

Exploring the Role of School Principals as Instructional Leaders in Improving Learner Academic Performance in Primary Schools.

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the role of the principal as an instructional leader in four primary schools in the township. This is regardless of the poor learner academic performance in township primary schools in Gauteng. Most of the principals serve mostly as a management and less as instructional leaders. Their lack of involvement in classroom instruction makes it challenging for them to comprehend the difficulties the teachers face during teaching and learning in their classrooms. This study examines instructional strategies used by principals of the four schools that may help to raise learner achievement and explores how these successful leaders use leadership styles and management approaches to improve learner academic performance in their schools.

Spillane's (2006) distributed leadership model and Hallinger and Murphy's (1985) Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale (PIMRS) model were used as the conceptual framework. We employed an interpretive paradigm in this investigation. This study used a sort of non-probability sampling called purposeful sampling to get pertinent information from the group of participants with expertise. We utilized snowballing sampling to obtain one principal, one deputy principal, one Departmental Head and one teacher from each school. Data was collected at four primary schools through individual semi-structured interviews.

The study found that the critical instructional leadership approaches used by these principals were promoting teamwork, active participation, collective decision making, sharing of responsibilities, collaboration and distribution of tasks amongst multiple leaders. The teachers and members of the school management team (SMT) confirmed the claims made by the principals.

Data also indicated that the principals relied on a combination of different leadership styles and efficient and effective management approaches with their subordinates to save the enthusiastic implementation of instructional approaches that help to yield good learner results.

The study suggests that there might be a strong link between leadership styles and learner performance. The data also suggests that the relevant leadership styles can contribute to institutional spirit against the main challenges which tend to depress performance in many schools in similar circumstances. The study makes specific recommendations for a broad-based research agenda to examine factors which contribute to success in schools operating in challenging circumstances.

Keywords: Instructional leadership, leadership, learner outcomes, management.

INTRODUCTION

In order for a particular organisation to be effective, it requires a good leader. Principals are there for considered as being key players in the creation and sustaining of functional schools as well as for developing ones which possess high student achievement (Glanz, Shaked, Rabinowitz, Shenhav, & Zaretsky, 2017). The critical role of a principal is to assist in providing focus and a support system that enables educators in

developing their classrooms leaning towards pronounced instructional effectiveness (Fullan, 2009). Relations between the principal, educators as well learners play an important role in achieving excellent results. Principals, teachers and learners interact more when an instructional leader is in charge of keeping a high profile in classrooms and schools (Sibomana, 2020). The principal retains responsibilities of promoting sound principles and values in acclimate that supports educator leadership, toward structuring as well as sustaining school improvement societies, for planning endeavours, which organise and monitor the improvement of a school (Zepeda, 2013). According to Harris (2020), principals ought to foster a feeling of community, work to build relationships inside the school, and give clear instructions to both teachers and learners.

Instructional leadership has an impact on teaching and learning, the key activities of the school. Bhengu and Mkhize (2013) designate instructional leadership as a principal's facilitation of the teaching and learning processes which provide direction towards the schools' instructional programmes. As instructional leaders, principals must guarantee that the school's instructional programme integrates with curricular and educational policies and/or legislation which then will create and maintain student discipline ensuring environmental order for instruction. They in-part envision and set the instructional goals framing their frequent monitoring of quality there by gaining sensitivity unto instructional glitches experienced by teachers in order to create learning incentives towards the achievement of high academic standards (Akcaoglu, 2013). Principals as instructional leaders retain the task of assuring and warranting soundness in the school's culture of teaching and learning.

Gupton (2004) maintains that instructional leadership is consistent with precise or vague conduct which significantly affects educator instruction, resultantly student learning. In accordance with Gupton (2004, p. 32), the key conducts characterising principals' instructional leadership areas follow:

Instructional leaders must be visionaries; This is achieved by collaborating with stakeholders to advance a shared vision that will maintain the livelihood of the school's vision and mission, thus sustaining routine operations throughout the school. Employ management participation; an enrichment of stakeholders though engagement would appropriate this and further empower them in fulfilling the operational processes of the school as well as improving decision making. Furnish teaching and learning sustenance; recognition of good instruction by teachers is pivotal as a tool in attaining one of the primary goals of the school which is students' learning. Instruction monitoring; an awareness of events within the school should be regularly monitored within classrooms. Display resourcefulness; A development of strategies should be employed towards overcoming obstacles in planning accordingly towards accomplishing the schools' goals.

