

Evaluating the Need for Competency-based Training Initiatives: To Increase Self-efficacy and Leadership Skills among Middle Managers in Jamaican Public Schools

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Abstract

The study seeks to explore the concepts of self-efficacy, competency-based training and leadership as they relate to middle managers in Jamaican public schools. The overall purpose of this research is to encourage research centred around garnering the perspectives of key stakeholders of education. The research seeks to ascertain whether or not purposeful competency-based training programmes are required for current and prospective middle managers, to increase their levels of self-efficacy and leadership skillsets to perform optimally in their roles. Many studies have purported that leadership in primary and secondary schools in Jamaica is an area which requires much focus and intervention for the desired outcomes to be realized. Priority needs to be placed on leaders building on their repertoire of competencies and self-efficacy so they can be better at what they do. In so doing they will be stronger as leaders and better equipped to lead and ascend to higher levels. The researcher seeks to collect the viewpoints of administrators, middle managers and classroom teachers in Jamaican public schools; using a structured and quantitative research approach, specifically employing a survey method. The research seeks to examine the areas of concern identified and provide support structures and much-needed information about addressing training and competency needs. The research also aims to encourage further research in this area. In so doing, greater awareness will be brought about regarding self-efficacy, competency-based training and leadership of middle managers in public schools in Jamaica.

Keywords: *Competency-based Training, Jamaican Public Schools, Leadership, Middle Managers, Self-efficacy*

Introduction

Albert Bandura introduced Social Learning and is seen as the most comprehensive theorist and researcher of social learning. Social Learning Theory explains that individuals learn new behaviours through observing others rather than through direct experience. In 1986, the social learning theory was changed by Bandura to the Social Cognitive Theory to accurately

reflect both learning and cognition [4]. This change was proposed by Bandura to better transition and account for a more comprehensive understanding of how individuals learn and behave. Social Cognitive Theory has been predominant in adult learning and human resource development; and is considered to be a dynamic interplay between an individual, the environment and behaviour

[8]. The components of Bandura's theory, Social Cognitive Theory, have been explored by many and have also been subjected to extensive research over the years. Bandura in his later work, after much research, sought to focus on the concept of self-efficacy [8]. With this new and insightful concept, other researchers have sought to also define and explore the new and enlightening concept of self-efficacy. All in all, the definitions and interpretations of the concept are similar. They can be classified as being similar as they revolve around the same core idea. Self-efficacy as defined by Bandura, is an individual's judgement of their capabilities not only to organize thought processes but also to execute courses of actions required to attain designated types of performance [2]. An Individual's perception of self-efficacy, meaning how competent they believe they are likely to be in a given situation; influences the effectiveness of their interactions with their environment and with others. Self-efficacy as defined by Cherian is a function of self-belief, thought patterns and emotional reactions of an individual's perception of their ability to achieve a goal [5]. The concept of self-efficacy is associated with the confidence a person reflects, their beliefs, and the impacts of such beliefs on an individual's subsequent actions. It is asserted that self-efficacy has a role as a causal variable in performance and achievement [1]. It is proposed that high achievers are usually individuals with high self-efficacy, having the belief that they can perform tasks well. On the other hand, low self-efficacy is manifested in individuals having doubts in their capabilities; which can have a negative impact on task completion and accomplishment.

Even though much research has been done in education in the area of social cognitive theory, the concept of self-efficacy is relatively new and is considered to be underexplored [1]. Self-

efficacy is still in its infancy, even though its prominence is growing in leadership and professional development [1]. Self-efficacy is used to predict behavioural outcomes in many instances and its use is seen especially in the areas of Psychology, Education and leadership. The concept of self-efficacy is considered to be a good measurement as well as an effective way to predict behavioural outcomes when compared to other motivational constructs [3]. This concept holds many prospects and research in this area can lead to meaningful change across sectors. The importance of self-efficacy on leadership levels and development should not be underestimated. Self-efficacy has been credited as a useful concept in assessing how one is likely to perform in key areas. The psychological state of self-efficacy directly promotes effective leader engagement, flexibility and adaptability [9]. As such it requires in-depth research to further explore its effectiveness and application to middle leaders in Jamaican schools.

