



Using Instructional Supervision to Improve Learners' Performance in Eswatini High Schools



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ABSTRACT

The primary objective of this study was to determine how instructional leadership is being used empirically in Eswatini and to establish whether it significantly impacts the performance of high school learners. This research employed a qualitative research methodology to gather data for the investigation. The sample comprised five principals and five deputy principals of five high schools in the Mbabane Hhohho Region, Eswatini. The qualitative data was analyzed using thematic analysis. Weber's instructional leadership model guided the study's theoretical framework. From the first research question, the findings revealed that instructional leadership improves school performance, provides adequate support structures for learners, helps manage school resources, and helps monitor and evaluate teaching and learning. The study suggested strategies that instructional supervisors can use to improve student performance by monitoring Curriculum and Instruction, collaborative leadership, and contextualizing instructional practices. Improving communication within the school and encouraging continuous professional development and parent involvement can also be helpful. The study concluded that instructional supervision is not effectively practiced in Eswatini schools. Therefore, the study recommends the appointment of principals on merit, parental involvement, and continuous staff development for principals. The study adds to the body of knowledge on instructional supervision in Eswatini. Several principals are unaware of instructional supervision in Eswatini, and in cases where they are, its implementation is minimal and does not fully constitute instructional supervision. School inspectors are informed on the part of the policy that guides instructional supervision in schools.

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INTRODUCTION

Research in Eswatini has shown that most schools lack instructional leadership, as most leaders are appointed to positions without experience.¹ This aligned with reports in the Times of Swaziland in 2018, suggesting a national deterioration in the quality of final examination results in high schools nationwide. The result was an outcry from parents and other stakeholders, with many citing a dearth of school

¹ L. Simelane, "Secondary School Leadership Practices in the Implementation of the Swaziland Education Sector Policy on Equity and Inclusion" (University of Eswatini, Kingdom of Eswatini., 2016).

instructional leadership.² Nsibande et al., observed that school leaders in Eswatini need regular, continuous professional development (CPD) to acquire skills to manage the managerial and instructional tasks and hopefully improve student attainment and school outcomes.³ The urgency and importance of continuous professional development and training should be prioritized as a need for immediate action.

Instructional leadership has since been regarded as the most significant leadership model that all school principals should adopt. They are expected to offer direction and use a high degree of impact on humans and different things to achieve the school's goals.⁴

As defined by Hallinger et al. and Neumerski, instructional leadership is an approach in which principals consistently focus their efforts on the core activities of teaching, learning, and schooling so that students can achieve academic success.⁵ It is the effort of the school's top management team to improve teaching and learning. It usually involves creating an environment where teachers can work with children and get the best outcomes from them. It includes all leadership activities that indirectly affect student learning.⁶ Gumus et al. concur that it is a type of leadership in which teaching and learning are significant components of school achievement.⁷ The study's objective was to establish how instructional supervision is used by schools to improve learner performance. Carrying out this in Eswatini was essential, as instructional supervision is lacking in schools, and there is also a dearth of literature on it.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Two central questions guide this literature review.

How does using instructional supervision lead to improved learner performance in school?

There has long been controversy about whether instructional supervision impacts school performance, often measured by student performance. Several sources in the literature provide evidence of the positive and negative effects of instructional leadership on learner performance.⁸ Previous research documents have shown that instructional supervision positively correlates with student performance.

It has been found to influence the behavior of teachers positively and, consequently, that of the students as they work very closely with them.⁹ The instructional supervision ability of principals and deputies in creating a conducive school environment has been credited as a catalyst in student performance and overall achievement. Similarly, how school principals relate to significant teachers has been found to improve their performance and the students.¹⁰

What strategies do instructional supervisors use to improve learner performance in schools?

Monitoring the Curriculum and Instruction

Supervision and evaluation of teaching and learning improve overall teacher and student achievements. Principals, as leaders, must be ready to support teachers so that they can successfully fulfill their roles in teaching and learning. They must also implement adequate supervision systems to help teachers improve

² Bongani D Bantwini and Moeketsi Letseka, "South African Teachers Caught between Nation Building and Global Demands: Is There a Way out/Forward?," *Educational Studies* 52, no. 4 (2016): 329–45.

³ Nqobile Ndzinisa, Maxwell Vusumuzi Mthembu, and Gciniwe N Nsibande, "Exploring Academic Readiness for ICT Integration Pedagogy at the University of Eswatini," in *Higher Education ICT Integration in Africa* (Routledge, n.d.), 121–39.

⁴ Qiao Zheng et al., "What Aspects of Principal Leadership Are Most Highly Correlated with School Outcomes in China?," *Educational Administration Quarterly* 53, no. 3 (2017): 409–47.