Statistics done by the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) aligned with numeracy and literacy testing the proficiency of reading in the latter part of South Africa proved to display dissatisfactory performance and results within the townships and rural areas respectively. Fourth Graders (16 073) from 429 schools and fifth Graders (14 657) from 397 schools in South Africa participated in the study alongside 45 other countries. South Africa performed poorly as compared to learners from other nations, as evidenced by their lowest score. When compared to learners in other nations, South Africans do poorly in mathematics (Bosman & Schulze, 2018). According to Motilal (2021), South African learners still do poorly on national, regional, and local literacy tests. This indicates that further efforts are required to enhance the academic performance of learners in South Africa.

Kruger & Van Deventer (2003, p. 8) demonstrate that the achievement of effective learning and teaching is derived from a path paved by excellent instructional leadership in its first-class cultural denomination henceforth executed by principals. Principals as specified instructional leaders of schools reserve the responsibility to furnish educators with the knowledge of breaking educational innovations and technological advancements alongside other tools which promote a positive environment of successful learning and teaching. Bhengu and Mkhize (2013) claim that principals to bag the duty to create a receptive atmosphere that invite educators into a healthy school environment. Setting high standards for both teachers and learners is the responsibility of principals in order to foster a healthy learning environment in schools (Mestry, 2017).

According to Boyce and Bowers (2018), instructional leadership is a form of educational leadership in which school principals participate routinely and actively in a variety of initiatives designed to enhance teaching and learning.

As principals at all levels make decisions which impact the organization, and might ultimately influence learner performance; it is of fundamental importance for school principals to realise they can improve their instructional leadership observations towards the potential effectiveness of student learning.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The idea of instructional leadership is "strongly concerned with teaching and learning, encompassing the ongoing professional development of teachers as well as learner growth," according to Southworth (2002, p. 79). Additionally, instructional leaders create a school vision that calls for learners and teachers to meet high standards and achieve greatness (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Barth, 1990). To improve learner accomplishment results, the ultimate goal is to provide high-quality instruction and learning experiences (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Rhodes & Brundrett, 2010).

Teaching and learning is the cornerstone of any school. This study is therefore focused on determining the degree to which principals' manipulation of activities improves learner achievement—a form of alignment. Therefore, an instructional leader must inspire and assist each teacher in that specific school in order to have an impact on learning and teaching. Creating a supportive environment for teaching and learning in order to achieve academic and social school goals is known as instructional leadership (Ahmed, 2016). The instructional leader promotes teamwork and equally distributes the organization's duties (Cuban, 2020). According to Maree (2011), a principal, in their capacity as instructional leaders, has to work to improve teachers' pedagogies in order to promote learners' academic performance. From this vantage point, leaders aim to impact learners' learning through teachers.

Murphy, Neumerski, Goldring, Grissom, and Porter (2016) state that instructional leadership is beneficial in reaching the objectives of improving schools and raising learner achievement. Ahmed (2016) goes on to say that establishing the ideal environment for teaching and learning is closely related to principals' instructional leadership methods. Instructional leadership helps principals create a goal and vision statement and prepares teachers to use cutting-edge tactics that could enhance teaching and learning (Mestry, 2017). A leader must make sure that teachers and learners have access to the necessary tools and materials to put learning into practice and increase learner achievement as measured going forward. Principals also start and oversee internal staff development initiatives so that everyone is aware of what's going on in the school. The DBE (2018, p. 20) states that the principle is in charge of setting up or facilitating different professional development, orientation, and induction programs in order to improve and enhance teachers' ability to teach. This indicates that principals have a big part to play in instructional leadership and that they ought to improve the way they teach learners.

As instructional leaders, principals primarily assist teachers in facilitating successful learning and support learners in their quest of academic achievement (Shava & Heystek, 2018). The principal is positioned as the head of the school and its main pillar through instructional leadership. Principals are encouraged by instructional leadership to support teachers and learners, which enhances instruction and learning as well as learner accomplishment. Mestry (2017) found that effective instructional leadership is shaped and created by principals, who encourage learners and teachers to reach their maximum potential in both learning and teaching.

A school's ability to succeed depends on how well its administration's concepts are implemented and how effective the way it leads is. Good school principals foster a positive atmosphere that helps the school continue to produce high-quality work. Day, Gu, and Sammons (2016) state that instructional management by teachers is "essential for achievement" and a vital "a contributor to better instruction." p. 251. To put it briefly, the job of managing a school is assigned to principals, who must be careful with the tactics they use

to establish their competence and successfully navigate any challenges that educational institutions may face. For this reason, the use of instructional leadership is encouraged and implemented as a tool for success.