Exploration of this very important concept can bring about much understanding and application to varying situations. Self-efficacy belief affects how much effort individuals expend, how long they will persist in the face of difficulties, their resilience in dealing with failure and the stress they experience in coping with demanding situations [11]. Now more than ever, individuals in leadership need to be persistent in navigating difficult situations. The importance of self-efficacy on leadership levels and development should not be underestimated. The psychological state of self-efficacy directly promotes effective leader engagement, flexibility and adaptability [9]. Promoting increased self-efficacy is warranted in developing leaders to yield great results. Greater self-efficacy leads to greater effort and persistence, which leads to greater performance, which in turn leads to greater efficacy [11]. Persisting effectively amidst the

varying challenges is what effective leadership calls for. Consequently, high self-efficacy is thus needed among this leadership group. This will give them the willingness to approach and persist on tasks, selection of tasks and situations, focus on problem-solving strategies, reduce fear and anxiety, have positive emotional experiences and have a positive effect on achievement outcomes [11]. Leaders should be persistent in their leadership roles and endeavours; showing perseverance in every situation, not giving up, but rather working consistently to achieve favourable outcomes at all times.

Human Resource

Middle managers are strategic leaders in organizations, holding the organizations and employees to standards that will support thriving teams and excellent results. Ref. [18] states that the most important element in changing an organization is having the right people on the leadership team. The need for greater self-efficacy is essential in combating the many challenges that may arise in leadership and many middle leaders find it difficult to cope with the challenges that arise. Helping middle managers develop strong efficacy beliefs early in their careers will pay lasting dividends [11]. The dynamic nature of schools calls for human resources who are well-skilled, adaptable and who are continuously developing themselves. Ref. [20] asserts that human resource development is the process of increasing the knowledge, skills and capacities of all people in a society. The development of human resources helps people to lead fuller and richer lives. The process of human resource development unlocks the door to modernization. To guarantee commitment to the intensive transformation of the education system and structures; the human resources chosen must be the best. Effective organizations depend exclusively on the

expertise, commitment and service of their greatest resource which is their people [11]. Leaders must be chosen and prepared well, because of the multiplicity and variedness of the roles they occupy and the duties they perform. Leadership does not exist without people; people define, honour or abhor it [12]. Leaders are considered the most precious of all the resources in an organization.

The field of education needs to have a middle leadership core that has high self-efficacy. Leaders with high self-efficacy usually believe that they can have a positive effect thus causing an increase in the effectiveness of the organization in which they serve [11]. This is likely to positively affect the workforce. Organizations need leaders who believe in their work and efforts [16]. When this is so, leaders have greater job satisfaction which leads to positive energy to achieve the organization's goals and objectives. The stronger individuals believe in their capabilities, the greater and more persistent their efforts [11]. Having such a sound belief, such leaders will be able to empower others to feel the same and produce at increased levels as well.

Self-efficacy is an important motivational factor that influences a wide plethora of behavioural and performance outcomes. Self-efficacy is associated with work-related performance such as productivity, coping with difficult tasks, career choice, learning, achievement and adaptability [11]. Self-efficacy is deemed important in the performance of job functions. Self-efficacy beliefs contribute to motivation by determining the goals that middle managers will set for themselves, how much effort they expend, how long they persevere in the face of difficult situations as well as their resilience in the future as well as to failure [11]. Every obstacle overcome and goal achieved by educators equips them to be more efficacious and propels

them to continue on the trajectory of continuous growth and development. In so doing, leaders are thus enabled to achieve the vastness of their truest potential. When people are motivated and inspired, they not only enjoy their work more, they are more creative and productive [16]. Leaders must be able to believe that they contribute to an important cause.