⁵ Philip Hallinger, Sedat Gümüş, and Mehmet Şükrü Bellibaş, "Are Principals Instructional Leaders yet? A Science Map of the Knowledge Base on Instructional Leadership, 1940–2018," *Scientometrics* 122, no. 3 (2020): 1629–50; Christine M Neumerski et al., "Restructuring Instructional Leadership: How Multiple-Measure Teacher Evaluation Systems Are Redefining the Role of the School Principal," *The Elementary School Journal* 119, no. 2 (2018): 270–97.

⁶ Philip Hallinger, Sedat Gümüş, and Mehmet Şükrü Bellibaş, "Are Principals Instructional Leaders yet? A Science Map of the Knowledge Base on Instructional Leadership, 1940–2018," *Scientometrics* 122, no. 3 (March 30, 2020): 1629–50, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11192-020-03360-5>.

⁷ Sedat Gumus et al., "A Systematic Review of Studies on Leadership Models in Educational Research from 1980 to 2014," *Educational Management Administration & Leadership* 46, no. 1 (2018): 25–48.

⁸ Yu Liu et al., "Analysis of the Causes of Inferiority Feelings Based on Social Media Data with Word2Vec," *Scientific Reports* 12, no. 1 (March 25, 2022): 5218, <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-022-09075-2>.

⁹ Vartika Dutta and Sangeeta Sahney, "Relation of Principal Instructional Leadership, School Climate, Teacher Job Performance and Student Achievement," *Journal of Educational Administration* 60, no. 2 (2022): 148–66.

¹⁰ Liu et al., "Analysis of the Causes of Inferiority Feelings Based on Social Media Data with Word2Vec."

their instruction.¹¹ When instructional leaders regularly monitor the curriculum, they can assess critical components such as the design of instructional material, teaching methods, student outcomes, and overall effectiveness.¹²

A study in Mandalay, Myanmar, concluded that the absence of leadership with content knowledge about the curriculum and its implementation was an ingredient for poor school instruction.¹³ Teachers believe that the principal's lack of content and understanding of the curriculum limits the school's ability to adapt to educational advancements. In contrast, when leaders are well-versed and comfortable with the curriculum, this aids their work, as they can make informed progressive decisions that support their daily operations.¹⁴

Collaborative Leadership

Collaborative leadership, a crucial aspect of organizational dynamics, is known by various names, such as shared leadership, facilitative leadership, adaptive leadership, integral leadership, and catalytic leadership. It revolves around equitable power distribution among individuals, groups, and organizations.¹⁵ A study in Tanzania highlighted the impact of leadership type on teacher retention in the schools run by the Ministry of Education and Secondary Training MoEST.¹⁶ Lack of collaborative decision-making was critical to teacher dissatisfaction and decreased learner performance.¹⁷

Effective collaborative leadership practices are recognized for nurturing inclusive cultures, leveraging diverse perspectives, and fostering innovation and adaptability.¹⁸ A key obstacle to the practical application of collaborative leadership lies in the scarcity of empirical research on its conceptualization within contemporary organizational contexts. Furthermore, there is a dearth of scholarship examining the impact of collaborative leadership on contemporary workplace outcomes and a deficiency in the capacity to monitor and evaluate its application adequately.¹⁹

School Climate and Discipline

A study in Nigeria on how a school climate impacts learner performance concluded that school climate depends on how members inside and outside the school observe the school. A positive school perception by leaders, teachers, students, and stakeholders creates a positive school climate.²⁰ The study findings indicated that although creating a positive school climate is crucial for student performance, many schools in Kano, Nigeria, and the world need help implementing this instructional task, resulting in leaders, teachers, and students suffering from behavioral and mental health issues.²¹

Schools and communities must collaborate to provide equal learning opportunities for students and produce well-rounded individuals equipped with education and lifelong skills.²² The absence of these partnerships robs schools not only of collaborations but also of powerful tools that, when used effectively,

¹¹ Nazmi Xhomara, *Instructional Leadership and Effective Teaching and Learning* (Nova Science Publishers, 2021).

¹² Peyman Nouraey et al., "Educational Program and Curriculum Evaluation Models: A Mini Systematic Review of the Recent Trends," *Universal Journal of Educational Research* 8, no. 9 (September 2020): 4048–55, <https://doi.org/10.13189/ujer.2020.080930>.

¹³ Rhia Monica Nolasco and Heildenberg Dimarucot, "Leadership Content Knowledge and Instructional Leadership in Selected International Schools in Mandalay, Myanmar: Analyzing Teacher's Perception," *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science* 8, no. 5 (2024): 147–80.

¹⁴ Afzal Sayed Munna, "Instructional Leadership and Role of Module Leaders," *International Journal of Educational Reform* 32, no. 1 (2023): 38–54.

