

Neoliberalism and the changing direction of schools: an edupreneurial leadership approach

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Abstract

Purpose – This qualitative study discusses the importance of effective leadership practices in connecting the macro-, meso-, and micro-contexts in which school leaders operate, considering the colonial and apartheid history of South Africa and the current era of neoliberal philosophies by exploring the degree to which school leaders in historically disadvantaged schools in Western Cape Province use an edupreneurial approach to steer their schools in new directions. The school leaders, especially in historically disadvantaged Colored schools, are expected to be more autonomous and accountable for making the school environment conducive to performance standards and improved learning results. The study uses an edupreneurial leadership approach as a theoretical lens to explore entrepreneurial agency, together with the educational leadership approach of school principals as a consequence of neoliberal policies.

Design/methodology/approach – This study focuses on secondary schools in historically Colored communities in Western Cape Province through semi-structured interviews with four purposively selected school principals and four teachers from four different schools in the Western Cape Province.

Findings – Education and training programs should focus on cultural values and practices to enhance the efficacy of these schools. Furthermore, an entrepreneurial mindset and spirit are aspects that can be encouraged in a culturally sensitive manner. The edupreneurial leadership approach in developing countries has a distinctive nature.

Originality/value – This study contributes to forging an understanding of how neoliberal trends influence school leadership practices in developing countries, especially the leadership work of school principals across public schools in the Western Cape Province in South Africa.

Keywords Apartheid, Colored people, Edupreneurial leadership, Leadership practices, New public management, Neoliberalism, School leadership, South Africa

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

This study shows that to facilitate effective leadership practices in schools, it is important to connect the macro-, meso-, and micro-contexts in which school leaders operate, particularly presenting how they take up their leading roles in dealing with change. Taking cognizance of the colonial and apartheid history of South Africa and the current era of neoliberal philosophies, this study aims to examine changes in leadership practices that could steer

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schools in new directions. Historically, from the seventeenth century in South Africa, European empires colonized many countries in Africa. Colonialism ended after 1945, typically also in the post-World War II years, when these European empires withdrew from colonized countries.

A few years after South Africa gained independence, the country was further encumbered by the political system of apartheid, a legislative framework of segregation based on race. The term *apartheid* “came to be used as a reference to the National Party system of government in South Africa, which lasted from 1948 until the ushering in of the constitutional dispensation in 1994” (Henrico and Fick, 2019, p. 1). The intention of the segregation policies was to protect and maintain the interests of the White minority at the expense of the Black majority in South Africa. Owing to national and international pressures, the apartheid regime ended in 1994 when the country became a democracy (Boughey, 2007). While the country implemented laws to evolve into a non-discriminatory society, it also had to keep up with the effects of neoliberal reforms, as was the case with the rest of the world. According to Maistry and Africa (2020), the issue of schools taking responsibility for their own financial sustainability has increasingly become the norm in South Africa. Ball (2003) notes that this is a characteristic of a neoliberal agenda that supports privatization over the welfare-state provisioning of public services such as education. Moreover, due to the historical political trajectory of South Africa, schools located in mostly affluent communities have remained mostly unaffected because of their adaptive ability to privatize. Conversely, schools in poor communities have struggled to come to terms with recent developments in South Africa (Du Plessis, 2020). Many former Model C schools (serving mostly children from White and to some extent Black African, Colored, and Indian middle-class families) remained highly functional, while poor schools (serving children from Black African, Colored, and Indian working-class families in rural and township areas) struggled against the odds. Neoliberal policies affect schools and how they operate, particularly schools in historically disadvantaged areas (Van Dyk and White, 2019). School leaders experience various challenges, especially regarding the functioning of the global rationalities of neoliberalism. This study assumes that school leaders need new and different skills because expectations from governments, communities, and other entities with educational interests have changed over recent years.

During the political transition from apartheid to democracy in South Africa, the government adopted new educational policies, specifically policies to accommodate poor communities (Van Dyk and White, 2019, p. 1). The South African Schools Act (SASA) (No. 84 of 1996) has made provision for two types of schools. The first are the independent schools that are responsible for their own complete financial management, and the second are public schools that receive varying degrees of governmental funding based on a poverty scale called the quintile ranking (Mestry and Bisschoff, 2009). Further legislation came into effect to redress past inequalities on a more equitable basis in education provision. The Amended National Norms and Standards for School Funding (ANNSF) (South Africa, 2012, p. 3) aimed to improve equity in the funding of education by categorizing each school into one of the five quintile categories. This ranking is based on the unemployment and literacy rates of the community in which the schools are located. A quintile 1 ranking indicates poor schools, whereas a quintile 5 ranking indicates affluent schools.