Training/Professional Development

It is critical that leaders at the middle management level not only be named in a role but possess the required skill sets for excellence. The creation of vigorous and substantive leadership development will lead to the coming together of both authority and classroom credibility to the service of results [14]. Persons who have the same skills but different levels of personal efficacy, combine and sequence their skills in a changing context differently. This is likely to affect how they perform at different levels because of how they use them [11]. This solidifies the projection that complementing skills and self-efficacy is crucial to leadership development and success. If managers lack self-efficacy their capabilities are diminished [10]. Many other researchers have shared findings on the effects such levels can have on leadership effectiveness. Such individuals tend to avoid tasks and situations that exceed their capabilities; they seek activities they judge they are capable of handling effectively [11]. This may mean that leaders with low self-efficacy, may avoid addressing certain situations they are not confident in handling. Such actions can have crippling effects on overall leadership and organizational success. Leadership must have the desire and the belief that better can be done and achieved. Leadership begins with how a person thinks. Self-belief is critical to the journey of leadership. A person's belief system determines their philosophy of life. An individual's thinking can be their escalator or

de-escalator. Many persons in organizations seeking to lead or those who may be in leadership positions may have limiting beliefs. Limiting belief can bring about negative belief in one's abilities. According to [16] limiting belief can put a ceiling on one's success and can also keep expectations low. This can also have negative effects on the organizations they lead. Ref. [19] states that there are growing concerns about whether teachers have the requisite knowledge and skills to adapt to the demands of the profession and its emerging trends. There is a genuine need for intensive efforts relating to leadership competency-based training development, for educators to meet the needs of an ever-changing educational landscape than ever before. Experimental studies have consistently found that changing self-efficacy beliefs can lead to better use of cognitive strategies and higher levels of achievement [11]. Leaders can be trained and developed to achieve greater results however, it requires decisive and collaborative planning and action. Education needs to come into alignment with the wider world and keep abreast of the changes as they occur. Bridging the gap in any organization requires focus and deliberate efforts; as when performance is subpar it is likely a result of inexperience, unclear expectations or a skill gap [16]. As education moves forward policy makers and educators must carry with them the understanding that with vision, commitment and persistence they can collectively move education to a much higher level by equipping and evolving leaders effectively.

More often than not, educators are not asked for their input into educational reforms and high-level policies; instead, such advice is directly sought from business leaders and think-tank researchers. Educators are often defined as a major part of the problem; rather than professionals qualified to offer solutions [7]. Educators are major stakeholders in education

making great shifts and turns in the system. It must not be only noted but also demonstrated that educators are considered experts with valuable opinions about education policy [7]. Educators can have a powerful and valuable impact in creating meaningful change in the education sector at the policy level. As such, the space must be provided for them to be integral in the process.

Many studies have purported that effective leadership is considered paramount to school success, and where it is lacking the necessary support needs to be provided to improve same. Leadership is important in developing effective and innovative schools and in facilitating quality teaching and learning [6]. Leadership is an area which requires much focus and intervention to realize the desired outcomes for all. To increase the level of leadership in any organization it is imperative to raise leaders' ability levels [15]. Leadership development has been purported by many studies as not a simple fix. Researchers have contended that leadership is a complicated and challenging role [13]. It is important to take a collaborative approach to addressing the gaps. True leaders are barrier breakers; they do not think of limitations. They seek to find ways to solve issues and as such they should be provided with the right foundation to unleash and create positive change in any given situation. Effective leadership does not occur by fate or by accident. Organizations, such as schools, often attempt to select individuals with traits and skills associated with effective leadership and subsequently try to provide much-needed professional development activities for further growth [11]. This approach by itself may not be wholesome or the best approach to be taken in promoting middle managers to lead effectively in schools. It is important to note that at one time, middle leaders were chosen based on their years of experience as a class teacher. However, the tide has changed, as an employee's richness

of capabilities does not necessarily lie in the years of their experiences but rather in the quality of their circumstances [12]. Leaders can achieve more when their quality of circumstances change for the better. Recent studies purport that age, experience and levels of qualification, though they may be important variables, must never be assumed to be equated with effective leadership [12]. It must be noted that effective leadership is multifaceted and requires much. Leaders and those who desire to lead must consistently find ways to redefine their space and reinvent themselves [12]. This is needed more so than ever before if leaders are to remain relevant in such a rapidly changing tide. Middle leaders must remain lifelong learners to boost their productivity. Leaders need to prioritise building on their repertoire of competencies so that they can be better at what they do [12]. The focus must always be on how to improve themselves; as in so doing they will not only be stronger as leaders but also be better equipped to lead as well as to ascend to higher levels.

