Chapter 14
School Inspection for Quality Leadership, Teaching, and Learning in South Africa:
The Current State of Education School Inspection

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ABSTRACT

South African secondary schools have gradually increased access to a diverse number of students, but that has not led to a related increase in student success. Several factors contribute to low throughput and pass rates, and these include, among others, poor leadership, under-preparedness of students to pursue their education, lack of effective instruction, and inadequate access to student support services. The above-mentioned factors are important, but the key to improving throughput and pass rates in secondary education lies in ensuring quality leadership for effective teaching and learning through school inspection. Teaching and learning should be informed by institutional approaches that translate leadership into effective teaching and learning practices and learning support for students. This chapter will address school inspections as well as identify the constraints and enablers of leadership for teaching and learning to improve student performance.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter is based on an argument that school inspection can ensure quality leadership, and, teaching and learning in South Africa. The chapter draws from the increasing concern among the education officials at national and provincial levels, and parents, about the poor teacher and learner performance in public schools, especially the under-resourced black schools since the beginning of the democratic South African education system. School inspection is one of the most challenging aspects in education; it represents an approach of accountability in teaching and learning. The key to improving throughput and pass rates in schools lies in ensuring quality leadership for effective teaching and learning. School Inspection (SI) serves as an accountability mechanism for monitoring and schools to ensure the achievement of outcomes in South Africa (De Clercq, 2007). Through SI, school leaders, policy and decision makers are provided with accurate information about the current state of education in schools (AlKutich & Abukari, 2018). SI, therefore, is a critical mechanism for enhancing leadership, teaching and learning in the school contexts under which those mechanisms operate. It is an accountability mechanism by governments to determine value for money in the education system, though there, seems to be little returns on education investment because SI is still not adequately performed and has no input to improving education. If properly implemented, it is a necessary precursor to explaining why student-learning outcomes do or do not result from accountability activities.

Schools are managed by principals who report to school inspectors. The demands made on them by the roles they play are enormous and forever changing. School inspectors perform a quality control mechanism in schools to enhance performance standards, to monitor and to evaluate the effectiveness of learning outcomes. They do formal site visit to schools as education authorities, to observe classroom and management activities. Although existing in almost all countries around the world, it is, however, subject to critical scrutiny (Alkutich, 2015; MacBeath, 2006). In most countries the results of poor inspection are poor leadership, and teaching and learning in schools. South Africa has limited research on the practice of school inspection (Martin, 2005), though a lot has been written on leadership, teaching and learning. The gap on how school inspection can ensure quality leadership, and, teaching and learning in South Africa necessitates the determination of existing inspection practices (Vass & Simmonds, 2001) for quality leadership, teaching and learning. To contribute knowledge on school inspection, the chapter draws from the findings of global studies discussing school inspection for improved leadership, teaching and learning.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The need to ensure quality leadership, and, teaching and learning in schools for better learner performance has widely been a topic for research and debate in many parts of the world. Among the topics in these studies has been the focus on the fact that desirable school-level outcomes are associated with coherent support for meeting performance expectations and for translating information about performance into everyday practices of teaching and learning. Within schools a range of leadership patterns exist; the principal, assistant or deputy principals, middle managers or Heads of Departments (HoDs) and teachers.

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