**Quantitative data:**

**Responses to statements regarding principals’ professional discretion**

***Table 5.1: Summary of responses pertaining to statements in Question 15.***

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Statement | Strongly Agree | | Agree | Neither Agree nor Disagree | | Disagree | | Strongly Disagree | | |
|  | **Frequency** | **%** | **Frequency** | **%** | **Frequency** | **%** | **Frequency** | **%** | **Frequency** | **%** |
| Principals may use professional discretion in their day-to-day decision-making, depending on the situations that confront them. | 24 | 63,2 | 8 | 2,1 | 1 | 2,6 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 13,2 |
| Discretion exists where policies, rules, and regulations do not have a clear indication of how to proceed in certain situations. | 12 | 31,6 | 21 | 55,3 | 1 | 2,6 | 1 | 2,6 | 3 | 7,9 |
| Professional discretion allows a principal some freedom to act or judge independently and that it sometimes even stretches beyond the scope of one’s legal power. | 5 | 13,2 | 16 | 42,1 | 4 | 10,5 | 11 | 28,9 | 2 | 5,3 |
| If a principal has discretionary power, he or she is under obligation to justify his or her decisions, judgement, and action with reasons that others can understand, accept, or reject and he or she can be sanctioned if such decisions were not rational. | 12 | 31,6 | 19 | 50 | 1 | 2,6 | 2 | 5,3 | 4 | 10,5 |
| A principal has the discretionary power to determine whether or not to bring a learner before a disciplinary hearing to face a charge of serious misconduct. | 13 | 34,2 | 8 | 21,1 | 2 | 5,3 | 7 | 18,4 | 8 | 21,1 |
| Principals are often compelled to exercise this power, particularly in a context where the safety of learners or educators is at risk. | 22 | 57,9 | 10 | 26,3 | 1 | 2,6 | 3 | 7,9 | 2 | 5,3 |

**Contributing factors towards respondent’s decision-making**

***Table 5.2: Contributing factors toward respondents’ decision-making (Q16)***

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Not at all | | Sometimes | | Often | | Generally | | Almost always | |
|  | **Frequency** | **%** | **Frequency** | **%** | **Frequency** | **%** | **Frequency** | **%** | **Frequency** | **%** |
| Years of experience | 1 | 2,6 | 9 | 23,7 | 7 | 18,4 | 14 | 36,8 | 7 | 18,4 |
| Knowledge | 0 | 0 | 2 | 5,3 | 1 | 2,6 | 12 | 31,6 | 23 | 60,5 |
| Educational training | 2 | 5,3 | 4 | 10,5 | 6 | 15,8 | 16 | 42,1 | 10 | 26,3 |
| Leadership and management training | 0 | 0 | 3 | 7,9 | 2 | 5,3 | 13 | 34,2 | 20 | 52,6 |
| The fear of being negligent | 2 | 5,3 | 8 | 21,1 | 7 | 18,4 | 14 | 36,8 | 7 | 18,4 |
| School code of conduct | 1 | 2,6 | 1 | 2,6 | 3 | 7,9 | 12 | 31,6 | 21 | 55,3 |
| School policies | 1 | 2,6 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 7,9 | 10 | 26,3 | 24 | 63,2 |
| Provincial and district officials of the Department of Basic Education | 0 | 0 | 7 | 18,4 | 9 | 23,7 | 11 | 28,9 | 11 | 28,9 |
| School governing body | 0 | 0 | 2 | 5,3 | 7 | 18,4 | 13 | 34,2 | 16 | 42,1 |
| Legislation | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 10,5 | 4 | 10,5 | 30 | 78,9 |
| Academic curriculum | 1 | 2,6 | 0 | 0 | 7 | 18,4 | 16 | 42,1 | 14 | 36,8 |
| The specific situation at hand | 1 | 2,6 | 2 | 5,3 | 4 | 10,5 | 20 | 52,6 | 11 | 28,9 |
| Personal values | 1 | 2,6 | 4 | 10,5 | 4 | 10,5 | 16 | 42,1 | 13 | 34,2 |
| Personality | 3 | 7,9 | 8 | 21,1 | 2 | 5,3 | 17 | 44,7 | 8 | 21,1 |
| Intuition | 4 | 10,5 | 6 | 15,8 | 7 | 18,4 | 16 | 42,1 | 5 | 13,2 |
| The expectations of the local school community | 1 | 2,6 | 5 | 13,2 | 10 | 26,3 | 16 | 42,1 | 6 | 15,8 |
| Parents or guardians | 1 | 2,6 | 7 | 18,4 | 12 | 31,6 | 13 | 34,2 | 5 | 13,2 |