To alleviate the financial challenges experienced by many schools, the South African Government introduced two mechanisms: exemption from school fees and a no-fee-school policy (Van Dyk and White, 2019). The government’s noble intention was to ensure a better financial position for impoverished schools. No-fee schools include schools in Quintiles 1, 2, and 3. These schools received the largest allocations per learner and were not allowed to charge school fees from parents. Contrarily, Quintiles 4 and 5 schools (which receive less state funding than quintiles 1, 2, and 3 schools) have the freedom to determine school fees and undertake various initiatives to raise their own financial resources to enhance the quality of

education. Schools in these categories are forced to seek other avenues and undertake entrepreneurial ventures to generate private funding to support school operations that the government does not cater (Du Plessis, 2020). School principals face significant challenges and responsibilities in effectively leading their schools, including being entrepreneurial (Du Plessis, 2020). Owing to the changing nature of the educational setting in South Africa, many fee-paying schools that now serve low socioeconomic contexts often struggle to raise the required income through school fees and fundraising projects (Spaull, 2013).

According to Spaull (2013), this severely compromises schools' financial sustainability and everyday functionality. Maistry and Africa (2020, p. 2) note that "these schools often struggle to meet their budgetary financial requirements and appear to be in a constant cycle of financial crisis management," and unlike their wealthy counterparts, struggle to collect school fees, rarely attract business sponsorships, and, in most instances, find it difficult to add to their facilities, equipment, and resources, as indicated in policy documents. For years, these schools have served poor children from near and distant farming communities, but lately have also had to serve the children of foreign citizens in the province.

This study aims to provide an understanding of how historically disadvantaged schools in Colored communities operate under the recent reform policies, and investigate the extent to which school leaders display an edupreneurial function (if any) to lead schools in new directions during neoliberal times.

Neoliberalism, new public management, and school leadership

This section discusses neoliberal ideas, especially new public management (NPM), and how they are taken up in the educational sphere. The intention here is not to shift the focus to reporting on Westernized leadership practices but to rather conceptualize localized leadership practices in the Global South. Owing to the limitations of neoliberalism and NPM, decolonized theoretical pointers are offered as an alternative lens for perceiving leadership practices in developing countries to conceptualize a leadership model in neoliberal times that could add pedagogical value to schools.

Neoliberal ideas, especially NPM, are the consequence of governance and management reforms in organizations in the twenty-first century. These ideas are driven by a key neoliberal principle that states that human well-being is best ensured by encouraging private enterprises, individual responsibility, and competitive markets to outgrow and organize entrepreneurs' actions (Harvey, 2007). The NPM philosophy is especially concerned with making public organizations more effective and economically efficient. Another important premise is that the state should not play a central role in the economy (Maistry and Africa, 2020). The argument is that the state lacks the proficiency that markets have as it relates to the correction of imbalances and the optimal use of resources. Neoliberals argue that welfare states are bureaucratic, overspending monetary resources and overtaxing citizens unfairly to provide public services (Maistry and Africa, 2020).

Bleiklie (2018, p. 1) maintained that NPM is a reform model, claiming that "the quality and efficiency of civil services should be improved by introducing management techniques and practices drawn mainly from the private sector." Neo-liberalism is less concerned with the attainment of greater equality in organizations (as in the past decades); however, the main focus in organizations is currently on quality assurance and quality as an output (Dougherty and Natow, 2019). Following this philosophy, Connell *et al.* (2009, p. 334) mention that "each part of an organisation [should] function like a profit-making firm, with its managers held accountable for the income/expenditure balance." The implication is that organizations and individuals within the organization are held accountable in terms of competition and overall outputs, operating within the global economic rationality.

Samier (2020) claims that the influence of neoliberalism on education and leadership worldwide is well documented. Thus, the assumption is that we can no longer perceive events

in the domestic context without grasping, for example, the link between national and world economics. In this regard, [Ripsman and Paul \(2010\)](#) claimed that the World Bank and other multinational corporations are setting national education agendas, especially in the Third World, regardless of whether they are democratic. These global processes are influencing and changing the direction of schools. Therefore, there is a need to explore the outcomes of these international trends in public schools in South Africa, including education and leadership practices in the Western Cape Province. In the colonialization/decolonialization discourse, the link between imperialism and colonized knowledge and the empowering approaches of developing countries are relevant to the critique of globalized processes in education and leadership practices ([Nkoane and Dube, 2020](#)). Educational policies and leadership practices in South Africa need to be considered to protect their own interests against the Western interpretations of events.

Decolonial critiques reject dependence on Western viewpoints and systems of leadership, and suggest investigations into their own local contexts to devalue neocolonial intellectual dominance ([Amghar, 2022](#)).

