



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA  
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**KWAZULU-NATAL SCHOOL PRINCIPALS'  
PERCEPTIONS OF THE PRACTICAL RELEVANCE OF  
FORMAL EDUCATION MANAGEMENT  
DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES**

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## Abstract

The purpose of this study is to explore school principals' perceptions of the possible effects and benefits of formal university-based education management development programmes (EMDPs) on their practical work in schools. It also aims to inquire into the kinds of challenges that principals in South Africa, specifically in the province of KwaZulu-Natal (KZN), are faced with in the post-apartheid era and their perceptions of the extent to which these EMDPs meet or fail to meet their needs and those of their schools.

In this study I move from the basic premise that professional development is critical for all principals and that given the new conditions that exist in SA post-1994, more than ever, the ideal situation would be for all principals to be trained so as to enable them to deal effectively with the changed and constantly changing conditions that prevail in schools.

The study is guided by the following general research question: What are the perceptions of school principals of the benefits of formal EMDPs on their practices in school? The following related questions are also addressed, namely

- i) What are the links between formal EMDPs and the needs of school principals?
- ii) What kinds of challenges do principals in KZN face in the post-apartheid era and what are their perceptions of the extent to which EMDPs have met or failed to meet their needs and those of their schools?

Working in an interpretivist research paradigm within a qualitative research design, the inquiry used document analysis, content analysis of research literature and semi-structured interview methods. Data were analysed using a grounded theory approach in an effort to make sense of the meanings that the participants, mainly the school principals, in this study give to their experiences of EMDPs.

One of the main findings of this study is that some principals demonstrated the ability to reflect on their professional development programmes and to make connections between theory and research and some of the challenges that they encounter. The other main insights of the study include the following:

- a) Regarding their content and context, and according to the participants, EMDPs in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) have major shortcomings in relation to needs assessment and analysis, programmatic aims and objectives, recruitment and selection of candidates, and field-based learning experiences. However, EMDPs are perceived to have been successful in areas such as understanding the environments for which principals need to be developed, the application of leadership and management development content to organisational settings, and in their modes of delivery.
- b) Although a majority of principals recognised the need to change and work within the new democratic environment ushered in by the new socio-political dispensation in SA, a few principals expressed their challenges with engaging in shared leadership and shared decision making in schools.
- c) Pertaining to the perceptions of school principals regarding the value of EMDPs in KZN, the majority of principals felt that although they were still struggling with a number of post-1994 challenges, EMDPs had equipped them, for the most part — albeit inadequately — to deal with the challenges that they face in schools.
- d) School principals highlighted what they saw as two significant aspects (emerging themes) in the professional development of principals:
  - i. Though very critical of training workshops in their current form, school principals in this study saw training workshops as important vehicles for assisting principals to keep abreast of the developments in the leadership and management of their school, as a means for providing opportunities to share and learn from the experiences of others, and as an avenue for collaborative problem solving;
  - ii. A majority of school principals emphasised what they regarded as the important role played by experiences beyond the formal education management development programmes, in the effective running of schools.

Apart from presenting “thick descriptions” of the voices of school principals regarding the effects of the post-1994 changes on their practices and the extent to which EMDPs are perceived to have met principals and school needs, the significance of this study lies in plugging the gap of previous impact analysis studies by, amongst other things, not only focusing on the perceptions of the recipients of the EMDPs, but also focusing on the views of the EMDP providers and the policy makers. This study therefore presents critical insights

which may be invaluable in the future development of EMDPs and in the improvement or modification of existing ones.

## **Key Words**

1. School principals professional development
2. Education management development
3. Leadership development
4. School leadership
5. School management
6. Post-apartheid school challenges
7. School effectiveness

## Declaration

I, John Sibusiso Chalufu, declare that:

**KwaZulu-Natal school principals' perceptions of the practical relevance of formal education management development programmes**

is my own work, that all the sources cited or quoted have been duly acknowledged, and that I have not previously submitted this work for degree purposes at any tertiary education institution.

Signed:.....

Date:.....

J. S. Chalufu

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## ACRONYMS USED IN THE STUDY

BEd (Hons.)	Bachelor of Education Honours degree
COL	Centres of Learning programme
DAS	Developmental Appraisal System
DEA	Department of Educational Administration
DEPLA	Department of Educational Planning, Leadership and Administration
DMs	District Managers
DoE	Department of Education
EMD	Education Management Development
EMDTP	Education Management Development Training Programme
EML	Educational Management and Leadership
HODs	Heads of Departments
KZN	KwaZulu-Natal
KZNDEC	KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education and Culture
EMDPs	Education Management Development Programmes
MEd	Masters in Education degree
OBE	Outcomes Based Education
SA	South Africa
SASA	South African Schools Act, No 84 of 1996
SEMs	Superintendents of Education
SGBs	School Governing Bodies
SMT	School Management Team
PD	Professional Development
PDE	Provincial Department of Education
UMNC	University of Melmoth North Campus (pseudonym)
UMSC	University of Melmoth South Campus (pseudonym)
UK	United Kingdom
UPS	University of Port Shepstone (pseudonym)
USA	United States of America