekhu 2011). Therefore, it is argued that instructional leadership concerns both school principals and HODs owing to the complex nature of school leaders' responsibilities to improve the quality of instructional processes at schools. This is based on the theory's perspective that instructional leaders should concern themselves with managing and supervising teaching and learning processes (Bhengu & Mkhize 2013; Mestry 2013). Therefore, they are expected to take action to promote excellence in teaching and learning (Heaven & Bourne 2016). Such actions should include being intentionally focussed on teacher professional development (Smith 2015) to improve teaching practice and subject knowledge.

Research methods and design

The findings reported in this article were mainly collected during the qualitative phase of a mixed-method study, which adopted a sequential explanatory design. Data were collected in two phases using questionnaires and interviews. However, this article reports primarily on the qualitative findings. The study was carried out in the Otjiwarongo education circuit within the Otjozondjupa region in Namibia, which consists of 12 primary schools and seven secondary schools. Permission to conduct the survey was obtained from 10 schools, which excluded the two schools of my professional practice. Participating schools were purposely selected based on spatial proximity and accessibility through convenience sampling. In addition, the principals' willingness to allow research at their school was another determining factor. Quantitative data were collected from 103 respondents. Simple random sampling was used to randomly obtain the respondents from the schools in the circuit inclusive of the teachers, HODs and principals. This sampling strategy ensured equal opportunity for all teachers and school leaders to be selected (Leavy 2017). The survey data were analysed using SPSS with the assistance of a university statistician to get descriptive statistics needed to inform the development of interview schedules used during the qualitative phase of the study. The results of this analysis were used to inform the interview questions during the second phase of the study during which semi-structured face-to-face interviews were conducted with six principals, eight HODs and nine teachers that were more in the form of dialogues as opposed to question and answer (Korstjens & Moser 2017). The duration of the interviews ranged from 30 to 60 min. These interviews

were aimed at mining the viewpoints and lived experiences of participants related to the phenomenon being studied (Creswell & Creswell 2017). Interviews therefore provided more descriptive data that consisted of in-depth answers to the research question from a relatively small sample (Bertram & Christiansen 2014). Purposeful convenience sampling was used to select participants for the interview, and the sample size was determined by the achievement of data saturation and no pre-determined sample size existed (Kumar 2018). This sampling mode is used by researchers who are guided by the participants' availability and willingness (Johnson & Christensen 2013; Onwuegbuzie & Collins 2007; Teddlie & Yu 2007), meaning the selection of individual participants for the interviews was based on the question 'Who is willingly available?'. Another inclusion criterion was for participants to have at least 3 years of teaching experience at the school as a measure of their insightfulness as those participants are expected to have more contextual knowledge about the schools. All the interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed and thematically analysed. I used inductive data analysis as individual ideas in the collected data were combined to generate a broader and more comprehensive description of the research topic (Lodico, Spaulding & Voegtle 2010). The inductive data analysis followed the steps identified by Akinyode and Khan (2018), which include data transcription, anecdotes, coding and themes generation. The blend of functional-distributed-instructional leadership theory was applied as a theoretical lens through which to conceptualise and connect the findings as discussed earlier. The theories' key assumptions and dimensions guided the analysis aimed at gaining in-depth understanding of the participants' views on the research question. It also focused on extracting participants' narratives that were more of an explanatory nature to the findings of the survey.

Profiles of the participants

The majority of the participants were females between the ages of 27 and 56. At the time of the interviews, the participating principals and HODs had between 3 and 23 years of experience in their current positions. Furthermore, of the 23 participants, 12 (52%) indicated that they have completed an honours degree, five (22%) a diploma and four (17%) a master's degree. Hence, the assumption is that the participants have a relatively high intellectual capacity and extensive experiential knowledge. The profiles of the participants are indicated in Table 1.