A research by Andrews and Smith (1989) examined how much time principals actually spend at work in the United States of America (USA). According to their research, principals of high schools and intermediate schools work longer hours than principals of primary schools. As the data breaks down, it becomes clear that principals use their extra time at work to manage learners and the curriculum. This tells us something about principals of primary schools. In our situation, principals of primary schools receive less resources than those of high schools because of the emphasis placed on matriculating learners. In contrast, Gupton's (2004) study, which included 500 Illinois principals in the USA, identified the following behavioural patterns as being extremely important to success in the role of principal:

"The tasks involve building an internal communication structure, conducting interviews applicants for positions as educators, following to required educational initiatives, describing an orderly and secure atmosphere, keeping beneficial connections with others, creating and upholding a vision, mission, and objectives, setting high expectations for educators, and creating a strategy for improvement for the institution (Gupton, 2004, p.2).

The majority of leadership studies conducted in South Africa indicate that most principals lack adequate professional training, particularly in instructional leadership, and that this is the direct cause of the underperformance of the majority of South African schools. According to Naidoo and Mestry (2019), most South African principals have not received sufficient training to develop their management and leadership abilities, skills, and competencies to have an impact on the majority of schools. Since they lack the necessary abilities to support successful teaching and learning, principals, as the leaders of the school, are unable to assist their teachers in raising learner performance.

According to Bush (2013), instructional leadership necessitates that leaders make teaching and learning their top priority every day. As mentioned by Bush and Oduro (2006), we also concur and support the claim that strong leadership and successful schools are closely related (Bush & Glover, 2003).

Conceptual framework

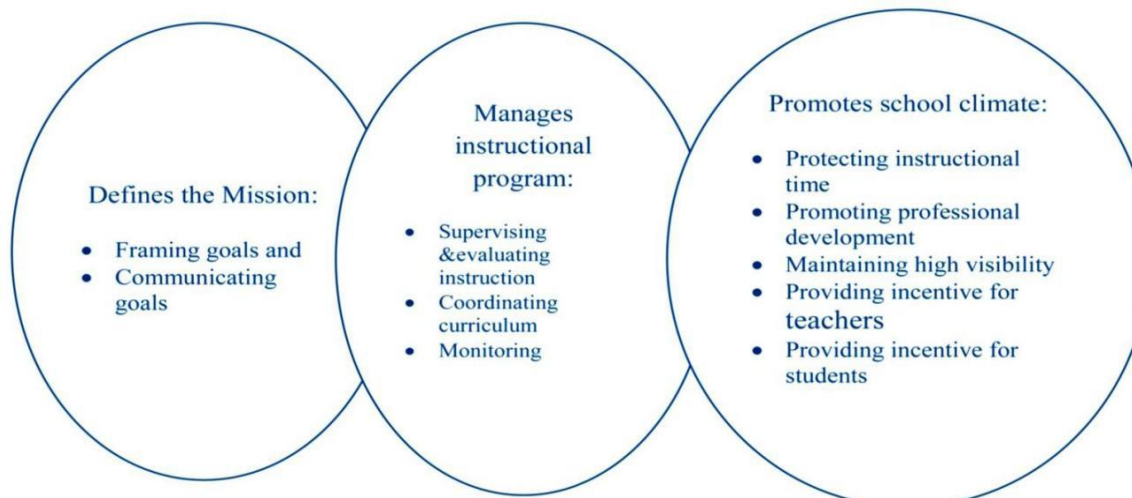
We have chosen to employ the Principal Instructional Administration Rating Scale (PIMRS) paradigm, which was created by Hallinger and Murphy in 1985. This framework offers a recommended method for investigating how principals at Johannesburg South District primary schools might serve as instructional leaders to enhance learners' academic performance. We were able to identify tactics that primary school principals might use to raise learner academic achievement.

Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale (PIMRS) model

The study aimed to provide further insight into the use of the instructional management paradigm developed by Hallinger and Murphy (1985) by principals in primary schools within a township school division. The reason we chose the approach developed by Hallinger and Murphy (1985) is that it provides township principals of schools with tactics for raising learner success. The strategies used by resilient school leaders to run successful institutions provide the conceptual foundation for our study. The PIMRS approach, created by Hallinger and Murphy, provides principals at educational institutions with techniques to think about when addressing difficulties related to learning and instruction. Hallinger and Murphy (1985) presented a three-pronged approach to the role of a headmaster in educational leadership, which had three elements: establishing the purpose and mission of the school, overseeing educational initiatives, and cultivating a pleasant school environment.

Hallinger and Murphy's model conceptualisation of instructional management is illustrated in **Figure 1**.