A major key in developing highly self-efficacious leaders is assessing where they are versus where they should be. Organizations should incorporate leadership and self-efficacy assessment into the leadership selection process as leadership and self-efficacy skills can be represented on a scale [17]. Nothing is corrected or advanced without leadership. The world needs and values effective leaders. Nothing happens, changes or enhances without leadership. Leaders who know themselves more, give more effective support to their followers. Ref. [16] asserts that the biggest breakthroughs and personal transformations are for leaders doing the work to know themselves more. In so doing they will be better able to know their strengths and weaknesses and will be equally able to work on their limitations. True leadership begins with self-discovery. Self-discovery is a process of gaining

knowledge and understanding of your feelings, character and abilities. Research has shown that assessing leaders' self-efficacy should not only be done at the organizational level but also be executed by the leaders themselves as well. It should be that individual educators be active agents, in consciously and consistently assessing their strengths and weaknesses. This will thus enable them to assume leadership positions based on their self-efficacy, mindset, capabilities and experiences and be willing to work on any identified weaknesses [11]. Identifying additional skill sets, knowledge and experience needed for middle leaders to realize their dreams and maximise their potential is likely to yield positive results; not only for themselves but for the organization as well.

Materials and Methods

The data for the study was garnered using the survey approach through an online questionnaire instrument, completed by educators; administrators, middle managers and classroom teachers, in public schools across the 7 educational regions in Jamaica. Criteria for inclusion in the study were based on informed consent given by the participants, being employed with the Ministry of Education in their respective roles, for at least one year and being remunerated as such. The participants who did not match the requirements were excluded from the study. The study utilized the stratified sampling technique with a randomized approach. The researcher made significant efforts to increase the sample size by extending the time given so as to acquire additional responders to the questionnaire. The group consists of a total of one hundred sixty (160) responders. Sixty-two (62) being principals, fifty-four (54) being middle managers and forty-four (44) being classroom teachers. The vice principals and middle managers were combined to form the middle managers' grouping. SPSS was the main tool

for statistical analysis and data management used to analyze the data and provide meaningful conclusions. The use of mean, median, and mode (descriptive statistics) and inferential statistics were the main methods incorporated in the analysis. Graphs and tables were used to present and assist with the interpretation of the findings.

Results

The research sought to examine the participants' perspectives on three core questions. The researcher sought to examine the strongly agree and agree responses. As such these levels were combined to form an overall agreement statement. This proved very helpful in providing a general understanding of the perspectives of the responders in analyzing the data sets and identifying possible trends and patterns. The analysis of the survey responses highlighted variations among the respondents and showed variance in the participants' perceptions across the different questions.

Question # 1

Question 1 examined whether *"Aspiring middle managers should be formally trained by the Ministry of Education or its affiliated agency/ies in leadership, using a competency-based approach."* The data garnered shows that all categories of participants believed that competency-based leadership programmes are needed for aspiring middle managers. The majority of principals, 80.0% to be exact, gave their perspectives as strongly agree and agree (12% and 68% respectively). Similarly, 80% of middle managers gave their perspectives as strongly agree and agree as well; with a breakdown of 36% and 44% respectively. Class teachers had the lowest combined agree and strongly agree percentage of 68.20%, their perspectives when divided as strongly agree and agree showed 36.40% and 31.80% respectively.

See Table 1 and Figure 1.