Ethical considerations

Firstly, an application was submitted to the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Education at the University of Pretoria for ethical clearance, and it was successfully granted (EDU071/21). Secondly, a request was submitted to the Director of the Otjozondjupa Regional Directorate of Education, Arts and Culture in Namibia to obtain permission to collect data at the selected schools within the Otjiwarongo circuit. All the prospective respondents and participants were provided with letters in which their rights and

TABLE 1: Profiles of the participants.

Code	Gender	Age (years)	Years of experience in the position	Qualification
Category of participants: Principals				
Principal 1	Male	41	4	Master's
Principal 2	Male	46	3	Master's
Principal 3	Female	43	6	Bachelor
Principal 4	Male	41	3	Bachelor
Principal 5	Female	56	16	Honours
Principal 6	Male	54	23	Honours
Category of participants: HODs				
HOD 1	Female	28	3	Honours
HOD 2	Female	36	4	Diploma
HOD 3	Male	33	6	Honours
HOD 4	Female	35	6	Master's
HOD 5	Female	41	8	Diploma
HOD 6	Male	48	4	Diploma
HOD 7	Female	52	12	Honours
HOD 8	Female	48	8	Honours
Category of participants: Teachers				
Teacher 1	Female	32	10	Honours
Teacher 2	Female	28	8	Honours
Teacher 3	Male	26	4	Diploma
Teacher 4	Female	32	9	Honours
Teacher 5	Female	34	9	Honours
Teacher 6	Female	31	4	Honours
Teacher 7	Female	27	7	Honours
Teacher 8	Female	46	3	Diploma
Teacher 9	Male	31	9	Master's

Source: Adapted from, So-oabeb, J., & du Plessis, A. (2023). Leadership competencies for teacher professional development: perspectives of Namibian principals, heads of departments and teachers. *Perspectives in Education*, 41(2), 16–32. <https://doi.org/10.38140/pie.v41i2.7097>

HOD, heads of department.

responsibilities were explained. They were then required to sign a consent form in which they acknowledged that they were informed of their rights and responsibilities and possible consequences of their participation. To address concerns of confidentiality, the participants in the study were made aware that by signing the consent forms their contributions will be kept confidential. In addition, emphasis was placed before the commencement of the interviews that the anonymity of the interviewee will be maintained and neither their names nor the schools' names will be disclosed.

Trustworthiness of the qualitative findings

The trustworthiness of the textual data obtained from the face-to-face interviews and the findings were enhanced through member checking (Bhattacharjee 2012; Creswell 2014) and triangulation (Creswell 2014; Korstjens & Moser 2018), respectively. Triangulation in the study was possible as both the questionnaires and the interviews served as sources of information to answer the research question; therefore, convergence of multiple data sources was possible (Creswell 2014; Kumar 2018).

Results and discussion

Staff meetings

In the quantitative phase of the study, staff meetings emerged to be the top agreed upon strategy as 90.2% of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed to the statement that teachers

have departmental and subject meetings to discuss individual subject needs as experienced in the classroom. In addition, 78% of principals and HODs either agreed or strongly agreed that they participate in meetings with their teachers to improve subject knowledge and teaching methods. Similarly, and as anticipated, the principals and majority of the HODs during the interviews expressed their use of department and subject meetings as one of their school-based platforms where they engage teachers. In relation to the use of staff meetings as a strategy to promote TPD, participants made the following comments:

'At the school, we have departmental meetings and in those meetings, teachers advise each other.' (Teacher 1, female, 32 years)

'[A]lso in our subject meetings, we share information, it is not just about having complaints, we share how to conduct lessons and how to do assessment, so the subject meetings also give the opportunity for teachers to share ideas or what they learnt when they were at other workshops.' (HOD 5, female, 41 years)

This finding supports evidence from studies conducted by Godara (2017), Admiraal and colleagues (2019) and Du Plessis and Eberlein (2018), who established that meetings are used as integral tools to TPD and that it can help solve teachers' problems and frustrations (Godara 2017).