Leadership in schools has been studied since the 1960s to trace the type of leadership that can respond to salient school conditions and contribute to positive results. It should be stressed here that the link between perspectives in school leadership and learner achievement has been well established, which, in fact, has been the situation for decades. [Bush and Sargsyan \(2020\)](#) described leadership as a process of influence based on strong values and beliefs that lead to a clear vision for the school. Leadership can be seen as interrelated behaviors and practices of school principals that influence the behavior of others to achieve organizational success ([Hallinger, 2003](#)). Previous research on leadership in schools has shown that successful school leaders draw on the same array of leadership practices that appear to be successful across countries ([Leithwood et al., 2020](#)). Research on leadership practices, particularly in developed countries, converges on the opinion that aspects of goal setting, organization restructuring, promotion of teachers' professional development, and management of the instructional program of the school can be seen as prominent leadership practices in which all leaders engage. [Marfan and Pascual \(2018\)](#) claim that this conceptual definition, stemming from first-world countries, could omit significant leadership practices in the developing world. International research interested in comprehending leadership practices in the developing world should consider the complex relationship between contextual aspects and school leadership, which may differ distinctively from Western practices.

This study focuses on a model that resonates with the changing contexts in which schools operate and sustain themselves. In the current complex and restrictive environments, "building coalitions with partners inside and outside the school as well as across several hierarchical levels", has become increasingly important ([Kemethofer et al., 2023](#)). Schools should be transformed into entrepreneurial schools ([Brauckmann-Sajkiewicz and Pashiardis, 2022](#)). [Brauckmann-Sajkiewicz and Pashiardis \(2022\)](#) developed the edupreneurial leadership approach, which aims to influence the internal school environment using a combination of entrepreneurial and pedagogical leadership styles to add pedagogical value to schools. The edupreneurial leadership approach is a combination of modern leadership approaches with a focus on entrepreneurial and pedagogical styles.

In the present times, school principals should meet pedagogical and learning outcome-oriented objectives by determining the resources for the required implementation of such practices ([Balasi et al., 2023](#)). To manage schools effectively and add pedagogical value, school leadership can engage in initiatives such as sponsorships, provision of additional services by teachers, and rental of school venues. The income generated from these initiatives can be used to effectively manage pedagogical resources such as additional teaching staff to achieve pedagogical objectives ([Brauckmann-Sajkiewicz and Pashiardis, 2022](#)).

This study aims to put forth an edupreneurial leadership approach in the context of historically disadvantaged Colored secondary schools in the Western Cape Province of South Africa to examine how principals in these schools function within neoliberal frameworks.

Edupreneurial leadership

In recent years, Brauckmann and Pashiardis developed the edupreneurial leadership style (Brauckmann and Pashiardis, 2011; Brauckmann-Sajkiewicz and Pashiardis, 2022; Pashiardis and Brauckmann, 2018). In the absence of substantial work done by other scholars on this leadership style, the work of Brauckmann-Sajkiewicz and Pashiardis is mostly used to explain the edupreneurial leadership approach.

Against the backdrop of neoliberalism, Pashiardis and Brauckmann (2018) argue that leaders around the globe are increasingly being expected to do more with less and do it (learner outcomes) better by aligning the inner and outer worlds of schools. The suggestion is that school leaders can lead more effectively through two key aspects of the Pashiardis–Brauckmann Holistic Leadership Framework, namely the entrepreneurial and pedagogical leadership styles (Pashiardis and Brauckmann, 2018). Furthermore, Pashiardis and Brauckmann (2018) claim that school leaders in the twenty-first century must exercise entrepreneurial leadership practices that encompass the involvement of external stakeholders in the daily activities of the school. Schools must operate in market-like environments. The focus of this approach was to gain more resources for schools to improve.

Balasi *et al.* (2023) note that although the theoretical grounding of entrepreneurial leadership stems from the business world, and it is worth noting that schools are not companies driven by the market but are instead subjected to NPM governance. Nowadays, leadership under the NPM principles of autonomy and accountability must enact the organizational mission of adjusting to changes in the internal and external environments to achieve overall pedagogical and learning outcomes. As schools become more autonomous, the participation of local stakeholders in making shared decisions become increasingly important. Schools and local communities are responsible for their choices, which subsequently influence learner outcomes.

Entrepreneurial leadership implies that school leaders should be more closely allied with stakeholders in areas close to the school. Another suggestion is that school leaders invest more in pedagogical leadership styles. This means that leaders must focus on defining and facilitating the achievement of educational objectives and supporting the internal organizational stability of schools (Pashiardis and Brauckmann, 2018). Brauckmann-Sajkiewicz and Pashiardis (2022) describe pedagogical leadership as school leaders' efforts to improve the teaching and learning processes of schools by encouraging conversations between teachers and themselves. In the realm of NPM, another expectation is to raise learning performance by encouraging innovation and experimentation in teaching methods.