**Demographic and biographic profiles of participating schools and individual participants**

**Table 4.2. Demographic and biographic profiles of participating schools and individual participants**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Participant code | Descriptor | School District | Type of School | Fee-paying or No-fee-paying | Years’ experience as Principal | Years’ experience in education | Gender |
| Principal 1 | School A | Tshwane South | Primary School | Fee-paying | 16-20 | 31-35 | Male |
| Principal 2 | School B | Gauteng North | Secondary School | Fee-paying | 11-15 | 31-35 | Male |
| Principal 3 | School C | Tshwane South | Primary School | Fee-paying | 6-10 | 31-35 | Male |
| Principal 4 | School D | Gauteng West | Secondary School | Fee-paying | 0-5 | 11-15 | Male |
| Principal 5 | School E | Tshwane South | Secondary School | Fee-paying | 0-5 | 31-35 | Male |
| Principal 6 | School F | Gauteng East | Primary School | Non-fee-paying | 0-5 | 26-30 | Male |
| Principal 7 | School G | Tshwane North | Primary School | Fee-paying | 0-5 | 26-30 | Female |
| Principal 8 | School H | Tshwane South | Primary School | Non-fee-paying | 0-5 | 16-20 | Male |
| Principal 9 | School I | Tshwane South | Primary School | Fee-paying | 0-5 | 16-20 | Female |
| Principal 10 | School J | Gauteng East | Primary School | Non-fee-paying | 0-5 | 21-25 | Male |
| Principal 11 | School K | Gauteng East | Secondary School | Fee-paying | 6-10 | 26-30 | Male |
| Principal 12 | School L | Tshwane South | Primary School | Non-fee-paying | 11-15 | 31-35 | Male |
| Principal 13 | School M | Tshwane North | Primary School | Fee-paying | 6-10 | 26-30 | Female |
| Principal 14 | School N | Tshwane North | Secondary School | Fee-paying | 0-5 | 21-25 | Female |

**Qualitative themes:**

**Table 6.1: Summary of the main themes and sub-themes**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| MAIN THEMES | SUB THEMES |
| 1. Professional discretion as perceived by participating principals | Professional discretion as perceived by participating principals |
| 1. When do principals apply professional discretion? | * Principals apply professional discretion daily * Principals rely on intuition and common sense when applying professional discretion * Principals apply professional discretion when policies are vague * Principals apply professional discretion when decisions should be made immediately * The situation or context matters * Principals apply their professional discretion in the best interest of the learners * Principals apply professional discretion for the academic well-being of the learners * Principals apply professional discretion when promoting learners to the next grade * Principals apply professional discretion when admitting learners to their schools * Principals apply professional discretion during COVID-19 * Principals apply professional discretion in terms of the Protection of Personal Information (POPI) Act. 4 of 2013 |
| 1. Factors that influence principals’ professional discretion | External factors  * Internal factors |
| 1. The influence of the diverse role of public school principals on their professional discretion | * The influence of the Department of Basic Education (DBE) on principals’ professional discretion * The influence of School Governing Bodies (SGBs) on principals’ professional discretion |
| 1. The principal as professional manager of a public school | * The minimum requirements to become a principal * Principals’ responsibilities |
| 1. Contextual intelligence of principals in public schools | * The role of contextual intelligence on principals’ ability to apply professional discretion * Contextual demands influence principals’ professional discretion * Emotional intelligence as a branch of contextual intelligence * School climate and culture |
| 1. Principals’ understanding of their duty of care | Duty of care is connected to the common law principle- *in loco parentis*  * Acting *ultra vires* in the best interest of the learners |
| 1. Professional discretion in ensuring a safe school environment | * School safety * School safety policies |
| 1. Negligence in the education environment | Principals’ perceptions of negligence in the education environment  * The principal as a reasonable person * Accountability framework * Principals’ experience and knowledge * Training of principals |

