



Principal Recommendation for Public Schools' Leadership in Lesotho: The School Board's Interview

Motlatsi Mathunya¹

¹ Mahala High School Campus, Leribe, Lesotho
Email: mathunya1961@gmail.com

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Abstract

This paper explores the school board interview and how the decision to appoint a principal is arrived at. The study was a multiple case study with 24 public school board members employing criterion sampling within the context of social constructivism theory. Data were collected and analyzed thematically using a semi-structured interview guide. The study's findings revealed that board members are looking for a candidate who has an additional qualification in management, must meet the job requirements, has good financial management skills, influences student outcomes, communication skills, administration skills, and is disciplined. Personal biases, early decisions, application order, merits, interview outcome, and political affiliation all impact board members' decision to suggest a candidate. It is recommended that the nomination of public school principals be evaluated in terms of seniority and competence.

Keywords: School Leadership, Recommendation, School Board, Interview, Principal

Introduction

A principal is a teacher in charge of the school (Education act, 2010). The principals play an imperative role for effective functioning and management of the schools (Nasreen, 2019). Each school in Lesotho according to Education Act (2010) shall be governed by a school board. The school board was created for effective management of schools (Okendu, 2012). Education Act (2010) and Okendu (2006) argue that the nine members' school board manages, promote, demote and transfer teachers, school development and budget and etc. It is also responsible for taking disciplinary actions against the principal or the head of departments (Education Act, 2010).

When a school principal in Lesotho dies, gets promoted, retires, is dismissed, is seconded, or resigns, the school will advertise the position through the ministry of education. The school board set a date for the principal's interview. Ullah (2010) conceives that,

the interview selection process is critical in bringing the finest applicant to the firm. Schmidt and Hunter (1998) and Lunenburg (2010) postulate that, while interviews are a poor predictor of job performance, they are widely employed around the world. Applicants who are the most skilled in interview techniques are hired, even if they are not the greatest candidates for the position (Lunenburg, 2010).

MOET circular notice 19 of 2021, all the principal positions are opened for Basotho with relevant qualifications both unemployed and serving teachers who have acquired high qualifications. The minimum requirements include a Bachelor's degree with 8 years teaching experience. The attendance of school administration and leadership training is the added advantage. There is no leadership qualification to be a principal in Lesotho. Any school to achieve its mission, it needs an effective leader. All the employers like school board member on the vacancy of a principal need a best employee, but very few can know how to maximize the possibilities to find the right person. Lee and Mao (2023) confirm that principals are assigned to manage the schools and are responsible for the school development and success.

Studies were contacted that focus on the role of principals, successful principals functioning of school board, principal professional identity, procedure to appoint the school principal, financial management (Motsamai, et al. 2011; Prew, 2007; Sezer, 2016; Sezer & Engin, 2021). The study contacted in South Africa by Mampane (2015) on procedures and processes followed in the appointment of principals for school leadership and management. This study looked into the path way followed for one to be appointed to be a school principal. The current study differs with that of Mampane (2015) in that it focused on the outcome of the school board interview. Sezer and Engin (2021), collected data from the principals this differ with the reported study in that I look for the board member 's experience about the principal recommendation. In the context of Lesotho Motsamai et al. (2011) has studied financial management of schools in Mafeteng district of Lesotho. What stand out to be the theme of the current study are the perceived qualities of the principal and perceived factors that influences the school board members to recommend a school principal to teaching service commissions for approval as a principal with an attempt to increase the literature on principal appointment. The goal of this research is to discover what happens during the interview that leads to the aspirant's proposal to the Lesotho Teaching Service Commission for approval as a head teacher. The following research questions are derived from the study's purpose. What characteristics of an interviewee do school board members look for in order to propose a candidate? What are the perceived elements that influence the final decision to suggest that individual for a leadership position in a public school? The answers to these questions will help teachers who want to apply for principal positions in public schools understand the attributes that school board members look for. The research would aid in their preparedness.