Modelling

The survey data indicated that 83% of principals and HODs agreed that they use the strategy of modelling to promote

continuous professional development for teachers. Consistent with the recent findings of Haiyan and Allan (2020), Hilton et al. (2015) and Goldsmith, Doerr and Lewis (2014), the qualitative data of this study suggested that principals and HODs' participation in activities that contribute towards their own professional enhancement is a commonly narrated leadership strategy. This study found that school leaders' co-participation serves as an inspiration for teachers to embrace lifelong learning and enact learnt knowledge and practices. This is demonstrated by participants' responses as indicated below:

'NIED and the regional office hold mostly workshops and if such workshops are within my field of work, I attend sometimes with another teacher. I remember one workshop on item setting, I left it to my teacher to teach other colleagues that didn't attend and I heard from her HOD that her question papers standards improved so I just monitored and supported her.' (Principal 6, male, 54 years)

'When principals' and HODs are engaged in PD, number one they will serve as role models and also teachers will look up to them and get those great traits. For example if a principal study he will further inspire those teachers who want to study further.' (HOD 1, female, 28 years)

'Based on my HOD she always inspires me because she ask I always find her with this small notes where she sets her goals so that inspires me so that I also do the same, she does weekly goals she would do term goals and this really inspires because at the end of the day allows me to achieve my goals in a short period of time.' (Teacher 2, female, 28 years)

This reflects arguments in literature that principals and HODs' participation in professional development activities enhances teachers' abilities to implement and reflect on new knowledge and practices (Goldsmith et al. 2014; Hilton et al. 2015). In this way, school leaders become literate on ways to enact support to teachers for the implementation of new knowledge and skills (Hilton et al. 2015). Therefore, there is evidence of reflective practice in the participating schools.

Goal setting

There is a plethora of literature that report on studies that identified goal setting as an approach to TPD (Bessong 2021; Camp 2017; Hallinger et al. 2017; Hussong-Christian 2013). This study also established that Namibian principals and HODs use the strategy of building a learning vision through goal setting to encourage teachers to strive for continuous improvement in their teaching and learning processes. It was found that 51.2% of principals and HODs who participated in the survey either agreed or strongly agreed that they encourage teachers to develop individual professional goals, which are consistent with the school goals. This was further confirmed by the interviews where six of the 14 interviewed principals and HODs narrated how they use goal setting as an instrument to support teachers' professional growth. These were some of their comments:

'We are also setting target dates for everything, the teachers are getting it as soon as possible after the term started so that the teachers can also plan thoroughly and know what is expected of

them and that tells me as a principal what I need to do help teachers achieve their plans.' (Principal 4, male, 41 years)

'Yes. Our vision is to ensure that math and sciences to be the best performed and understood subjects at school. We set subject targets, individual subject targets for learners and that gives an indication of possible areas of intervention.' (HOD 3, male, 33 years)

Implied from the above is that the setting of goals encourages teachers to plan ahead and seek ways for self-improvement, for example, setting of targets (Camp 2017; Hallinger et al. 2017) as it encourages personal responsibility (Hussong-Christian 2013) while it informs schools leaders on possible areas of intervention.

Staff collaboration

According to the interview data, school principals and HODs identify teachers with certain skills and expertise that are needed by novice teachers or teachers with poor subject knowledge or pedagogical challenges. This is demonstrated by the following quotations from the interviews:

'I allow and try to find help for my teachers to visit better performing schools and teaming up my teachers with teachers there.' (Principal 2, male, 46 years).

'[F]or lower primary, what I do is to see if there is a lack in a teacher and I normally combine with the next teacher which I think have got expertise so that this teacher can be helped.' (HOD 4, female, 35 years)

'[I]f I am not an expert, I can look for someone who can train them on that specific content.' (Principal 5, female, 56 years)

This finding is corroborated by several other studies, which revealed the important role of school leaders in identifying experts to help overcome the challenges teachers face (Bush & Glover 2016; Sunde & Ulvik 2014) and how teacher collaboration contributes to teacher development (Castro Garcés & Martínez Granada 2016; Dolfing et al. 2021; Rimpola 2011). This aspect of the findings in this study reflects those from Dolfing and colleagues (2021) who argued that teacher collaboration as a strategy to support TPD enhances teacher efficacy as teachers with multiple skills and knowledge seek solutions to problems facing them.