Table 1. Aspiring Middle Leaders should be Formally Trained using a Competency Approach to Take on Leadership

Levels	Participants		
	Principals	Middle Managers	Classroom Teachers
Agree	12%	36%	36.40%
Strongly Agree	68%	44%	31.80%
Neutral/Uncertain	8%	12%	4.50%
Disagree	8%	8%	13.60%
Strongly Disagree	4%	0%	13.60%
Total	100%	100%	100%

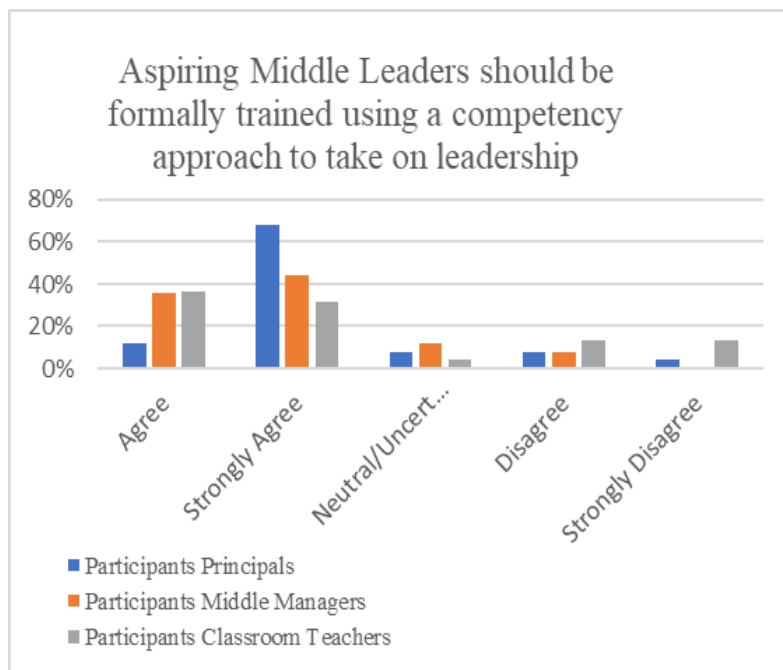


Figure 1. Aspiring Middle Leaders should be Formally Trained using a Competency Approach to Take on Leadership

Additionally, it is interesting to note that of all three questions, classroom teachers had their highest overall average as it relates to this question. This question is one that when dissected, directly affects classroom teachers; as they serve from this level and the questions relate to them directly. As aspiring middle leaders would be selected from this very cohort of educators. It would therefore suggest that the average speaks of the level of interest in middle leadership development among this group. Further exploration of the factors contributing to this positive perception could inform future

initiatives or strategies for future leadership training and development.

Question 1 had a mean score of the agree and strongly agree levels of all participants being 76.07%, suggesting that respondents rated it favourably. Of the 3 questions examined it had the lowest standard deviation of 5.56%, indicating the least variability in the responses compared to the other research questions. While Question 1 received the second-highest mean score, its low standard deviation indicates that the responses of the participants did not vary widely. This suggests that the participants may have very close and similar perspectives to

this question. Such an analysis is, therefore, a strong indicator that expresses the opinions of all the responders collectively in support of aspiring middle managers to be formally trained by the Ministry of Education or its affiliated agency/ies in leadership, using a competency-based approach.

Question # 2

Question 2 sought to examine whether “Compulsory competency-based leadership programmes should be made available by the

Ministry of Education.” The data garnered shows that all categories of the participants agree with this statement. The data reveal that 80% of principals gave their perspectives as strongly agree and agree (28% and 52% respectively). 84% of middle managers gave their perspectives as strongly agree and agree (32% and 52% respectively). 54.60% of classroom teachers gave their perspectives as strongly agree and agree (27.3% and 27.30% respectively). See Table 2 and Figure 2.

Table 2. Take Full Responsibility for Leadership Training and Development

Levels	Participants		
	Principals	Middle Managers	Classroom Teachers
Agree	8%	40%	27.30%
Strongly Agree	84%	44%	27.30%
Neutral/Uncertain	0%	12%	22.70%
Disagree	0%	4%	4.50%
Strongly Disagree	8%	0%	18.20%
Total	100%	100%	100%



Figure 2. Take Full Responsibility for Leadership Training and Development

Question 2 had a standard deviation of 13.2%, suggesting that some amount of

variability exists in the responses. When compared to the other questions, the variability

is less than Question 3. and more than that of Question 1. The responders of the cohort groups both individually and collectively responded greater than 50% that they take full responsibility for their leadership training and development. This is thus indicative of the sense of responsibility that educators believe that the Ministry of Education owes educators in terms of them providing Compulsory competency-based leadership programmes. Notwithstanding this shared sense of belief, they equal belief that they need to take responsibility for their own leadership development. Purposeful competency-based programmes are warranted from a policy level and should also be delivered from such a front based on guided standards.