¹⁵ Miriam Y. Perkins, "Beyond the Building: Unleashing Leadership Potential in the Graduate Classroom," *Teaching Theology & Religion* 24, no. 2 (June 30, 2021): 93–106, <https://doi.org/10.1111/teth.12586>.

¹⁶ Condrada Stephano Mpangala and Perpetua John Urrio, "School Leadership Styles and Teachers' Satisfaction: A Case of Secondary Schools in Kigamboni District, Tanzania," *East African Journal of Management and Business Studies* 4, no. 2 (2024): 1–12.

¹⁷ Pudensiana Tarimo and Chrispina Lekule, "Effect of Instructional Supervision on Education Quality in Secondary Schools in Kaham District, Tanzania," *East African Journal of Education Studies* 7, no. 1 (2024): 216–30.

¹⁸ Dilshad Ahmed Salman and Khairi Ali Auso, "[Retracted] The Sequential Influence of Creative Leadership and Organizational Environment on Strategic Performance," *Journal of Environmental and Public Health* 2022, no. 1 (2022): 5948806.

¹⁹ Tino Endres et al., "It Matters How to Recall—Task Differences in Retrieval Practice," *Instructional Science* 48, no. 6 (2020): 699–728.

²⁰ Osama F Al-Kurdi, Ramzi El-Haddadeh, and Tillal Eldabi, "The Role of Organisational Climate in Managing Knowledge Sharing among Academics in Higher Education," *International Journal of Information Management* 50 (2020): 217–27.

²¹ Al-Kurdi, El-Haddadeh, and Eldabi, "The Role of Organisational Climate in Managing Knowledge Sharing among Academics in Higher Education."

²² Katharina-Theresa Lindner et al., "Do Teachers Favor the Inclusion of All Students? A Systematic Review of Primary Schoolteachers' Attitudes towards Inclusive Education," *European Journal of Special Needs Education* 38, no. 6 (2023): 766–87.

can enhance students' social, emotional, and intellectual development to gain success both in school and in society.²³

This collaborative relationship challenges traditional ideas about schools being the only center where students can get knowledge and supports the narrative that knowledge building is enhanced when schools coexist as a mechanism for social transformation.²⁴ Working together pays dividends for schools and communities, as the school's engagement with communities could directly or indirectly improve the quality of outcomes.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Weber's 1996 instructional leadership model guided the study.²⁵ The model was relevant because it outlines the significant issues principals must address daily for their schools' positive outcomes. It manages six influential leaders' activities: setting academic goals, organizing the instructional program, hiring personnel, supervising, evaluating, protecting instructional time and programs, creating a climate for learning, monitoring achievement, and evaluating programs. The model emphasizes the importance of a collaborative approach to achieving the school's goals.

METHODOLOGY

The study's ontological assumption was that instructional leaders influence student performance. Ontology concerns the nature of reality and is an area of philosophy involved with the nature of being and what exists.²⁶ The study aimed to gain insights into the multiple realities and interpretations of principals and deputy principals by interacting with them and obtaining their lived experiences of instructional leadership to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon.²⁷ It was particularly appropriate for the study as it observed and described subjects' behavior scientifically regarding situation variables, thereby enabling an in-depth understanding of their realities.²⁸ Data were collected from a sample of principals and deputy principals through interviews on their lived experiences as instructional leaders.

Site Selection and Sampling

The study focused on high school principals and deputies in the Hhohho District in Mbabane, Eswatini. The interpretive design was chosen as it complements purposive sampling, a strategy allowing the deliberate selection of participants who fit the specific selection criteria. Six participants, comprising three schools, principals, and deputy principals, were selected because they met the inclusion criteria as designated instructional leaders, an approach confirmed by Campbell et al., 2020.²⁹ Data provided by the Hhohho District Education Department, which oversees schools in the district where the study was conducted, was used to select the schools purposefully. School choice selection assumes that instructional practices vary with the type of school, which could include, among other factors, the whole teaching system, learning processes, policies, and the learning environment.³⁰ Cresswell's 2014 theory guided the sample size, which is determined by the research design used for the study.

Data Collection

The semi-structured interview guide, a collaborative tool, provided a robust structure for the in-depth interviews used to collect data. Casual face-to-face conversations were used to obtain in-depth data-rich narratives through open-ended questions, which, according to Rutledge & Hogg, are compelling and

²³ Jeongsuk Kim, Carolyn Gentle-Genitty, and Jangmin Kim, "Ecological Correlates Contributing to Reporting of School Delinquency among Caribbean Adolescents," *School Psychology International* 41, no. 4 (2020): 331–50.

²⁴ Kim, Gentle-Genitty, and Kim, "Ecological Correlates Contributing to Reporting of School Delinquency among Caribbean Adolescents."