Managing the learning programmes

Much has been written on the significant roles played by principals and HODs in managing teaching and learning activities for improved educational outcomes (Ali & Botha 2006; Bipath & Nkabinde 2018; Bush et al. 2010; Mestry 2017; Wilmot 2017). Interestingly, the findings of this study indicate that all the participants overwhelmingly narrated their active roles in managing the teaching and learning programmes at their schools. The qualitative data indicate that principals and HODs monitor and support teachers' learning through regularly visiting their classrooms during teaching time. Similarly, in the quantitative findings, the strategy of regularly visiting teachers to ensure systematic monitoring of

teachers' professional learning emerged to be the most highly agreed upon strategy with 78% of the respondents either agreeing or strongly agreeing to the statement. Most of the participants indicated that they use class visits to identify teachers' pedagogical strengths and weaknesses, understand their subject knowledge competencies and identify areas of further intervention. This is illustrated by the following responses by participants:

'When a HOD visits a specific teacher, they normally take note of the strengths and weaknesses of a specific teacher and then they have one-on-one and feedback give an idea how the teacher was supposed to teach that component and they also do co-planning.' (Teacher 2, female, 28 years)

'Class visits from time to time and then if you see that teacher is not on bar or lesson plan is not in bar than that is the opportunities for me to get the teacher in and when it is necessary than I will also deal with the particular or general things I can help them with.' (Principal 6, male, 54 years)

This study arrived at a finding similar to a study conducted by Wilmot (2017) that highlighted HODs' use of class visits as opportunities to assess teachers' subject knowledge and pedagogical competencies and assist accordingly. Furthermore, literature also attests that class visits are tools used by instructional leaders, not only to criticise teachers' practices, but to provide good models for lesson planning, assessment, pedagogy and subject knowledge (Bush et al. 2010; Olurotimi & Ekere 2017; Tuytens & Devos 2017).

In relation to the functional distributed instructional leadership theory that framed this study, the interviewed principals and HODs largely practised instructional leadership. In the Hallinger and Murphy's instructional leadership model (1985), the dimension of managing the instructional programme relates to these study findings.

Resource provision

In line with several findings of contemporary researchers (Alsaleh et al. 2017; Bessong 2021; Cirocki & Farrell 2019; Gaikhorst et al. 2019), the findings in this study showed that Namibian principals and HODs support the professional development of teachers by providing much-needed resources. This qualitative finding is contrary to the survey results that indicated that 46.3% of principals and HODs disagreed that they provide resources to support teachers' learning opportunities, while 22% of them remained undecided. This contradiction is attributed to principals and HODs' survey indicating a limited understanding of TPD by the respondents. However, through regular probing during interviews, lived experiences were narrated that gave rise to the strategy of resource provision as leadership support towards the professional development of teachers.

According to the participants, the realisation of TPD activities in their schools is made possible through principals and HODs facilitating the provision of resources such as IT facilities, textbooks, teaching and learning aids, subject experts and time. This, according to the data, the

school leaders achieve through ensuring that financial resources are mobilised and budgeted for. For example, two of the principals who participated in the interviews had this to say:

'I am supportive of my teachers' to become top performing teachers' in the region and one way is by looking their teaching and learning needs and I ensure there is a budget and such things are bought.' (Principal 2, male, 46 years)

'[S]o ja we have a budget and we also so a lot of fund raising to pay extra for our teachers to go to the Afrikaans congress yearly for them to learn from other experts.' (Principal 4, male, 41 years)

The extracts above concur with the findings of Hardman and colleagues (2015) and Cirocki and Farrell (2019) who argued that teacher efficacy through professional learning demands school leaders to avail sufficient funds towards such initiatives.