Figure 1: PIMRS



Hallinger, and Murphy, (1985).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this study, a qualitative research approach was applied. We collected data in person by interacting with a selected sample of participants in their natural settings, as confirmed by McMillan & Schumacher (2010, p. 315). We physically visited a few selected schools to collect data and interact with those chosen to understand their real-life conditions. For our investigation, word representations of the information were created. Qualitative study relies on word-based data, and descriptions are used by investigators to communicate data (McMillan & Schumacher 2010, p. 315).

Instead of focusing on a big number of participants in a quantitative technique, we opted for a small number of participants using a qualitative approach. Thus, four educators, four deputy principals, four DHs, and four principals were the main subjects of attention.

We employed an interpretive paradigm in this investigation. This paradigm holds that scientists observe processes in order to understand human behavior and the esoteric character of the cosmos (Burrell & Morgan, 2005). In this study, we applied the social the concept of constructivism (interpretive) paradigm, which employs inductive analysis and qualitative methods for study (Maree, 2011).

In order to define the parameters of the study and determine the causes of the phenomenon in the context, we employed the descriptive case study. Our goal was to gain a comprehensive understanding of how principals, acting as instructional leaders, can enhance learner performance in primary schools by creating a unique, natural environment. Our attention was drawn to the examination and depiction of the research subjects. Because of this, we were able to analyze the case study in real time without attempting to extrapolate the results to different groups or situations.

Through a case study, we were able to examine principals' roles as instructional leaders in enhancing learner performance in primary schools from several perspectives and to focus on various aspects of the tactics they employed. This made it possible for me to interview educators, DHs, principals, and deputy principals in order to gather comprehensive information.

We chose to employ the method of qualitative study because it would help me understand the principal's role as an instructional leader in raising learner achievement in primary schools. For our studies, we employed a case study technique.

This study used a sort of non-probability sampling called purposeful sampling to get pertinent information from the group of participants with expertise. The researcher utilizes intentional sampling, in which the sample is selected based on the experience of the group to be sampled, to get the appropriate data for that particular study. Four schools were utilized as a sample in this investigation.

Four public primary schools with strong academic performance over the previous three years were purposefully chosen for this study. The system that the schools use to keep track of their learner academic performance is called Data Driven Districts Dashboard (DDD) was used to identify the primary schools that are performing well in Johannesburg South District. We utilized snowballing sampling to obtain one teacher, one deputy principle, and one DH from each school. Through the principals, we were able to enter the schools, and we depended on them to find and enlist potential volunteers who would be willing and knowledgeable enough to take part in this study. We studied the tactics used by prosperous township school principals to improve learner performance even in the face of difficult obstacles.

A letter authorizing study at these schools was received by the Gauteng Department of Education in the Johannesburg South District. We conducted interviews as part of this study. As a result, one principal, one deputy principal, one departmental head, and one teacher of each school were interviewed.

This study was carried out to try to answer the following main research question: What is the role of the principal as an instructional leader in improving learner academic performance in primary schools? The following sub questions were investigated:

- What features of instructional leadership affect learner results?
- How do leaders of successful township primary schools deal with the challenges that may negatively affect learner results if not attended to?

Data generation method

There are numerous methods available in qualitative research for gathering data. De Vos, Strydom, Fouche, and Delpont (2005) provide a variety of methods for gathering data, including as questionnaires, observations, interviews, and reviews of documents and artifacts. Nonetheless, individual interviews were carried out for this investigation. The procedure of creating the data took five weeks to finish.

Open-ended questions were used in individual interviews to gather information about participant meanings, how they conceptualize the world, and how they explain significant life experiences. The participants' interviews took place on the school's grounds. To safeguard both their identities and the identities of their schools, we utilized pseudonyms. It went for around forty to forty-five minutes at a time that worked for them. We recorded the interviews using a digital voice recorder since it made taking notes easier (Kvale, 2008). We were able to pay close attention to the interviewees' comments and follow up with them thanks to the digital voice recorder. Recording the interviews was done so that "all nuances of the responses can be preserved and the richness of individual statements is not lost," according to Briggs, Coleman, and Morrison (2012, p. 262).

The principals' experiences, as articulated in their own words, as instructional leaders in enhancing the achievement of pupils in their schools were better understood thanks to the interviews held at these specific schools.

The way these interviews were conducted was designed to put participants at ease. In order to give the participants the freedom to participate with no fear, sensitive questions were avoided. We ensured they understood why the research was being conducted and why their schools were being used. To ensure that the right data was collected, open-ended questions were used in the interviews.