²⁵ James R. Weber, "Leading the Instructional Programme," in *School Leadership*, ed. S. Smith and P. Piele (Clearinghouse of Educational Management, 1996), 253–78.

²⁶ Julius Sim et al., "Can Sample Size in Qualitative Research Be Determined a Priori?," *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* 21, no. 5 (September 3, 2018): 619–34, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13645579.2018.1454643>.

²⁷ Godswill Makombe, "An Expose of the Relationship between Paradigm, Method and Design in Research," 2017.

²⁸ Makombe, "An Expose of the Relationship between Paradigm, Method and Design in Research."

²⁹ Steve Campbell et al., "Purposive Sampling: Complex or Simple? Research Case Examples," *Journal of Research in Nursing* 25, no. 8 (2020): 652–61.

³⁰ Charu Jain and Narayan Prasad, "Quality of Secondary Education in India," *Quality of Secondary Education in India*, 2018.

engaging to get the diverse experiences of the participants.³¹ In-depth interviews were suitable for creating a trusting atmosphere. They allowed prompt and follow-up questions to focus on the core questions and explore the participants' life experiences as instructional leaders in detail, perfect for the data quality required for the study. They also allowed audio-recorded responses.³²

Data Analysis and Interpretation

The collected data were meticulously transcribed, tabulated, and analyzed using Yin's five phases (compiling, disassembling, reassembling, interpreting, and concluding) to identify the emerging themes.³³ Keywords were grouped and classified according to themes derived from recurring phrases during data collection. The themes that captured the main ideas from the transcript were then classified, ensuring a thorough analysis and instilling confidence in the validity of the study's findings.³⁴

Expert reviewers were consulted for their knowledge, expertise, and experience in the field to provide invaluable feedback and suggest modifications to the themes, enhancing the quality of the research.³⁵ The researcher also member-checked the procedures by revisiting each participant's interview transcript to confirm the accuracy of the accounts and interpretations, clarify or amend responses as needed, and validate the results, thereby ensuring confidence in the data's accuracy and the absence of researcher bias.³⁶

Throughout the analysis, the researcher used a thematic map to visualize the interconnectedness and patterns between the key themes, providing a clear and structured overview of the data. This involved examining messages through textual analysis found in various mediums and analyzing them in the social contexts in which they are situated.³⁷ To address the risks posed by potential biases and subjectivity in qualitative data analysis and interpretation, the researcher and the expert reviewers undertook a rigorous process of defining, testing, and validating the variables as a team, providing reassurance about the accuracy of the data. The researcher employed data triangulation, a robust technique in qualitative research, to minimize biases that can arise during data gathering, reporting, and analysis. This approach significantly bolstered the study's reliability and validity.³⁸

Ethical Considerations

The University of KwaZulu Natal Research Ethics Committee rigorously approved the planned research before the researcher contacted or involved any potential participants. This crucial step ensured that the research was conducted ethically and with full respect for the participants' rights and privacy.³⁹ Using this permission, the researcher visited the Ministry of Education Department in Eswatini, which oversees the schools in the Hhohho District in Mbabane, where the research was going to be conducted, to seek further permission to carry out the research in the country and within the schools.

After the school gatekeeper (MOET) granted permission, the researcher visited the targeted schools and explained the research to principals, deputies, and teachers to obtain their informed consent, as stipulated by Denscombe.⁴⁰ Participants were assured that their personal information would be kept confidential and that their identity would remain anonymous. They would be notified of their permission if there was any reason the researcher should publish their information as stipulated by Denscombe.⁴¹

³¹ Pamela B Rutledge and Jerri Lynn C Hogg, "In-depth Interviews," *The International Encyclopedia of Media Psychology*, 2020, 1–7.

³² Rutledge and Hogg, "In-depth Interviews."

³³ Robert K Yin, *Qualitative Research from Start to Finish* (Guilford publications, 2015).

³⁴ G. Machimbidzofa, "A Process Evaluation of Social Protection Policy in the Unconditional Cash Transfer Programme for Vulnerable People: A Case of Chipinge District, Manicaland Province, Zimbabwe," *Journal of Social and Humanities Studies* 1, no. 1 (2022): 13–26.

³⁵ Luke Laari, Desmond Kuupiel, and Christian Makafui Boso, "Mapping Research Evidence on Children Living with Autism Spectrum Disorders in Africa: A Scoping Review Protocol," *Journal of Pediatrics, Perinatology and Child Health* 6, no. 2 (2022): 245–53.

³⁶ Laari, Kuupiel, and Boso, "Mapping Research Evidence on Children Living with Autism Spectrum Disorders in Africa: A Scoping Review Protocol."

³⁷ Jeffrey A Smith, James Moody, and Jonathan H Morgan, "Network Sampling Coverage II: The Effect of Non-Random Missing Data on Network Measurement," *Social Networks* 48 (2017): 78–99.