According to Pashiardis and Brauckmann (2018), the two leadership styles discussed above assist school leaders in becoming edupreneurial leaders, forming the “new leadership cocktail mix.” This implies that new school leaders should strategically scan their surroundings and formulate, implement, and evaluate their actions tactically. As such, they should be sufficiently flexible to employ a range of leadership styles and utilize their hybrid leadership styles to align the inside and outside environments of the school and add pedagogical value.

Methodology

The main research question of the study was: How can an edupreneurial leadership approach foster added pedagogical value in historically disadvantaged Colored schools in the Western

Cape Province under the challenges and pressures of NPM policies within neoliberal frameworks?

Five schools in the Western Cape Province were purposively selected to serve the study purpose. At the beginning of the interviews, one of the schools opted out of the research. Three of the schools were Section 21 schools, categorized as Quintile 4 schools. The fourth school was a Section 20 school which is a no-fee school. The purpose was to acquire a sense of what entrepreneurial undertakings existed in these types of schools and how additional resources could contribute to the pedagogical value of the schools. The three Quintile 4 schools were ranked seemingly incorrectly and received fewer resources from the government. In this regard, [Van Dyk and White \(2019\)](#) suggested that an incorrect quintile ranking of schools causes great financial hardship at all levels in the affected schools.

The selected schools were all located in semi-urban and rural towns in the Western Cape Province. In addition, schools were situated within historically disadvantaged Colored communities. The term *Colored* used to describe a particular historically disadvantaged group of people in South Africa is not without controversy ([Jansen, 2019](#)). Nevertheless, the uniqueness of this group is reflected in South African historiography ([Adhikari, 2006](#)). Colored people in South Africa are regarded as “a mixed group whose racial background included European, Malay, Griqua, and other Khoisan descendants and imported slaves from other parts of Africa” ([McCormick, in Banda and Peck, 2016, p. 577](#)). A legacy of colonial and apartheid times in South Africa (*cf.* [Fataar, 1997](#)) is that a large percentage of Colored people can still be found at the margins of society.

Colored schools are still located in historically segregated areas, as was the case under the past laws of apartheid. After 1994, when South Africa became a democracy, most Colored schools in the Western Cape Province were still serving mostly Colored learners from Colored communities. The conditions of deprivation and neglect of Colored schools from previous political dispensation are still visible ([Fataar, 1997](#); [Lemon, 1999](#)), and these schools must deal with additional constraints in current neoliberal times.

Additionally, parents' involvement in historically disadvantaged communities takes a different form with different challenges ([Heystek, 2011](#)). The main challenge identified in the literature on schooling in historically disadvantaged communities in South Africa is parents' poor socioeconomic circumstances. Poor communities are less likely to provide for their families or support schools through their own private contributions, as is the case with schools in more affluent communities ([Baker, 2018](#)). This lack of funding has severely affects the delivery of quality education in these communities.

The interview sample comprised of eight participants; four were principals of the selected secondary schools and four were teachers in the respective schools. The participants had varying levels of experience and provided valuable information during the interviews. The interviewed principals were all above 50 years of age and possessed in-depth knowledge of managing schools during neoliberal times. Teachers voices were added to provide additional views and perceptions of the study phenomenon ([Nieuwenhuis, 2016](#)). Pseudonyms are used to safeguard participants' privacy.

The author relied on past contacts through personal and social networks to access selected principals and teacher participants. In addition, the targeted participants were expected to possess knowledge related to the financial operations of the schools so that they could share rich experiences to complete the interviews. Participants were assured that their responses would be handled with utmost confidentiality and that they could withdraw from the research at any time without any consequences ([Merriam, 2009](#)).

The same sequence of questions was followed in each interview, although different sub-questions were asked to elicit more detailed insights ([Amghar, 2022](#)) and offer room for more details as the interviews progressed. The interviews took between one and two hours each to complete.

It took several visits over nine months from the author's current province of residence in central South Africa to Western Cape Province to gather sufficient data to complete the empirical study.

Data analysis and ethical considerations

The collected data were analyzed using the model suggested by [Henning \(2004\)](#). Codes were assigned to different segments of meaning. A critical feature of deductive content analysis is that the researcher searches for a predetermined list of items in the theoretical framework and/or literature review ([Vears and Gillam, 2022](#)). Related codes were grouped and categorized, and three themes were discussed.