Results from data generated in the field are displayed under themes and sub-themes. Thematic analysis

techniques were used to inductively construct these topics from the data. In order to analyze the results, we also consult the literature and the conceptual frameworks that are discussed in section two.

FINDINGS

Four primary themes emerged: principals' perceptions of their roles in encouraging leadership in education procedures; principals' execution and enhancement of these practices in schools; obstacles to implementing these practices; and principals' attempts to overcome these obstacles. The section that follows delves into these four themes.

The viewpoints of the participants regarding how they perceived the role of the principals as instructional leaders in enhancing the academic performance of learners were described in detail in the preceding sections.

Principals' conceptualisations of their roles in supporting instructional leadership practices

The four participating school principals expressed a deep comprehension of the significance of their responsibilities in advancing education. This demonstrates their unwavering dedication to making teaching and learning the centrepiece of the institution's mission. They gave their teaching team constant support and made sure that the educational procedures ran well. This dedication was demonstrated by Ms. Plum, Fruit Primary's principal, who said:

"The principal is central to teaching and learning." Thus, it is our duty to encourage efficient instruction and learning. Therefore, the principle must be active in the procedure in order to assist learners and principals; he or she cannot be an outsider looking in. (Ms. Plum)

This statement is consistent with academic discourse, as noted by Maponya (2020), who emphasises the critical role that principals who engage in successful instructional leadership play in driving educators to meet expectations, which in turn improves learner performance. These principals' dedication to leadership in education is evident in their constant observation, encouragement, and support.

Modeling good practice

The principals of Vegetable and Fruit Primary agreed that it is essential for them to set a good example by actively participating in teaching activities. Principals must be role models for others, according to Ms. Plum of Fruit Primary, who said that

The principle should be a teacher that others may aspire to be like and emulate. I aim to conduct myself appropriately when I teach a class so that I may set a positive example for other educators to follow. (Ms. Plum)

By personally instructing a class, Ms. Plum further demonstrated her dedication to this goal and served as a suitable example for other educators to follow.

This viewpoint emphasises how important it is for principals to see classroom dynamics firsthand in order to better understand the difficulties principals confront. Principals are then more equipped to provide practical methods for raising learners' academic achievement. Ms. Plum's commitment to teaching is consistent with the notion that high visibility is an essential component of instructional leadership, as emphasised by Hallinger and Murphy (1985).

The school's vision

All of the study's participating schools generally agreed that the principals were acting as instructional managers by putting the goals and ambitions of the schools front and centre. The principals have to continually shift their attention back to teaching and learning while keeping their mission and objectives in

mind. A strong basis for later functions is provided by well-crafted school objectives and vision (Maponya, 2020; Ozdemir, 2019). The principals had a distinct idea of how their schools should best carry out their goals. Mr. Square of Shape Primary did a great job capturing this, saying that:

Our school's vision is in line with teaching and learning, which fosters a feeling of purpose among educators, learners, and parents. This alignment directs the application of efficient instructional techniques that uphold the school's overarching objectives. (Mr. Square)

It is becoming apparent that written statements of purpose were present in all of the participating schools. Each learner acknowledges the critical role that vision plays in curriculum delivery. It outlines the specific objectives of every school and provides guidance to principals on how they can carry out the curriculum. According to Khan, Khan, and Saeed (2020), the key to instructionally successful schools is having well-defined goals that are conveyed to stakeholders and are geared towards raising learner accomplishment. Defining the purpose and vision of the institution is the first step in Hallinger and Murphy's (1985) leadership of instruction approach.

Creating an appropriate positive school environment

Participants in each of the four schools under examination emphasised how important it is for school leadership to create an environment that is favourable to effective instruction and learning. The body of research supports the beliefs held by school principals, as emphasised by a number of academics (Cuban, 2020; Ahmed, 2016; Mestry, 2017), who stress the critical role that a supportive school environment plays in promoting successful teaching and learning. Principals take an active role in fostering a positive atmosphere and empowering educators to openly share their thoughts, which eventually helps learners do better academically.

The assumption that enhanced instruction and learner outcomes are a result of good school settings is further supported by the literature (Aldridge & Fraser, 2016). To foster positivism in the school atmosphere, principals like Ms. Blue and Mr. Potato use leadership philosophies like collaboration and an inviting attitude. This highlights the necessity for principals to encourage, lead, and mentor people of the organisation in establishing a favourable atmosphere to accomplish shared objectives (Junaidi&Fadillah, 2022).

Principals' enactment and enhancement of instructional leadership practices in schools

The results of the interviews show how committed all principals are to putting instructional leadership strategies into practice and making them better because they understand how important they are to raising the academic achievement of their learners.