Middle managers had the highest combined average among the participants as to the need for “Compulsory competency-based leadership programmes being made available by the Ministry of Education”. Interestingly to note, that even though they opine that they believe in their leadership development at a combined percentage of 80%, they also asserted at a combined percentage of 84% that such training opportunities should be provided by the Ministry of Education or its affiliated agency/ies. Looking closer at question 2

variability is suggestive of the variedness of the participants’ responses. Further exploration as to why middle leaders lead in their perspective for the need for compulsory competency-based leadership being available to middle leaders is an interesting area to carry out further analysis. Further research may be required to better understand the varying supporting perspectives that support this stance. However, one such analogy may examine whether middle leaders are fully satisfied with the self-development programmes they participate in. Or if such programmes are not fully desired due to the lack of competency-based approach.

Question # 3

Question 3 sought to examine if the respondents, **“Take full responsibility for leadership training and development.”** The data gathered revealed that 92% of principals gave their perspectives as strongly agree and agree (8% and 84% respectively). 88% of middle managers gave their perspectives as strongly agree and agree (40% and 44% respectively). 54.6% of classroom teachers gave their perspectives as strongly agree and agree (with both levels reflecting a score of 27.30%). See Table 3 and Figure 3.

Table 3. Compulsory Competency-based Leadership Programmes should be Made Available by the Ministry of Education

Levels	Participants		
	Principals	Middle Managers	Classroom Teachers
Agree	28%	32%	27.30%
Strongly Agree	52%	52%	27.30%
Neutral/Uncertain	8%	16%	22.70%
Disagree	4%	0%	4.50%
Strongly Disagree	8%	0%	18.20%
Total	100%	100%	100%

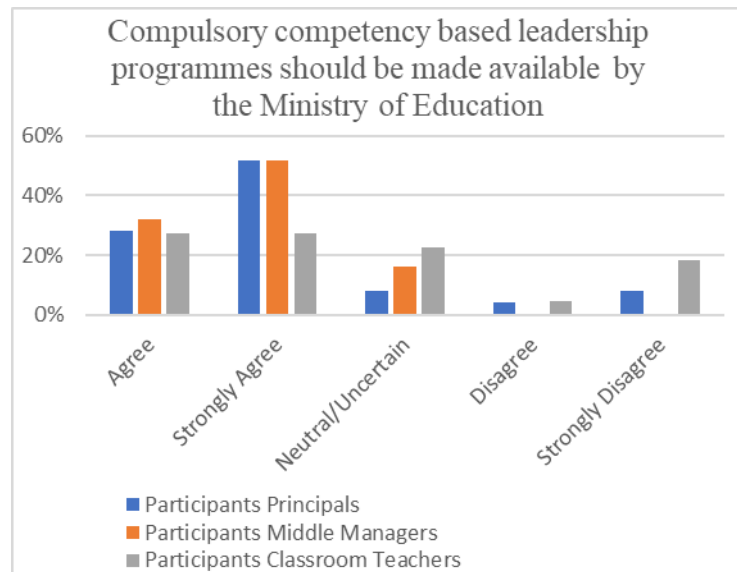


Figure 3. Compulsory Competency based Leadership Programmes should be Made Available by the Ministry of Education

Question 3 received the highest mean score of 78.20%, indicating that respondents rated it most positively on average. Question 3, despite having the highest mean score, it also had the highest standard deviation of 16.77%. Indicating the greatest level of variability in responses among the questions 1, 2 and 3. Its high variability in standard deviation would thus indicate a greater disparity in responses, indicating less consistent perceptions among the three response groups. The variation in perspective is seen more so at the classroom level. It would therefore suggest that further research may be needed to better understand what constitutes such variance. Additionally, classroom teachers have the lowest level of overall agreement across the other questions. This may be a result of limited interaction with leadership training needs. This thus warrants further investigation and the application of targeted interventions.