Literature Review

The literature has been reviewed on the virtues of the principal and the factors that influence the school board to recommend a candidate to the teaching service commission to approve as the principal.

Below Are Perceived Virtues of a Recommendable Candidate for Principal Position in a School

The principal must have the necessary academic qualifications that are the bachelor degree; 8 years' work experience and at least 5 years as a senior teacher (Education Act, 2010). The teacher must be registered by the teaching service. In the study similar to this Mampane and Mampane (2022) observes that the principal should have a matric plus a teaching certificate or diploma which is the lowest. Principal with more teaching experience are more stable added Pendola and Fuller (2018). Sebastian et al. (2019), Sezer and Engin (2021) together accentuate that a principal should have the administrative skills (teamwork, goal setting, and communication skills). In their study, Samosir et al. (2021) argue that the principal controls and determine the direction and goals of a school. Nasreen (2019) reported that the principal plays an important role for effective functioning and management of the school. The contestants who apply for the position of a school leader should have financial accountability. Rangongo et al. (2016) content that lack of accountability on financial resources in many schools proves problematic. In other words, the financial mismanagement emanates from principal and the school board. The study contacted by Mncube and Makhasane (2013) pronounce that principals are not being effective in managing the finances. This mismanagement is due to lack of skills. By implication, one quality to win the principal position interview is by having the financial management capabilities. Motsamai et al. (2011) opine that mismanagement of schools funds lead to shortage of important resources such as textbooks and etc., in the study conducted in Mafeteng Lesotho. In the study by Mphutlane (2017) it is highlighted that principal have no financial competences. Researchers, Baker (2001), Dhuey and Smith (2014) posit that school principals influence the students' performance. A number of studies show that principals are the crucial factors for activating school success (Samosir et al., 2021). The principal is said to provide curriculum leadership. However, Mampane (2015) in the study about procedures and processes followed in the appointment of principals for school leadership and management, suggest that there should be a developed monitoring tool to ensure quality appointment of principals.

Factors That Influence the Board Member Decisions to Recommend a Candidate for a Principal Position

Below are factors that influence the decision of the school board to recommend a candidate to the commission to approve as a principal of public school. Lunenburg (2010) define personal biases as having perception and prejudices about others. For example, “fat people are lazy”. This factor may affect the outcome of the interview. Sezer (2016) refer to personal bias as favouritism. Premature decisions can also affect the outcomes of the interview. The merits of individuals were ignored indicating favouritism (Sezer, 2016). This is making the decision about the applicant in the first minutes before getting out all the information. Interviewers weigh the negative information from the participant more heavily than positive. Lunenburg (2010) presented the other factor as applicant order, this is where the applicants are rated by the order in which they are interviewed. For example, interviewing the good applicant after the outstanding, the former is rated below average. The other factor is the merits (competence) Sezer and Engin (2021) in their study about the school principals’ views on selecting, training and appointment of administrator for schools. Nasreen (2019) found the two ways to become a principal as merit based selection and seniority based promotion. However, participants in the same study, disagree with seniority based promotion as it does not quarantine the competent person. Many studies on the appointment of the school principal have reported that interview scores are considered (Sezer, 2016; Sezer & Engin, 2021).

Theoretical Framework

The study is underpinned by the 1968 Vygotsky social constructivism theory. Social constructivists believe that knowledge acquired through social interaction (Akpan et al., 2020), so the school board member in this study will give the knowledge they constructed from interaction with the interviewee. The theory of social constructivism assisted the researcher to understand the perceived qualities of the principal and the factors that influence them to recommend the candidate to the teaching service commission to approve as a principal.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative multiple-case study design involving 26 school board members from eight secondary schools in the Leribe District of Lesotho. A multiple-case study is a qualitative research design in which a researcher conducts an in-depth investigation of two or more cases to gain a comprehensive understanding of a particular phenomenon and to identify similarities and differences across the cases (Yin, 2018).

In this study, each of the eight secondary schools constituted a case, while the 26 school board members served as participants within these cases. These schools were purposively selected because they had recently appointed new principals.