The qualitative findings also revealed that the preservation of time and the provision of physical resources for efficient and continuous learning for teachers form part of the leadership strategy of synergising resources. For example, HOD 1 said:

'We assist the teachers by providing the necessary equipment and materials that they need but you know for our teachers' to learn and improve they need time so we have off periods on the timetable that they can use for their professional development so to say.' (HOD 1, female, 28 years)

A second example is Principal 6 who shared similar sentiments by saying:

'For my teachers to develop professionally, I look at what they need. Quality requires money and resources so as the management we use the little we have to buy textbooks identified as the best by them, equipment and we recently also installed the fastest as they say internet and our teachers have a wide coverage of internet on the premises.' (Principal 6, male, 54 years)

Similar findings were reported by Bessong (2021) who affirmed that school leaders from South Africa indicated to have allocated time strictly for teachers to participate in various professional development activities.

There is evidence that the participants practised functional and instructional leadership as they aid teacher development opportunities through availing much-needed resources. This strategy is also represented in the Weber's model of instructional leadership whose dimension on managing the instructional programme identifies the function of an instructional leader as that of providing instructional resources (Kgatla 2014).

Limitations and suggestions for future research

I could include the broader Namibian context by sampling respondents from across all 13 education regions of the country, but logistically it was not feasible. Hence, I only gathered data from respondents and participants in the Otjiwarongo education circuit.

Additionally, as the study aimed to explore various strategies employed by school leaders to support teachers for improved teaching practice, there was reluctance from some principals and HODs in providing factual information. Therefore, I used a mixed-method approach with sequential explanatory design to help counterbalance such limitations.

Further research into each of the leadership strategies for teacher professional development as identified in this study is required, for example, a comprehensive study on how it is implemented and the impact thereof. This will be particularly valuable within the Namibian context.

Recommendations and practical implications

According to the results, it is evident that Namibian school principals and HODs have multiple strategies to aid their efforts in supporting teachers' professional development. Therefore, it is recommended that the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture in collaboration with the National Institute of Educational Development (NIED) further develop a mandatory insert programme or short courses focused on further enhancing and imparting new and innovative leadership strategies that are responsive to the changing curriculum need except those identified in this study. This will help ensure that the principals and HODs have a broader knowledge base to initiate and support TPD activities.

This study provides practical insights and contributions that can inform the development of effective leadership practices in supporting teachers' professional development not only in Namibia but also in other educational contexts worldwide. The study also provides a new knowledge base for Namibian policy makers, political office bearers and administrators to avail human and financial resources to capacitate and support school leaders towards innovative and creative strategies geared towards teachers' professional development.

Conclusion

Namibian principals and heads of departments play a significant role in supporting teachers' professional development and hence have established various strategies for improved subject knowledge and pedagogy. Therefore, this study provided valuable insights into the leadership practices towards promoting teacher professional development in the Namibian context. It was established that there are multiple strategies employed by Namibian school principals and HODs to support the professional development efforts of their teachers similar to other parts of the world. These include the use of staff meetings as platforms to engage teachers, modelling by senior staff, goal setting, staff collaboration, managing the learning programme and resources provision.

The study contributes by identifying various strategies employed by Namibian school principals and heads of

departments (HODs) to support teachers' professional development. This information is valuable for educational leaders globally as it provides insights into effective practices that can be adapted and implemented in different contexts. It further offers context-specific insights into the Namibian educational system. Understanding the specific strategies within a particular context is crucial for tailoring leadership practices to meet the unique needs of teachers in Namibia. Furthermore, by recognising that Namibian leaders utilise strategies similar to those employed in other parts of the world, the study contributes to a global understanding of effective leadership practices in teacher professional development. This allows for comparative analysis and cross-cultural insights that can inform best practices internationally.

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Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

Authors' contributions

J.H.S.S.-O.: Student researcher conducted the main research as the findings reported are part of my doctoral thesis. A.d.P. was the main supervisor of the study. A.M. assisted with quantitative data analysis.

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Data availability

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, J.H.S.S.-O., upon reasonable request.

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