³⁸ Sylvester Donkoh and J Mensah, "Application of Triangulation in Qualitative Research," *Journal of Applied Biotechnology and Bioengineering* 10, no. 1 (2023): 6–9.

³⁹ Jaap Bos, *Research Ethics for Students in the Social Sciences* (Springer Nature, 2020).

⁴⁰ M. Denscombe, *Good Research Guide Research Methods for Small-Scale Social Research*, 7th ed. (Open Univ. Press, 2021).

⁴¹ Denscombe, *Good Research Guide Research Methods for Small-Scale Social Research*.

PRESENTATION OF RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The value of instructional supervision in improving learner performance in schools

The researchers used interviews to elicit data from principals (P) and deputies (DP) on whether instructional supervision improved learner performance. The three schools were numbered A, B, and C. PA represents Principal A school, and DPB represents Deputy Principal B school. The themes that emerged from the first research question are discussed below.

Instructional Supervision improves School Performance.

The participants agreed that instructional supervision improved school performance even against the challenges they faced as schools.

PA, PB, and PC, our school mission and vision, promote school performance. We try to achieve this by supporting teaching and learning and prioritizing instructional tasks in the school, although we are still expected to do managerial roles.

DPA, DPB, and DPC indicated that they are tasked with planning, procuring, and distributing instructional resources to support teaching and learning. However, resource availability was different in their schools because of budgetary constraints. Learner performance is also enhanced when we supervise teachers in their lessons and track the students' progress.

Several studies have underscored the pivotal role of the principal in fostering effective schools.⁴² This aligns with Saleem et al., who argue that schools aim to promote teaching, learning, and student performance.⁴³ As instructional leaders, principals can improve school performance by supporting teachers directly and indirectly. Directly, they can create time to visit classes to observe the quality of teaching and support teachers with behavior issues.⁴⁴

Principals who are knowledgeable about instructional practice and actively involved in roles such as supervision and teacher evaluation bring out the best in their teachers and students. A key strategy they employ is holding regular meetings to discuss teachers' and students' views on instructional practices. This feedback is then used to design and implement effective strategies.⁴⁵

It helps in Monitoring and evaluating teaching and learning

The findings recognized that monitoring and evaluating instructional practices was necessary, but implementation varied widely among the schools. Schools with more consistent monitoring practices reported better-perceived student outcomes.

PA, PB, and PC concurred that monitoring and evaluating instructional practices was necessary but agreed that implementation was always a challenge. PB and PC said we seldom have time to monitor teaching and learning because of our many hats. We are busy with meetings. This should be the responsibility of deputy principals and teachers.

PA said, I try to monitor teaching and learning but sometimes struggle with constant changes to pedagogical issues because of lack of training. I end up relying on reports I get from the deputy principal.

DPA, DPB, and DPC were involved in monitoring instructional practices in their schools.

DPA and DPC found this challenging as they also had to plan for the classes they taught. They agreed that this overloaded them, compromised the quality of instruction in classrooms, and negatively affected learner performance.

⁴² Felicia Obioma Onoye, "Challenges Encountered by Principal in Improving Students' academic Performance in Secondary Schools in Isuikwuato Lga of Abia State," *UNIZIK Journal of Educational Research and Policy Studies* 10 (2022): 62–67.

⁴³ Amna Saleem, Farah Deeba, and Farah Latif Naz, "Role of Instructional Leadership on Teachers' Performance at College Level," *Pakistan Social Sciences Review* 4, no. 1 (2020): 1058–71.

⁴⁴ Onoye, "Challenges Encountered by Principal in Improving Students' academic Performance in Secondary Schools in Isuikwuato Lga of Abia State."

⁴⁵ Saleem, Deeba, and Naz, "Role of Instructional Leadership on Teachers' Performance at College Level."

Educational evaluation plays a crucial role in predicting and improving the quality of education in schools. One of its primary functions is to measure the achievement of learning objectives.⁴⁶ Schools use monitoring and evaluation to assess their general learning behaviors, quality, effectiveness, and educational outcomes. Monitoring can involve regular classroom observations, while evaluation can include standardized testing and student performance reviews. Schools with embedded monitoring and evaluation structures benefit from the rich feedback they receive. This feedback assists them in future planning and forecasting and contributes to educational policy matters.⁴⁷

It helps in managing school resources.

The findings underscore the critical role of resource management as an instructional leadership task that significantly impacts learner performance.

DPA, DPB, and DPC decried their struggle to manage resources. Sometimes, we fail to procure adequate resources and work with meager resources because of our limited budgets. Sometimes, we do not get the teachers we want and must juggle with untrained teachers or teach the classes ourselves, which affects learner performance.