Rigor was ensured through in-depth semi-structured interviews with four school principals and four teachers with different levels of teaching experience in their respective schools. This was done to attain an in-depth understanding of the participants' perspectives and help uncover how entrepreneurial and pedagogical leadership actions can foster added pedagogical value in a historically disadvantaged context.

To confirm data validity, member-checking was performed and themes were discussed with the participants to verify whether the data corresponded with their lived experiences ([Nieuwenhuis, 2018](#)). Ethical approval was obtained from the University of the Free State (reference number: UFS-HSD2015/0503/21). Permission to conduct the research at the selected schools was obtained from the Western Cape Education Department. Informed consent was obtained from all the participants. Before commencing the interviews, a request was made to audio-record the interviews. Three participating principals declined the request, probably because of the sensitivity of the topic. Their request was to not be audio-recorded was accepted, which allowed them to respond honestly and openly to the questions ([Amghar, 2022](#)). Notes were taken during the interviews, and the participating principals' responses were captured immediately after the conversations. The remaining principal and teacher participants did not express any concerns regarding the recording of the interviews and were assured that the information they shared would be handled confidentially. Subsequently, the audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed.

Findings

The findings of this study are presented as three main themes that emerged from the interviews.

Supporting the idea of self-managing schools (as a feature of neoliberalism)

During the interviews, the participating principals discussed how they believed it was best to lead their schools successfully. They engaged in leadership strategies to strengthen the relationship between the school's internal and external environments.

Rylan Moses, an acting school principal mentioned:

For me, human relations must be transparent; otherwise, people will mistrust you. Since I started my term as a substitute principal here, I immediately allowed the SGB (school governing body) and the SMT (school management team) to meet so that they could build on their working relationship.

Ashton Williams, a newly appointed principal, indicated:

I believe schools must have a good image in the community. My vision for the school is that this school must be the first choice for parents. For me, as a leader, to succeed is to be transparent. If you receive money for the school, use it for that specific intended goal. That is where the community [is] starting to trust you.

One of the teachers, Janine Cunningham, reflected on the subject:

The principal must have a strong personality. He must be brave enough to persuade staff members to buy into his ideas to keep the school functional. Everybody must do something to add to the [planned fundraising] event to make it successful.

Additionally, the teacher indicated:

Our principal managed to acquire laptops for senior learners to use in the classroom. He looks for endless opportunities to address the needs of the school. He is business-minded, and with the support of the school management teams, comes up with great business plans.

Through the participants' responses, it is clear that schools are working towards achieving outcome-oriented education objectives in supporting the internal organizational stability of schools. The data show that the principals wanted to establish working relations between the SMT and SGB toward a strong foundation for building the idea of a self-managing school. These participants had an idea of how to develop their schools and take a changed direction in line with the reformed educational legislation. This notion is evident in Rylan Moses' response. The participating principals realized that they had to foster relations between the leadership and governance of schools, as a working relationship between the SMT and SGB was essential for making shared decisions in developing self-managing schools. Moreover, for schools to survive in current times, they must be the first choice of parents in local communities. Therefore, school leadership must establish local partnerships and trusting relations, and persuade different stakeholders to buy into initiatives to support the school. Within the NPM framework, the principals realized that they had to be accountable for the resources obtained from the local community. One of the selected principals demonstrated strong entrepreneurial feature/spirit, being creative and willing to take risks to achieve set goals for the school.

Current contextual factors at selected schools

Financial support. To survive in the current complex and financially restricted school environment, role players at schools need to be involved in quality entrepreneurial ventures to sustain the schools financially. Since education policy changes, particularly those related to the financial support of Sections 20 and 21 schools in South Africa, school leaders require new and different skills to support the daily operations of their schools. Demi Adonis, a senior teacher at one of the Section 21 (Quintile 4) schools, indicated that professionally, there was a lack of initiative from the school leadership to function under the changing educational policy frameworks.

In the interview, Demi Adonis responded to the question of how willing the role players were to support the school in a changing environment:

They want very much to support the school, but this does not happen in a conducive manner. This happens when a need arises and not in a continuously planned manner. No planning. Leaders are unwilling to learn. In particular, the leadership has stagnated in drawing up the school's budget. They stagnate on innovation; it is not a challenge but rather a liability. They do not have the confidence to start something new. Typically, they give up too easily.

Demi Adonis further pointed out:

The SGB does not have the new knowledge or skills to spend money. They have plenty of experience with the old system, but do not have the new skills needed to do the budget and take projects from the ground. Leadership does not want to reflect on projects and processes; they do not want to learn. They do not know what a process entails. They just want a quick end product; it does not work like this.