The deputy principal of Colour Primary, Ms. Pink, praised her principle for his dedication to seeing to it that all teachers are observed, observed, given feedback, and guided. This strategy encourages educators to use cutting-edge and successful teaching techniques, which improves classroom management throughout the institution. Regarding this, she stated:

Our principal makes sure that every learner shows up for class, keeps an eye on the principals, and gives them comments and direction. This encourages educators to use cutting-edge and successful teaching strategies, which eventually improves classroom education throughout the institution. (Ms. Pink)

The literature, as articulated by Swarniti (2021), emphasizes the principal's role in providing directions, fostering willingness among educational staff, and maintaining open two-way communication. This highlights the importance of principals in monitoring teaching and learning, setting clear expectations for teachers, and subsequently improving learner academic performance.

Participants from a variety of educational institutions confirmed that principals use a range of tactics, such as giving instructions, giving feedback, and assigning tasks, to support efficient teaching and learning. Fruit

Primary's Ms. Pear underlined how important it is to build a common vision for teaching and learning and to communicate objectives clearly.

Distributed Instructional Leadership

The study's conclusions attest to the fact that every principal in each school demonstrated a high degree of dispersed instructional leadership. This cooperative method, which is based on shared decision-making, mutual trust, and curricular expertise, empowers educators and develops their leadership potential, which has a favourable impact on learner achievement.

Shape Primary's Mr. Oval emphasised the value of distribution, emphasising that running a school is a team effort. With ongoing oversight and assistance, principals are encouraged to assign responsibilities to managers of departments, educators, and deputy principals. According to Bush (2018a), distributed management gives educators more freedom to hone their leadership skills. Learning attainment is positively impacted when dispersed leadership endeavours are combined with trust and involving followers in making choices. The results highlight how important it is for principals to provide their staff members different leadership responsibilities in order to foster a cooperative and empowered learning environment (Sibanda, 2018).

Monitoring Teaching and Learning

Based on participant replies, it was clear that principals kept a close eye on learner achievement, teacher effectiveness, and curricular alignment while monitoring teaching and learning. Participants' satisfaction with their principals' monitoring procedures revealed how well these practices had impacted teacher development and, in turn, the academic success of their learners.

According to Mr. Onion of Vegetable Primary, principals' participation in evaluating lesson plans, curricular materials, and assessments guarantees conformity with academic standards. As stressed by Ms. Red, the Department Head of Colour Primary, keeping an eye on learners' books gives principals helpful criticism that points out their strong points and places for development. Regarding this, she stated:

Every term, the principle oversees the learners' workbooks to ensure that the curriculum is covered. Additionally, the principal gives principals constructive feedback that identifies their areas of strength and growth. (Ms. Green)

The benefits of monitoring teaching and learning for learner achievement are highlighted in the research. Effective teaching tactics and classroom activities are supported when principals engage in regular discussions with teachers and provide ongoing professional growth (Imron, Hadi, Wiyono, Gunawan, Saputra, Perdana & Abbas, 2021). This study's proof of principals' active participation in the monitoring process shows their dedication to comprehending the dynamics of teaching and learning and creating an atmosphere that supports ongoing development. According to Naidoo (2019), principals' knowledge of the teaching and learning process makes it possible to effectively monitor learners' progress, which enhances instructional activities. Participants' agreement upholds principals' direct supervision of teachers' and learners' work, creating a procedure consistent with good leadership in education.

Promoting teacher professional development

The information from the four schools under investigation shows that principals are actively involved in supporting teachers' professional development. All of the participants believed that the school should foster an atmosphere that supports teachers' professional development. As previously said, professional development gives teachers the tools they need to improve the quality of their education. Principals took great care to make sure principals attended training courses and seminars in order to improve their knowledge and abilities, which in turn improved learner achievement.

All of these viewpoints support the idea that principals value professional development in their schools and that all staff members actively participate in it. The Principal of Colour Primary described their role in supporting professional development through the Quality Management System (QMS) programme, which includes identifying teachers' challenges for professional growth and creating an annual plan for teacher development. Teachers agreed, emphasising that principals encourage them to attend workshops, exchange ideas, and grow together. The primary objective, as principals have stressed, is still improving learner achievement. This is consistent with literature, which highlights the principals' instructional leadership as a crucial tool for impact. Syomwene (2018) and Kilag (2023) have provided scholarly contributions that elaborate on the transforming effect of professional development on teachers. This leads to greater competence and confidence, which in turn favourably influences the implementation of curriculum and learner outcomes.