Principals echoed their views. PB narrated how, as a government school, it relies on grants from the government, which usually cover a small portion of its budget.

PC acknowledged the benefits of working in a church school where they can attract teachers because of the extra incentives they enjoy compared to government schools.

Educational resources are assets and lifelines teachers and students can access in classrooms, schools, or community contexts to enhance their pedagogy and development.⁴⁸ The availability of resources has also been found to influence student outcomes. A high teacher-pupil ratio can overload human resources in a school, leading to teacher overload and burnout.⁴⁹ An analysis of A-level results in the UK showed that private schools had better outcomes than government schools because of their better infrastructure, human personnel, and access to learning material.⁵⁰

It provides adequate support structures for learners

The findings revealed that when instructional supervision is focused on learner performance, students receive adequate support structures to improve their outcomes.

PA, PB, DPA, and DPB agreed that their classrooms could benefit more from learner-centered approaches. There is a discrepancy between theory and practice in our classrooms, and we need more support in implementing student-centered learning.

Student-centered learning (SCL) involves schools adopting teaching and learning strategies that allow students to think and express themselves in problem-solving tasks that help them answer questions. This overshadows the traditional lecture method, where teachers are the only source of information and solutions in the classroom.⁵¹ Allowing students to think, participate, and engage equips them with the skills to investigate problems and work them out systematically before arriving at a solution.

However, leaders and teachers need to navigate several universal sticky points regarding learner-centered approaches when using this approach. These include the teacher's knowledge of learner-centered

⁴⁶ Mensah Prince Osiesi, "Educational Evaluation: Functions, Essence and Applications in Primary Schools' Teaching and Learning," *Society & Sustainability* 2, no. 2 (2020): 1–9.

⁴⁷ Osiesi, "Educational Evaluation: Functions, Essence and Applications in Primary Schools' Teaching and Learning."

⁴⁸ Shannon L Navy et al., "Accessed or Latent Resources? Exploring New Secondary Science Teachers' Networks of Resources," *Journal of Research in Science Teaching* 57, no. 2 (2020): 184–208, 186.

⁴⁹ Sophia Madiekolo. Ndlovu, "The Role of Circuit Managers in the Professional Development of School Principals" (University of Pretoria (South Africa), 2017).

⁵⁰ Morag Henderson et al., "Private Schooling, Subject Choice, Upper Secondary Attainment and Progression to University," *Oxford Review of Education* 46, no. 3 (May 3, 2020): 295–312, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03054985.2019.1669551>.

⁵¹ Duratul Ain Tholibon et al., "The Factors of Students' Involvement on Student-Centered Learning Method," *International Journal of Evaluation and Research in Education* 11, no. 4 (2022): 1637–46.

instruction, large class sizes, time, and inadequate resources. These challenges can hinder the effective implementation of learner-centered instruction.⁵²

Strategies that instructional supervisors can use to improve learner performance in schools.

The second research question sought to find strategies that instructional supervisors can use to improve learner performance in schools. The themes that emerged are discussed below.

Contextualizing instructional practices

When quizzed on the strategies they could use to increase learner performance in school, the school principals leaned toward the ability to understand the school's context and adapt instructional practices to it.

PA, PB, DPB, and DPC said the effectiveness of our instructional leadership practice is heavily context-dependent, suggesting a need to develop and formulate flexible, adaptable leadership approaches. A strategy that may work in one school may fail in another.

The schools' contexts vary remarkably, as seen by how educational policies that have succeeded in one school can fail dismally in another. The variations in the conceptions of leadership effectiveness have been found to depend on the cultural, socio-economic, and political factors shaping the educational context.⁵³ A school's context heavily influences its policy processes and choices within and outside the organization. School leaders need to be guided by their context's possibilities and limitations when constructing, translating, interpreting, and enacting their policies.⁵⁴

PC, DPA, DPC, and PC all agreed that they may need to do more as leaders to understand the connections between context, leadership, teaching, and learning and how that can impact learner performance. Understanding this may also help us decide which roles to prioritize.

Earlier research findings show how school leadership's influence on teacher performance and student learning, with due consideration to external contextual factors, has determined the school's direction.⁵⁵ This was supported by Pashiardis and Johansson (2021), who argued that external contextual factors influenced the leaders' approaches to setting the school's vision, setting expectations and policies, and implementing their strategies. Although more recent research suggests a growing consensus that no single prescription exists for effective school performance, it has reinforced the importance of context and culture as critical factors that mold the perspectives and practices of school leaders.⁵⁶

While the importance of context in influencing school leaders cannot be underscored, school leadership practices must be more adaptable and flexible to allow leaders to thrive and exhibit different behaviors in different situations.⁵⁷ The rules must not be cast in stone, but instructional decisions should be made depending on the situation's demands; it should not be a one-size-fits-all approach.