The school's leadership and governance were lacking the new skills to function effectively under the reformed policy. The participant shared her perception that the role players at her

school did not want to develop new skills and did not want to be challenged or take risks to steer the school in new directions. Under these conditions, they were compelled to lead school through constant crises. As is evident in the aforementioned responses, instead of being innovative and taking risks, schools struggled with financial crisis management. In the case of this school, there were few traces of added pedagogical value.

Peter Abrahams, the participating principal from the Section 20 school, remarked:

Yes, the SGB determines schools' needs. The SGB and the Education Department manage the schools' finances. The school relies on external stakeholders for cultural and sports activities. Bus companies usually donate money for extra activities that the Education Department does not cater for. The Education Office is funding the school, and, in my opinion, they are just managing the school from their side.

This participant commented on the constraints that Section 20 (no-fee) schools were dealing with. The government supported no-fee schools; however, they believed that their autonomy was compromised. In contrast, Section 21 schools were confronted with multiple issues caused by government cuts and poor communities that could not support them financially, as expected from the government.

Fees. Financial allocations to schools under the subsidized government model have financial implications. In the context of South African public schools, Rylan Moses noted:

There are two types of public schools:—, the Section 20 schools (the no-fee schools), and the Section 21 schools. The no-fee schools are fully subsidized by the government and are Quintile 1-3 schools. Our school is in Quintile 4. Our school is supposedly affluent but is located in a poor area. We receive R770 per learner annually, whereas a quintile 3 school receives R1530 per learner annually.

The school wants to apply to become a quintile 3 school so that the subsidizing model can be changed. This is because financial allocations differ. Approximately 500 learners applied for a release from school fees. In October, the government reimburses the schools annually. For the remaining 1000 learners, 30% to 40% of learners/parents will then pay the school fees.

Janine Cunningham narrated the following on how the financial changes affected the school:

Schools cannot cope with all of their financial responsibilities, especially for parents who cannot pay school fees. For example, our school does not even have printing paper. The principal was compelled to ask parents to send at least one pack of paper to school.

Quintile 4 and 5 schools have the freedom to determine school fees and undertake various initiatives to raise their financial resources (*cf.* Du Plessis, 2020). However, owing to the changing nature of the South African educational setting, most fee-paying schools struggle to raise the necessary income to meet their budgetary requirements (*cf.* Spaul, 2013). Considering the socioeconomic circumstances of most families in historically disadvantaged communities, parents cannot contribute financially to the school, as indicated by the policies. Parents decide on their own how to support their children's schools. As seen in the above excerpt, parents are willing to support the school in ways that make sense to them. This confirms the importance of family and community relationships in these contexts.

Entrepreneurial opportunities, partnerships, and constraints. For some principals, undertaking entrepreneurial ventures is an opportunity that they are keen to engage in, while others regard it as a constant challenge. Rylan Moses indicated the following regarding the school context and how he was able to undertake various entrepreneurial ventures to build the school:

The school took over the school kiosk from privatization and currently makes a profit of R40,000 per term. The school has its donors and supporters. Local businesses support sports and cultural activities annually. My personal contribution is to the yearly rugby barbeque, since I was the sports coordinator of this school.

The school hostel brings money by renting out the hall for functions and private rental rooms. New legislation provides more power and responsibilities to the SGB. The control is more in the hands of the parents.

This participant had developed entrepreneurial attributes since he had been a sports coordinator at the school for years. The capabilities that he had accumulated supported and enhanced sports activities. Since he was acting as principal, he was using those capabilities to build the school. On the one hand, the participant was successful in his entrepreneurial ventures, but on the other hand, the school was struggling to stabilize the internal organizational structures.

To transform schools into self-managing schools, school leaders must facilitate the attainment of educational objectives by reaching out to external partnerships. Here is the gap between the policy intention and how reality is playing out at Colored schools in the Western Cape. Because of being located in poor communities, in many cases, schools are wrongly categorized in the quintile system, and are unable to sustain themselves financially.

With regard to educational or pedagogical issues at the school, Rylan Moses indicated:

The biggest problems are that the school is overcrowded and that it experiences drug and gangsterism. The demographics of the school has changed. Many immigrant children are attending the school. This school is gradually becoming a double-medium school (Afrikaans and English). I dream that the school has just 800 learners, not 1600.

Another issue that emerged was the changing context in which schools operated. With changing demographics of the learners, additional problems were surfacing in schools. Drug- and gangster-related issues place greater pressure on the internal stabilization of schools. The aforementioned participant believed that a decrease in school numbers could make the school more manageable.

Janine Cunningham commented on the school's internal stability:

The school discipline is not good. The principal allows the district head to tell him what to do. He can lead the school more successfully if he demonstrates the same entrepreneurial mindset to the discipline matters of the school.