Population, Sampling and Participants

The sample for this study comprised 26 school board members from eight public secondary schools in the Leribe District of Lesotho. The participants were selected using criterion sampling. To be eligible for participation, school board members were required to have served on school boards for more than two terms, with each term lasting five years. The schools were selected based on their proximity to the researcher, taking into consideration time and financial constraints. The schools had appointed new principals in 2022, following the government's conversion of principals' performance contracts to permanent and pensionable contracts.

Data Collection

The semi-structured interview guide was used to obtain data. The one-on-one interviews provided insight into the interview experiences of the school board members. The information was gathered during a six-month period. The author explained the goal of the study to each participant. When the person consented to participate in the study, a day was selected and he or she was phoned a week before to confirm his or her availability for the agreed-upon day. The interview questions were supplied to the participants during the first meeting to refresh their memories. Among the questions are: What are the characteristics of a good principal? What qualities do you seek for in an interviewee? What are the factors that have an impact? What qualities do you seek for in an interviewee? What considerations lead you to believe that a certain individual is the best fit for the primary position? They were interviewed at their homes in either their own tongue (Sesotho, the language of the people of Lesotho) or English. The interviews were audio recorded and lasted between 1 hour 40 minutes and 2 hours, depending on the responses. The consent forms for audio recording were signed by all participants.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed thematically using the social constructivism theory. After two weeks, the audios of the interviews were translated, transcribed, and crosschecked for accuracy by an English specialist from the National University of Lesotho. The author listened to, read, and reread the transcribed text multiple times while still listening to the voices of the respondents. They were distributed to the participants for four weeks to ensure that their own words were conveyed correctly and that their meaning was not misconstrued.

However, Ibrahim (2012) cautions that thematic analysis is the process of locating the participants' thinking patterns and the pattern of activity displayed. According to the study's goal and research questions, the author looked for (1) perceived traits of the candidate from answers. They were then coded. For each audio the researcher classified, for example, the principal should have appropriate academic qualifications (the categories were that the participants should have qualifications, be educated, must be from tertiary, from teacher training institution, to name a few) were highlighted in red. The principal should have administrative skills (this umbrella theme was from the following categories; decision making, goal setting, team building, and others) with a blue color, while the principals' influence on students' performance (the respondents' answers included, bring about results, improve the students' performance) was coded green; the principal should have financial accountability (know how to use finances, capable of using money, run school funds). When it comes to fees, we are honest when it comes to the categories composing the theme) was coded purple on each and every participant transcribed interview. The new perceived qualities were tagged with a yellow color and their complete name. The principal, for example, was coded yellow because he should be disciplined.

(2) Perceived variables influencing the choice to propose a principal were coded using an acronym of the factor's name. Personal biases-BS (women cannot effectively lead the school, men were given a chance and did not perform, young people lack leadership experience), premature decisions-PD (some could not answer well the first question), applicant order-AO (we can conclude when we meet someone who answers well). Pink was assigned to the interview outcome-IO. The new factors were abbreviated and preceded by the word "new." For example, PO-new is the place of origin, PA-new is the political affiliation, and R-new is the religion. This was done consistently throughout the transcribed audios. The researcher waited two weeks before reanalyzing the data and comparing the two.

Results and Findings

The researcher discovered the following perceived traits of a recommendable candidate during the analysis: the applicant should have administrative abilities, impact the students' performance, the appropriate academic qualifications, and financial accountability. It is worth noting that the researcher has been abbreviated for the interview with the letter R. P1 denotes the first participant. P1 to P26 were the participants. These are the aliases of the study's participants.

Perceived Virtues of a Recommendable Candidate for Principal Position in a School

To be the principal of a secondary school in Lesotho, the competitor must meet the employment qualifications specified on the post. According to the literature, this resonates with the Education Act (2010), Mampane and Mampane (2022). Twenty-five (25) of the 26 participants underscore the importance of a recommendable person meeting the job requirements. A brief extract from P5's discourse follows: *To be recommended for the principal position as mentioned on the advertised post, participants must first meet the requirements of the post.* It can be inferred from the above quote that the competitor to be recommended to be a principal should meet the requirements of the post. This is in consonance with Education Act (2010) a participant must be registered with the teaching service. In support of this claim, P5 and P8 alluded that the degree qualification is a must have to be the secondary school principal. This finding that for head of school position a qualification is a core requisite overlaps with that of Mampane and Mampane (2022) as conveyed in the literature.