Collaborative Leadership

Based on the research findings, the researcher was convinced that collaborative leadership approaches could significantly improve learner performance.

PA, PB, and PC all confirmed they were guilty of being too cautious about implementing collaborative leadership. We hesitate to delegate some responsibilities because we fear being held accountable should things go wrong.

⁵² Sylvester Donkoh and Albert Amoakwah, "Use and Challenges of Learner-Centered Pedagogy: Basic School Teachers' Perspective," *European Journal of Education and Pedagogy* 5, no. 1 (February 24, 2024): 66–71, <https://doi.org/10.24018/ejedu.2024.5.1.774>.

⁵³ Simon Clarke and Tom O'donoghue, "Educational Leadership and Context: A Rendering of an Inseparable Relationship," *British Journal of Educational Studies* 65, no. 2 (2017): 167–82.

⁵⁴ Clarke and O'donoghue, "Educational Leadership and Context: A Rendering of an Inseparable Relationship."

⁵⁵ Clarke and O'donoghue, "Educational Leadership and Context: A Rendering of an Inseparable Relationship."

⁵⁶ Petros Pashiardis and Olof Johansson, "Successful and Effective Schools: Bridging the Gap," *Educational Management Administration & Leadership* 49, no. 5 (September 17, 2021): 690–707, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143220932585>.

⁵⁷ Philip Hallinger, "Bringing Context out of the Shadows of Leadership," *Educational Management Administration & Leadership* 46, no. 1 (January 2, 2018): 5–24, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143216670652>.

The literature agrees that collaboration and team-building skills are desirable and essential for school principals to improve the quality of learning.⁵⁸ These skills foster a culture of cooperation and communication among principals, teachers, and students, leading to improved learning outcomes. While instructional leadership is theoretically a collaborative process, the absence of some stakeholders in practice, particularly in goal setting and vision creation, is a common issue. Research has shown that schools that embrace more collaborative approaches achieve better outcomes. Despite the strong support for a culture of collaboration in several research studies, the findings often do not reflect a collaborative culture in goal setting with deputies and teachers, indicating a need for change in the school principal's role.⁵⁹

DPA, DPB, and DPC indicated that although they yearned to perform more responsibilities formally in the school, it is not entirely up to them. Our roles are entirely at the discretion of the principal, the designated instructional leader in the school.

Collaborative leadership in goal setting is a crucial 21st-century educational approach where all stakeholders in a school engage in a common task and work together to achieve a shared learning goal.⁶⁰ This approach, a departure from the traditional model that places the sole responsibility for running the school on the principal, has significant benefits. Recent perspectives in literature have shifted this narrative, recognizing goal setting as a collaborative effort involving principals, deputies, teachers, and other stakeholders.⁶¹ The benefits of this approach are promising, including a more comprehensive understanding of the school's needs, increased buy-in from all stakeholders, and a more effective and sustainable implementation of the set goals, instilling a sense of optimism about its potential impact.

Professional Development

The issue of continuous professional development proved to be a thorn in the flesh for most schools.

PA, PB, and PC agreed that its importance cannot be overstated. However, we all struggle to implement it for various reasons. The Eswatini Education and Training Sector Policy (2018) is prominent in the professional development of school staff.

DPA and DPC all concurred and highlighted that MOET policy prioritizes maintaining high levels of service provision in schools, as documented in their objectives. School principals, deputies, and heads of departments are to be regularly provided with ongoing support and managerial skills to enhance the quality of curriculum delivery. However, this has not been the case.

DPB and DPA, we struggle to tick that box because we cannot just create time as a school. We need our teachers to complete the syllabus and get them to teach during weekends and holidays.

PA and DPA revealed that when they sent their teachers for training, the classroom instructional quality improved.

Teachers who receive regular professional development training feel more equipped to support student performance, underlining the critical role of continuous professional development in improving the quality of education.⁶²

PB and DPC highlighted that we want to send our teachers for staff development training, but sometimes, we cannot get the courses we want as a school. In other instances, our teachers decline offers to attend as they feel the training is not beneficial.

⁵⁸ Refi Meilia Aryani and Rudi Haryadi, "Principals' implementation of Collaborative Leadership to Improve Learning Quality," *EduFisika: Jurnal Pendidikan Fisika* 8, no. 1 (2023): 6–15.

⁵⁹ W A De Jong et al., "Collaborative Spirit: Understanding Distributed Leadership Practices in and around Teacher Teams," *Teaching and Teacher Education* 123 (2023): 103977.

⁶⁰ Asly Nicole P Cagatan and Erlinda A Quirap, "Collaborative Learning and Learners' Academic Performance," n.d.