In the NPM discourse, as schools become more autonomous and responsibilities are shared with local communities, schools are required to meet their diverse organizational needs; therefore, school leadership becomes increasingly accountable to their stakeholders (*cf.* [Bush, 2020](#)). Schools have become more responsible and accountable for school development and learner achievement.

Participants outlined the context of their schools. The schools seemed to struggle to keep up with contemporary challenges, mainly related to financial school allocations and constraints. While some schools have the capacity to manage their budgets, others find it difficult to survive financially. In addition to the aforementioned financial difficulties, school principals were struggling with the ill-discipline of learners and could not demonstrate the same entrepreneurial undertakings to manage learner behavior in their schools.

The neoliberal discourse does not align with the context and functions of historically disadvantaged schools. [Barry et al. \(1996\)](#) maintain that the move to empower civil society reflects the neoliberal trend that seeks to "autonomize" the public school system from the government by promoting self-governance to shift the burden of public schooling to newly "entrepreneurial," "self-managing," and "efficient" schools.

It is clear from what the participants shared that schools need more financial support from the government. As expected, the quintile system did not serve them as expected. Additionally, the school community could not support the school, as expected from the perspective of the NPM discourse. The community did not have the means to support the school financially, as was the case with the more affluent schools. The upkeep, finances, and

governance of these local schools were a constant struggle. Historically, disadvantaged schools have been unable to form partnerships (as foreseen by policies) or engage meaningfully in managerial structures from which to benefit. The aspects of exercising entrepreneurship and obtaining resources at historically disadvantaged schools in the Western Cape Province are linked to crisis management and do not yet raise additional pedagogical value for the school. [Amghar \(2022\)](#) claims that neoliberal processes require historically disadvantaged schools to survive with their scarce resources, which results in persistent structural deficiencies in schools.

The need for schools to change

For schools to do better, participants suggested that schools need to change. Rylan Moses noted:

As the principal, I tell [the staff] that I believe in them. The SGB, SMT, and the staff must change. For instance, they must keep track of technological advancements in order to keep everything in place.

Demi Adonis indicated that schools must work towards solidarity:

There must be cohesion – workers, learners, and teachers – between those who lead and those who receive it. Leadership must give access, space, and directives [be] clear in their vision and mission and according to the needs of the schools, but no, they [are] stuck, they are standing still.

Ashton Williams commented:

The staff must be experts on what they are doing. Specifically, new ones must be built on their expertise.

Megan Pretorius, a teacher participant, shared the following:

The principal must maintain better human relationships. He must be fair in his actions; otherwise, he loses the support of his staff.

Demi Adonis also emphasized caring relationships and commented on what the school was doing:

Our humaneness, the effort that the school displays when a learner is absent, to go and pick the learner up at home. Caring for and compassion are values that are important to us.

It is clear from participants' responses that schools need to change. This could involve changing the school form, upskilling and reskilling managerial competencies, decreasing the number of learners at school, engaging more in information and communication technology (ICT), or giving more directives to lead schools. Trusting relationships among all parties in schools are valued. This includes relationships between the school principal and all role players, as well as between teachers, learners, and non-teaching staff. In line with the findings of this study, [Samier \(2020\)](#) provides a broad conception of leadership rooted in sociocultural values such as consultation, solidarity, trust, and collaboration to steer schools in new directions. Exercising these values has the potential to improve the performance of leaders and teachers in schools in the developing world, which can consequently result in learner achievement.

Discussion

Edupreneurial leadership values entrepreneurial behavior and strongly emphasizes the educational stability of schools. Leaders in schools need continuous training to manage schools effectively; however, most school leaders find it difficult to embrace the entrepreneurial function assigned to them under neoliberal pressures, and have to deal with new managerial demands and do what is expected of them. However, the historically

disadvantaged environments in which they manage schools are not conducive to importing private or business practices. In many cases, historically disadvantaged schools do not have the skills, capacities, resources, finances, or partnerships that affluent schools have to function in market-like conditions. These schools are underfunded and neglected by the government, and school leaders have to deal with unrealistic expectations from the government, parents, and community at large. This is evident in how the government supports schools in historically disadvantaged communities and in the types of partnerships confronting those schools.

One of the participating principals believed that if he could improve the image of his school, he would be able to foster trusting relationships both inside and outside the school. Another participant strongly believed that school leadership should have financial and business sense to make the school financially accountable for securing leadership success. [Brauckmann-Sajkiewicz and Pashiardis \(2022\)](#) write that the training and professional development of principals at schools could be “reconceptualised and rearranged” so that professional development programs can respond to entrepreneurial leadership facets. Where there is evidence of strong traces of business-oriented school principals, schools can benefit from these initiatives to balance the tight budgets they are forced to accept.