Question # 4

A further examination was done of the data as it relates to the number of persons each group supervises or leads. The data showed that a large majority of principals, 52% to be exact, supervise more than 20 persons. An analysis of classroom teachers, a group which would constitute aspiring leaders, revealed that 27.20% of this cohort supervised 1 to 9 members of staff. In examining middle managers, it showed that 60% of middle managers supervise 1 to 9, 12% supervise 10 to 20 persons and 16% lead more than 20 persons. The data therefore showed and confirmed that middle managers, sometimes lead large groups of persons in their respective roles and as such competency -based training is of critical importance to their overall effectiveness and can assist them significantly to lead great teams. See Table 4 and Figure 4.

Table 4. Total Number of Staff Members Supervised

Categories	Participants		
	Principals	Middle Managers	Classroom Teachers
1-5 Persons	0%	32%	22.70%
6-9 Persons	8%	28%	4.50%
10 -15 Persons	20%	4%	0%

15-20 Persons	20%	8%	0%
More than 20	52%	16%	0%
None	0%	12%	72.00%
Total	100%	100%	100%



Figure 4. Total Number of Staff Members Supervised

Discussion

The results from this research are in keeping with other research done in the areas of self-efficacy, leadership and competency-based training with other categories of workers and leaders in organizations and in particular, the educational workspace.

It was found that principals and middle managers had similar combined response rates in the strongly agree and agree categories of 80% for Question 1. This highlights the value that is placed on the concept of leadership development by the different demographic groups. The data revealed that principals' and middle managers' response rates were higher than classroom teachers

The results thus show that educators at the leadership level by and large understands the importance of leadership development when compared to classroom teachers

Question # 1

$$\text{Mean} = \text{sum of all } \frac{\text{values}}{\text{number}} \text{ of values}$$

$$\text{Mean} = (80\% + 80\% + 68.20\%) / 3$$

$$\text{Mean} = 228.20\% / 3$$

$$\text{Mean} \approx 76.06\%$$

Standard Deviation

$$s = n - 1 \sum i = 1n(xi - \bar{x})^2$$

$$\text{Where: } s=5.56\%$$

Question # 2

$$\text{Mean} = \text{sum of all } \frac{\text{values}}{\text{number}} \text{ of values}$$

$$\text{Mean} = (80\% + 84\% + 54.60\%) / 3$$

$$\text{Mean} = 210.6\% / 3$$

$$\text{Mean} \approx 70.2\%$$

Standard Deviation

$$s = n - 1 \sum i = 1n(xi - \bar{x})^2$$

$$\text{Where: } s=13.02\%$$

Question # 3

Mean = sum of all $\frac{\text{values}}{\text{number}}$ of values

$$\text{Mean} = (92\% + 88\% + 54.60\%) / 3$$

$$\text{Mean} = 234.60\% / 3$$

$$\text{Mean} \approx 78.20\%$$

Standard Deviation

$$s = \sqrt{\frac{1}{n} \sum (xi - \bar{x})^2}$$

Where: s=16.77%

Conclusion

This research provides much-needed information as it relates to the need for targeted leadership programmes which are offered by the Ministry of Education or its affiliated agencies.

Discrepancies between how middle managers view themselves and how others view them may indicate a need for better alignment of expectations and communication of leadership actions and decisions.

Given the specific focus on self-efficacy, leadership and competency-based training, the data support recommendations for strengthening leadership training and practices within schools.

The research Emphasizes the need for continuous professional development and

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possibly restructuring leadership training programs to ensure a consistent and high level of confidence across all groups. This will certainly assist in strengthening middle managers' self-efficacy and leadership levels; as well as provide structure for upcoming leaders.

Given the specifics of the study, it is hoped that continued research will take place focusing on other factors.

Conflict of Interest

I declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper. I, the corresponding author on behalf of all contributing authors, hereby declare that the information given in this disclosure is accurate and complete to the best of my knowledge and belief.

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