⁶¹ Cagatan and Quirap, "Collaborative Learning and Learners' Academic Performance."

⁶² Amare Asegedom and Kassahun Weldemariyam, "Academics and Their Respective Institution Practices of Continuous Professional Development: A Case of Hawassa University, Ethiopia," *Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies in Education* 13, no. 1 (2024): 69–89.

Several researchers argue that while CPD is beneficial for self-development, it needs to be aligned with the needs and competencies of teachers and the school, not just to fulfill a requirement. School staff members can only be committed to programs they perceive positively. In some instances, conflicts, a lack of resources, and compromises between the school and the staff on when they should attend CPD have not helped address these resource constraints. Their advocacy for more resources and innovative solutions can make a significant difference.⁶³

Parental Involvement

All participants underscored the importance of parental involvement in improving learner performance.

PA, PB, and PC said that when parents are involved in our school's activities, we experience fewer challenges when supporting student performance.

PB, PC, DPB, and DPC cited their inability to engage with parents as their Achilles heel. Some parents do not seem to care about and look at schools as the solution to the challenges they experience with their children.

When parents actively participate in school activities, constantly contribute to meetings, volunteer, attend consultations and sports days, and accept nominations on SDA/SDC committees to serve the school, students have a comfortable and supportive learning environment at home and school.⁶⁴ This underscores the importance of parental involvement in the education process.

PA and DPA highlighted that they had seen a positive relationship between parental involvement and student performance in their school. We value and treasure our relationship with our parents, and we can trust to call upon them when we experience areas that need their input and support.

Several studies on parental involvement concluded that being involved in school activities creates a positive relationship that triggers positive outcomes in students' learning. However, parental involvement can also have different consequences for children's education. When parents have negative feelings about the school, their children's commitment and interest also lead to adverse outcomes.⁶⁵

Improving Communication within the school

Communication emerged as a critical theme from the findings. The participants unanimously agreed that poor communication kills many organizations.

PA, PB, and PC said effective communication is vital to successful instructional leadership. We try to communicate, but we are not always successful. When we communicate effectively, all our members become aware of what we do as a school and what is expected of them.

When communication is inadequate or ineffective, the performance of staff members and the school is negatively impacted, as people are kept guessing about what the school is doing and what is expected of them. In contrast, when communication strategies are effective in school, all stakeholders have a shared understanding of the goals and objectives and are willing to collaborate to work towards them, and they all enjoy an increase.⁶⁶

PA and DPA agreed that, as a school, communication is helped by daily briefings, weekly meetings, notices posted around the school, and newsletters to parents.

Although several studies have emphasized the significant impact of effective communication and its ability to maintain a positive correlation with positive school outcomes, other studies have firmly stated

⁶³ Asegedom and Weldemariam, "Academics and Their Respective Institution Practices of Continuous Professional Development: A Case of Hawassa University, Ethiopia."

⁶⁴ Josephine Oranga, Audrey Matere, and Eliud Nyakundi, "Importance and Types of Parental Involvement in Education," *Open Access Library Journal* 10, no. 8 (2023): 1–9.

⁶⁵ Irene Musengamana, "A Systematic Review of Literature on Parental Involvement and Its Impact on Children Learning Outcomes," *Open Access Library Journal* 10, no. 10 (2023): 1–21.

⁶⁶ Sofia Sofia, Khasnah Syaidah, and Akhmad Shunhaji, "Principal's Effective Communication and Teacher Performance: A Classroom Perspective," *Kelola: Jurnal Manajemen Pendidikan* 10, no. 2 (2023): 101–14.

that when communication is not done strategically and with the right intent, including such critical aspects as transparency and honesty, the efficacy of school instructional practices is diminished.⁶⁷ Leaders in schools are challenged to communicate transparently, as this helps all school community members become aware of what is happening and what is expected of them.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends that the Ministry of Education consider appointing individuals who clearly understand all the teaching and learning requirements. They should also plan continuous in-service training for principals and try to involve parents in the school's activities.

CONCLUSION

The study aimed to investigate the role of instructional supervision in learner performance in Eswatini High Schools. The study concluded that instructional supervision could improve learner performance in schools when appropriately implemented by leaders. Though used widely by school leaders, its impact varied depending on the school context, type of leader, and leadership style. The findings show that schools lacked consistency in applying instructional supervision practices, affecting learner performance. Collaborative leadership, effective communication, investing in continuous professional development, and parental involvement were proffered as strategies that leaders could adopt to improve learner performance.

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⁶⁷ Vasiliki Brinia et al., "The Impact of Communication on the Effectiveness of Educational Organizations," *Education Sciences* 12, no. 3 (2022): 170; Salamandra. T., "Effective Communication in Schools," *BU Journal of Graduate Studies in Education* 13, no.1(2021):22–26.

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