In summary, the principals' deliberate efforts to improve learner achievement can be seen in their support of professional growth, the construction of a pleasant educational environment, and the provision of opportunities for collaboration growth as professionals. This pledge is consistent with the leadership in education paradigm developed by Hallinger and Murphy (1985).

Understanding of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)

All of the participants understand the importance of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), and principals play a crucial role in motivating their staff members to participate in PLCs in order to improve their academic performance. PLCs give teachers the chance to grow personally by enabling efficient problem-solving and information exchange.

This is consistent with the body of existing literature, which depicts PLCs as essential for raising learner achievement through direct improvements in instruction and learning, the development of strong teacher-learner relationships, and ongoing instructional reflection (Serviss, 2021). Shape Primary's deputy principle reaffirmed this idea by stressing the need of introspection and self-improvement, the creation of mentorship programmes, and the encouraging of involvement in outside opportunities for professional growth.

Participants generally agree that principals, using a variety of tactics, including as actively promoting Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) and facilitating professional development for educators, have a critical role to play in improving the performance of learners. PLCs' collaborative structure shows promise as a powerful tool for teacher development, since it enhances learners' knowledge, critical thinking skills, behaviours, and general competences (Wongyai and Patphol, 2019). Essentially, in order for a school to succeed, principals need to sincerely urge teachers to participate in PLCs.

Rewards and recognition

Every responder emphasised that their principals' use of incentives and recognition is a calculated tactic to support instructional leadership. This strategy was crucial in inspiring teachers and learners to work hard to meet a variety of learning objectives. This was a tactic used by principals to inspire motivation among the learner body. Acknowledgments for exceptional pupils not only act as personal boosters but also create an atmosphere that is favourable to efficient instruction. For instance, the principal of Vegetable Primary confirmed that academic excellence certificates are awarded each term, encouraging learners to always strive for progress.

Enhancing total learner attainment was stated as the main goal of rewarding and recognising principals as well as learners. According to Turkoglu and Cansoy (2018), principals use reward schemes to recognise pupils who perform well in the classroom and at the school. The study's principals were crucial in encouraging teachers and learners and creating an atmosphere that helped learners do better academically. Principals all agreed that motivation is essential to the functioning of the organisation because it helps everyone involved understand their duties and objectives and makes it easier for different objectives to be

accomplished.

A variety of methods were used to administer acknowledgment and incentives, such as awarding trophies, distributing diplomas, and praising people at assemblies.

Barriers to discharging instructional leadership practices

The results show that there are a number of obstacles preventing school principals from putting instructional leadership methods into practice successfully. Principals showed that they could recognise and identify these obstacles, which enabled them to identify specific areas where successful implementation of instructional leadership methods is impeded. For example, Ms. Blue of Colour Primary outlined the socioeconomic obstacles that many learners encounter, originating from low-income families and underprivileged backgrounds, and how they affect the standard of instruction and learning.

Ms. Plum of Fruit Primary added that:

Teacher unions interrupt the curriculum with their activities, which leads to a great deal of disturbance in the classroom. Principals utilise these activities as a justification for skipping curriculum-based lessons. Thus, this hinders both teaching and learning. (Mrs. Plum)

Teacher unions are disruptive forces, according to Ms. Plum of Fruit Primary, who linked their actions to interruptions in the curriculum. Mr. Garlic of Vegetable Primary identified budget and resource constraints as a barrier to the use of instructional practices.

The main conclusion is that these obstacles seriously hinder school principals' capacity to carry out their instructional leadership duties, with an emphasis on the difficulties presented by educators and learners.

Principals' attempts to overcome barriers to instructional leadership practices

Every member agreed that they would handle internal issues and disagreements in a professional way. Various approaches were utilised to address obstacles presented by learners, such as providing more time for learners who needed it and working with outside partners to expand educational initiatives.

The participants placed a strong emphasis on using fair solutions and following set procedures to resolve internal issues. In order to prevent issues, Ms. Plum of Fruit Primary stressed following the Personnel Administrative Measures (PAM) document and avoiding common sense. This strategy is demonstrated by the period set aside for notification and circulars about union operations. In order to reduce disruptions to teaching and learning, Naicker, Chikoko and Mthiyane (2013) support principled positions against disrupting teacher organisation campaigns. The principal's emphasis on timely resource provision to prevent interruptions during educational activities was emphasised by the department head of Vegetable Primary.

Overall, the results point to a multimodal strategy that principals should use to get past obstacles. This strategy is consistent with research that highlights the need to safeguard educational materials time and strategically manage resources in order to achieve successful teaching and learning (Leaf and Odhiambo, 2017; Hunter, Sonnemann, and Haywood, 2022).