**Contextual demands placed on school principals’ professional discretion**

***Table 6.2. Contextual demands placed on school principals’ professional discretion***

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Contextual Demand | Participants | Most valuable comment |
| Culture and ethnic groups | P2; P4; P7; P8; P14 | *I am working with multi-racial groups, there are different groups, different cultural groups. So, I think that it is the contextual things that’s actually influencing me the most in my situation with my school (Principal 2).* |
| Language of teaching | P3; P4; P14 | *The context in which you work will have a major influence on your decision… Let’s take it in the context of the different language schools have. If you are a principal at a full Afrikaans, medium school, you are working with a totally different situation. Then for a principal of an English medium school or a principal of a dual medium school it doesn’t matter which languages we are speaking, but you have a different context that you are working with (Principal 4).* |
| Religious orientation | P3; P4; P6; P11 | *So, this is also the religious aspect. The balance is quite challenging. Almost every week and day you’ve got to make sure you do not side with any organisation, but there’s a lot of demands on that side as well (Principal 11).* |
| Socio-economic background | P1; P4; P6; P7; P9; P10; P11; P13; P14 | *Also, something that’s quite interesting is the difference in socio-economic circumstances of the different learners you have. You know, most schools in South Africa at this stage reached a point where you have the haves and have-nots in the same school… So, that plays a major role (Principal 4).* |
| Pressure of academic success | P4; P5; P7; P9; P10; P12 | *Stakeholders expect this school to perform well academically irrespective of any contextual factors faced by the school. They expect the schools with no resources to perform the same way as a private school, with an abundance of resources…*  *They just want the quality output… they don’t even know if you have enough inputs to get to the output that they desire. So that is a challenge that we are having, and it becomes a huge challenge, the contextual factor (Principal 12).* |
| Geographical location of the school (rural and urban) | P1; P4 | *Your area, the context of area plays, an even bigger role… Also, things like the distance your school is from suburbs. That is a totally different game. Schools were built in a different era. Schools were built for a different situation.*  *(Principal 4).* |
| Different schools | P1; P5; P7; P8; P13 | *It is completely different. Because we have got different people in all the spheres. My school is bigger than the other neighbouring schools that we are working with. Surly there are factors that are in play when going on with the day, the business day office school will differ from the other school (Principal 8).* |
| Fee-paying and non-fee-paying schools | P4; P9; P10; P11: P12 | *A modern fee-paying school differs from township schools. Now, in a modern fee-paying school they have material like the Internet, the intercoms and so on… We do not have such things. They are more sophisticated. So, you have to be autonomous and think about this and think about what is best for your school (Principal 10).* |
| Financial pressures | P4; P10; P11 | *At our school, we have to look at the economic condition of the school. The way that people use the finances and make decisions are placed on me as a school principal (Principal 10).* |
| Human factor | P5; P7; P8; P10; P14 | *As a teacher, you’re working with people, you are moulding the people’s minds and their hearts. If that is lacking, it’s very, very, very difficult for you as a teacher, because you’d make wrong decisions at the end of the day (Principal 8).* |
| Accountability | P7; P9; P13 | *The fact that you are in the end, liable and accountable for every decision that is taken, whether it’s taken by you, by a management member, whether it’s taken by someone who works in the admin office or an educator. In the end, it always comes back to the principal, and you have to be accountable. And I think that is sometimes something that is not always clearly understood as to what influence it has on us as principals (Principal 7).* |
| Laws and protocols | P6; P7; P11 | *I must implement necessary educational laws and policy during my leadership management and administration process on a daily basis while I’m running the school… By that I work within the legislative parameters, such as for us stakeholders… to ensure that my decision-making is not governed by my own opinion, feeling or experience and negating the laws as such during my leadership (Principal 6).* |
| Media | P2 | *And media, you can think to yourself if you are in trouble, media for a school can either kill it or put it out there… because I see that social media is playing such a big role… That is a contextual demand that I can’t ignore (Principal 2).* |
| Emotions | P1; P2; P4; P5; P7; P11; P13; P14 | *So, contextual intelligence also has to be outside of emotion, outside of anger. I think the basic rule there is: “Don’t make a decision while you’re angry. Don’t make a decision while you’re sad. Make your decisions with intelligence, taking into account all the situations, all the contextual factors…” Take emotional feelings, anger, take it out of your decision-making and then you’ll see that mostly you apply what a reasonable person would do (Principal 4).* |
| School culture | P4; P5; P9 | *Every school has its own culture when making those decisions. There’s a certain culture in each school and you will take it into consideration. The culture, the ethos of the school, what is your aims? Long-term, short-term. When you make those decisions, you’ve got to look at the profile of your school… So, when you’re making those decisions, you want to make sure that you keep that in mind before making decisions, which will definitely have an impact on the future (Principal 5).* |
| COVID-19 | P2; P6; P7; P9; P11; P12; P13; P14 | *These challenges are caused, by COVID-19. What it does mean here is that you need to understand the context within which COVID affected your environment and then how to manage and manipulate around the situation to get it right for your school (Principal 12).* |
| Sexual orientation of learners and staff members | P3; P9; P14 | *So, one of the very, very strong academic impressive learners of my school left for lockdown as a girl. And then the parents requested for this person to return to school as a boy. So, that was a huge challenge. Firstly, the question was whether the person must use the boys’ bathroom now. And I said it’s not possible. I don’t think it is safe and that is where professional discretion will be very, very impressive with regard to contextual intelligence… (Principal 14).* |