The findings of this study also reveal that participants seeking the provost job must have good financial management abilities and financial accountability. This was mentioned as a characteristic of a recommendable person by 25 out of 26 participants. The following is an excerpt from the interview with P20, who mentioned that the headmaster should have solid financial management skills and be financially accountable: *The participant should be capable of handling the school's finances in order for it to grow. Participants must deliver papers demonstrating those talents or have a high reputation from a previous managerial job.* As mentioned in the study by Motsamai et al. (2011), head teachers in Lesotho must do financial management. According to the findings of this study, the head should have financial skills. This is consistent with the findings of Rangongo et al (2016). Papers are mentioned as proof for talents in P20. However, Horvat et al. (2019) and Mphutlane (2017) claim that school principals lack preliminary financial education.

The additional perceived benefits that participants should have are effects on the outcomes of students. A worthy competitor should be capable of influencing the school's performance. This concurs with the findings of Dhuey and Smith (2014). Twenty-one (21) of the 26 participants stated that the leader must influence the students' results in a good way. The following is a summary of my conversation with P22: *It should be someone who can improve the pupils' performance; we should also look at where he or she has done so in the past and ask for techniques to do so. I mean, the nominee should demonstrate where he or she has previously taught and created strong results, as well as the function she or he has played.* This implies that the recommendable individual should have the abilities and techniques that can lead to good performance and that he or she has previously used to achieve good results.

Administration skills are one of the acknowledged attributes of a candidate for a principal post. As in the case of Sebastian et al. (2019), who accentuate the importance of the school principal's administrative skills. My conversation with P14, a school board member who also noted that job candidates for school leadership should have administration abilities, ensued as follows: *We need someone with administrative experience to recommend as a school principal. There should be some documents confirming such abilities, or she or he must persuade us with a school he or she previously managed in this country. She or he must have an administration certificate or be in an administration role at his or her institution.* The interview utterance above, school board members require an applicant with administrative skills to suggest for the position of head of school. To be recommended as a principle, the participant must clearly produce paper; she or he must be from a managerial position.

Other Perceived Quality

The perceived eminences that have developed from the responses of the present study school board members. The principal must be disciplined in order to discipline students and instructors and uphold the code of good conduct. In the following interview, P19 discussed discipline: *We can only recommend someone we know and have observed how he or she behaves in the community. We have the ability to find out from folks who know him or her over the phone before the interview.* Based on the interview, the participants should be excellent citizens in the community. It is also obvious that the school board has the authority to conduct a telephone investigation into the participant.

Perceived Factor that Influences the Board Members Decisions

Another apparent aspect that leads the school board to suggest a person to the teaching service commission for approval as a principal is the outcome of an interview. That instance, the competitor with the best interview is suggested. Twenty-four (24) of the 26 participants agreed that the interview scores from the score sheets are the most commonly utilized to determine who should be recommended. To demonstrate this idea, consider the following interaction with P11: *The leadership test and the mean interview scores of all participants impact the final decision. Each question will be graded by more than two persons, and the participant with the highest mean score will be recommended.* The interview with P11 made it obvious that the leadership test and interview meaning scores play a significant part in making the final recommendation to the teaching service commission. Sezer and Engin (2021) collected data from principals in a focus group interview and discovered that the interview score should be included in the selection of the school administrator.