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

This study has shown that, despite facing difficult operational environments, some schools are nevertheless performing effectively. All four principals understand the significance of their responsibilities in improving learner academic performance. They are dedicated to make teaching and learning the centre piece of the institution's mission. This statement agrees with Maponya (2020), who mentioned that the critical role of the principals is to engage in successful instructional leadership to help the educators to meet expectations in order to improve learner performance. These principals constantly observe, encourage and support the

teachers in ensuring that teaching and learning take place effectively.

The principals of Vegetable and Fruit Primary agreed that it is essential for them to set a good example by actively participating in teaching activities. This serves as a suitable example for other educators to follow. This assists the principals to understand the classroom dynamics firsthand so that they better understand the difficulties the teachers confront during teaching and learning. The commitment to teaching concurs with Hallinger and Murphy (1985) when they said high visibility is an essential component of instructional leadership.

All of the participants agreed that the principals were acting as instructional leaders by putting the goals and ambitions of the schools front and centre. They always prioritise teaching and learning and protect instructional time. This concurs with Maponya (2020) who noted that a strong foundation for later functions is provided by well-crafted school objectives and vision. Teachers may perform more effectively and motivate learners to put in more effort to enhance their academic achievement if the institution's mission and goal are clear (Dowd, 2018).

Participants in each of the four schools highlighted the importance of school leadership in creating a conducive environment that is favourable to effective teaching and learning. Mr. Spinach from Vegetable Primary, acknowledged the beneficial effects of a supportive learning environment on learners' performance. This concurs with Cuban (2020) who mentioned that it is important to create a supportive school environment, because it promotes successful teaching and learning.

Mr. Oval of Shape Primary mentioned the value of distribution, highlighting that running a school is a team effort. According to Bush (2018a), distributed management gives educators an opportunity to enhance their leadership skills. This highlights the importance of providing teachers different leadership responsibilities in order to foster a cooperative and empowered learning environment. Sibanda (2018), noted that learning achievement is positively impacted when distributed leadership activities are shared with trust and involving followers in making choices.

All the participants acknowledge the important role played by their principals in monitoring teachers and supporting them in order to improve learner academic performance. This concurs with Imron et al., (2021), who mentioned that effective teaching strategies and classroom activities are supported when principals involve in regular discussions with teachers and provide ongoing professional growth.

All of the participants believed that the school should foster an atmosphere that supports teachers' professional development. Principal of Colour Primary described their role in supporting professional development through the Quality Management System (QMS) programme, which includes identifying teachers' challenges for professional growth and creating an annual plan for teacher development.

All four principals ensured that they avoid anything that might interrupt teaching and learning in their schools. They placed a strong emphasis on using fair solutions and following set procedures to resolve internal issues. Ms. Plum of Fruit Primary stressed the importance of following the Personnel Administrative Measures (PAM) document and avoiding common sense. This agrees with Naicker et al. (2013) who support principled positions against disrupting teacher organisation campaigns.

As a result of the principals' comments that their usage of various leadership philosophies has improved learner accomplishment in their schools, this study has also demonstrated the significant correlation that exists between effective leadership and learners' academic success. Leadership, according to Hoadley (2007), is essential to enhancing learner outcomes. Relationship building elements including dedication, collaboration, teamwork, and an atmosphere of encouragement all play a significant role in the four schools' outstanding results.

CONCLUSION

The study came to the conclusion that principals of schools must develop their own conceptions and perspectives on leadership in education. The principal of the school can use instructional management to support high-quality teaching and learning. Principles must comprehend the notion of instructional leadership in order to support good teaching and learning, since doing so will enable them to behave in ways that advance educational leadership.

This study has shown that for the school to be successful, the principal must exhibit leadership qualities that enable for everyone to participate in decision-making and that they can all learn from. It has also demonstrated how critical it is to assist and advance educators.

According to this research, using a variety of leadership philosophies is the key to running a successful school. Positive effects on learners' academic achievement have been formed by the mixtures of leadership styles that four principals have used. We believe that this approach of utilising many leadership philosophies is beneficial as these principals are effectively implementing these philosophies. All of these statements were verified by several individuals both throughout the data collection and analysis phases. According to the study's findings, every school should have a principal who employs principles of leadership that support efficient instruction and learning.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to sustain favourable outcomes, we recommend that all school principals implement instructional leadership in their institutions. This is because instructional leadership fosters an environment that makes it possible for educators and learners to collaborate effectively during instruction. According to this body of research, principals are essential to the success of any school. Therefore, in order to become proficient in the refreshed Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) curriculum and remain up to date with current practices, it is recommended that all principals teach topic courses.

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