However, this study shows that even if a principal is able to follow an entrepreneurial approach, the educational capacity to strengthen the internal organizational structures of the school are not guaranteed to be enhanced. Sociopolitical factors (demographics of the population) can also exert additional pressure on school operations, and may cause disciplinary problems due to the existing weight of overcrowded schools. In this regard, [Brauckmann-Sajkiewicz and Pashiardis \(2022\)](#) proclaim that it cannot be disregarded that the commitment to entrepreneurial leadership may lead to a change in other areas of leadership practices. In other words, the generation of financial and other resources does not guarantee that added pedagogical value will be realized. This finding is especially true in the context of historically disadvantaged schools in the Western Cape Province.

As mentioned by another participating principal, the school took over the kiosk from outsourcing. Contrary to the reform policy directives on how schools will benefit from importing private or business practices, the school had to counteract these ideas to benefit more. By taking control of the school kiosk, the school gained more funds to supplement its limited government allocation. Schools react to conditions that inform their distinctive needs.

Concerning entrepreneurship in schools, school leaders rely on parents and the community, such as counting on smaller contributions (e.g. printing paper and gardening services) to supplement the school’s limited resources. The Department of Education should negotiate with larger sponsors and investments for these schools.

The findings show that while some participating schools embraced an entrepreneurial spirit to exploit entrepreneurial ventures, others found it difficult to operate under the reformed policies of neoliberalism. In the case of no-fee schools, to supplement the allocations of the government supporting them financially, they also found the need to raise funds through smaller and larger fundraising projects throughout the year when they fell short of balancing their expenses.

With changes in educational policy frameworks, it has been found that school leaders lack the necessary skills to support school functioning. In some instances, it seems that school leaders have no budget or project management competencies. One teacher participant mentioned that they were not willing to learn new skills and lacked innovation. Considering the political history of these schools, the current circumstances further contribute to the fact that school leaders are constantly engaged in managing financial crises.

Educational issues related to the changing demographics of the learner population, drug- and gang-related problems, disciplinary matters, and inaccurate ranking within the national quintile system are challenges faced by school leaders. In addition, schools are unable to form

partnerships to engage with leader- and managerial structures that are more profitable than foreseen by policymakers.

Conclusion

New types of accountability, control of various school aspects, and managerial tasks are demands that school leaders and management teams in historically disadvantaged environments may not easily meet. It is suggested that the Education Department take a more active role in obtaining resources and partnerships from larger sponsors and other departments to secure the resources needed to support historically disadvantaged schools. Continuous training to support school leaders in their educational functions must be monitored and evaluated to respond effectively to school needs.

Implications and recommendations of the study

In neoliberal times, and in the context of historically disadvantaged communities, leadership practices demonstrate that such communities face distinctive challenges. The fact that many schools in these areas are ranked incorrectly in the national quintile system creates further problems. Correcting these classifications requires the state to dig deeper into its coffers. State provisions and the school quintile model require a critical review considering the original criteria set by the state and new developments in the changing demographics of schools, alluding to the socioeconomic backgrounds of families in the community. Neoliberal rationalities affecting schooling in developing countries harbor the danger of sparking neocolonialism because of predominantly global regulatory issues. Developing countries need to display critical awareness of education and educational practices to steer schools in a direction that serves their own interests and those of their people.

Furthermore, it is important for the Education Department to incorporate cultural leadership courses in combination with concomitant pedagogical content to prepare principals and teachers for new tasks. Contextual factors, such as local culture and educational policies that align with the distinctive nature of the people and their circumstances in these places, must influence leadership practices. For instance, the example of the school that took over the school kiosk for increased financial benefits. Schools in these contexts rely more on smaller contributions from parents and stakeholders in areas close to the schools. Research should contribute to identifying leadership practices in the context of historically disadvantaged communities that add to the understanding of what kind of leadership is more effective for each school. Presently, it has become increasingly important to build coalitions with partners inside and outside schools to assist with new challenges that schools must deal with.

Further qualitative and interpretive research on the distinctive leadership practices in developing countries that influence principals' professional actions is required. Further research on different scales (school, provincial, and national) sharing similar contextual factors and exhibiting the same school leadership patterns should be explored.

The embeddedness of these schools in their contexts must be acknowledged and valued, particularly in terms of leadership practices that respond to these contexts. Identifying and documenting leadership practices (incorporating edupreneurial leadership approaches that could add pedagogical value) that are most effective in these school contexts could add to accounts that the world's periphery has explanatory power for understanding our changing world.

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