Almost all of the participants point to personal biases, such as a woman being unable to lead the school when a candidate is female, senior individuals being unable to lead the school in the right way, and young people lacking leadership experience. This finding matched the one described in the literature by Lunenburg (2010). The following was clarified in the exchange with P2: *We wanted a guy to run our school; I believe a man can help our school flourish since men can control instructors and motivate them to accomplish better.* On the same point, a personal bias was clear in P17's remark, which ensured: *We require a mature individual. Young people have little leadership experience. We require someone with capabilities in management.* The discussion with P17 personal biases was combined with the merits of an individual. This finding is concord with that of Nasreen (2019), who obtained data directly from the principal.

Premature decision, this is where the applicant is judged within that brief period of time in the interview. This observation is resonating with Lunenburg's (2010). The following is a summary of the researchers' conversation with P10: *We are mostly influenced by the fact that some of the participants will be struggling with the first question and we will become bored.* Allowing the respondent's early response is paired with applicant order, which refers to interviewing the best participant first and then a new weak one.

Other Perceived Factors

These are the perceived factors emerge from this investigation. Political affiliation, place of origin, and religion are among them. The first factor considered when endorsing a candidate for the principal position job is political affiliation. This was addressed by 20 of the 26 board members, who stated that a candidate for principal of public schools must be active in politics of a leading party. The following is an excerpt from our conversation with P1: *We also need youngsters from this constituency; how can we hire people from locations we don't know when our young people have the same qualifications as those from other places? We need to enhance this constituency because, as members of the main party, we vowed to provide jobs for the constituency's youth.* This political association was given a name by the researcher. This was done for political reasons. P1 and P12 agree that they need to improve the constituency youngsters, unlike other people who are going to enhance their houses, villages, and constituencies, not where they work.

The location of origin is another apparent aspect that stems from this study. This study's 24 out of 26 respondents indicate that the interviewee should be from the local community where the board members are familiar. P12 participants share the same sentiments with P15 that a candidate must be from the area because there are many unemployed children in their community and this will help develop their community. *We are impacted by an applicant's place of origin. We have unemployed children from the surrounding area. We also require a Christian.* Furthermore, religious beliefs appeared to be an influential

element, with 24 out of 26 participants mentioning it, as explained by P17. *We need a Christian, and we trust that if we choose a Christian to manage our school, our money and students will be in excellent hands. We need our children to grow up with strong religious ideals.*

Discussions

These are the attributes a candidate should have for the principal job, according to the study's findings, which overlap with those in the literature. For example, the interviewee should meet the job requirements, have solid financial management abilities and financial accountability, be able to affect student outcomes, have good communication skills, and administration skills. This study's conclusions are substantially compatible with those of Mampane (2015), Sezer (2016), and Sezer and Engin (2021); however, data for this study was derived through school board interviews. The quality of discipline and religion that has arisen from the participants in this investigation is unique to the current study. It is reasonable to conclude that a school administrator is responsible for instilling religious values and discipline in students. The study found that an applicant should be well disciplined in the community. According to the study, interviewees should present the papers as proof of their experience and to demonstrate their reputation from previous work. In this study, as stated by Motsamai et al. (2011), the school board members were aware of the schools' funds mismanagement as seen in the study. The similarity the current study shares with that of Dhuey and Smith (2014) is that, the principal should be able to influence the student's performance.

Personal biases, early decisions, and application order and interview scores are factors that arose in this study that are similar to those documented in the literature. This result closely resembles those of Lunenburg (2010). The participants' statements provided sufficient proof that a personal bias influenced school board decisions. Unlike Nasreen's (2019) study, which revealed that teachers are promoted to school leadership positions based on seniority, the current study discovered that in Lesotho public schools, the recommendation to become a principal is impacted by location of origin, political affiliation, and religion. These findings add to the existing body of knowledge. The lesson learned is that school board members utilize self-interest to suggest a candidate for principal to the commission. This finding supplements findings from other studies, such as Mampane (2015), who discovered that the principal's appointment is flawed when compared to the prescribed procedure.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The study was examined using the social constructivism theory, and it discovered more

perceived features and elements that affect school board members to propose a candidate for the school administration position. As a result, it is recommended that the school board interview be governed by the law and be common across the country. This would increase the likelihood of hiring the best applicant for the schools.

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