

Determining the Challenges of Implementing Instructional Leadership in Township Secondary Schools in the Western Cape: A Case Study



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ABSTRACT

In this empirical paper, the researchers determine the challenges experienced by township secondary school principals in the Western Cape, in implementing instructional leadership. The background to this paper is that there are challenges in the implementation of instructional leadership in township secondary schools which leads to learners performing poorly in the National Senior Certificate (NSC) exam. The study is couched in the theoretical framework of Critical Emancipatory Research which advocates peace, hope, equality, freedom, and social justice. A transformative paradigm under the qualitative approach and participatory action research design was adopted to analyse the experiences of the stakeholders of the research school. A focus group discussion was conducted with the school management team (SMT) of a particular secondary school in the Metro East Education district in the Western Cape. This SMT comprised eight members, including the school principal. The findings revealed that ineffective communication and a lack of clear goals are the primary causes of challenges to the effective implementation of instructional leadership. Contrary to this, effective communication and formulation of clear goals can alleviate the challenges experienced in instructional leadership. Considering the findings, the study argues that effective communication, and a formulation of clear goals, are a prerequisite for the implementation of effective instructional leadership in schools. This study contributes to the body of research on the challenges of implementing effective instructional leadership from the township context in the Western Cape province in South Africa.

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INTRODUCTION

Various studies have been conducted on the implementation of instructional leadership in schools. Principals are expected to ensure that academic standards are met, that quality teaching and learning are taking place and to ensure that the purpose of schooling is achieved.¹

¹ CMvA Steyn and Molly Patricia Fuller, "Lack of Support within the South African Education System Augments Challenges Principals Experience," *International Journal of Research in Business and Social Science* (2147- 4478) 12, no. 6 (September 14, 2023): 296–306, <https://doi.org/10.20525/ijrbs.v12i6.2702>.

In a study conducted by Shuaib et al., they mention a few distractions to the principals' running of their schools in Lucknow, India.² These distractions become challenges that lead them to perform their instructional leadership roles poorly. These distractions include inadequate resources, underqualification in instructional leadership, poor parent and community involvement, learner disciplinary problems, and other related matters. Wieczorek and Manard conducted a study of novice principals in rural areas of the United States.³ Their finding was that principals were caught between their professional and private lives and meeting their community's expectation of being visible and engaged. This caused the principals to focus heavily on developing relationships and trust among their educators, learners, and parents at the expense of their professional positions as instructional leaders at their schools. They suggested that educational leaders need to be developed professionally for them to execute their mandates. This was further raised by Ahmad and Sewani who mentioned that ineffective teaching in township secondary schools is occurring because the professional development of educators is neglected.⁴

Rahman et al. conducted research exploring the challenges of implementing instructional leadership.⁵ They revealed that secondary school principals in Malaysia are internally faced with limited experience and knowledge of their instructional leadership. This harms their role as resource persons to the educators who serve under their leadership. They recommended that efforts should be made to improve instructional leadership. Nkambule conducted a study in Mpumalanga to compare effective and ineffective knowledge-sharing practices in township schools.⁶ The evidence was that ineffective instructional leadership is mostly caused when there is a counter-collaborative culture that is caused by a lack of proper communication, top-down communication directed at educators, poor decision-making, absence of Ubuntu (i.e., humanity, tolerance, and mutual respect) among staff, and added to that, the principals' inaccessibility to staff.⁷ The recommendation was that there should be effective knowledge sharing in a school. Zulu et al., conducted a study that explored the challenges and how the schools' leadership was dealing with complex township school life.⁸ They confirmed that principals used various strategies that included ignoring policy thus causing tensions among the stakeholders.

While the above studies have contributed to understanding the challenges experienced by school leaders in implementing instructional leadership, none of these have alluded to the areas where communication could be implemented and manifested freely and openly. This study is unique in the sense that it agrees that there are challenges with the implementation of instructional leadership. It goes further to say that there are challenges with the implementation of instructional leadership in township secondary schools and it demonstrates how these challenges can be overcome. The study further highlights that the key to all these challenges is a lack of proper communication and clear goals. The paper is arranged in the following manner: After a discussion of the theoretical framework, the methodology will be presented, and finally the findings and a conclusion.

² Ms Mavra Shuaib, Sushanta Kumar Roul, and Rashmi Soni, "Instructional Leadership: Practices and Challenges in Secondary Schools of Lucknow," *CEMJP* 30, no. 4 (2022): 1706–14.

³ Shuaib, Roul, and Soni, "Instructional Leadership: Practices and Challenges in Secondary Schools of Lucknow."

⁴ Nazir Ahmad, Zahid Ali, and Rozina Sewani, "Secondary School Teachers' Perceptions of Their Head Teachers Instructional Leadership and Its Effect on Teachers' Professional Development in Karachi Pakistan," *Journal of Development and Social Sciences* 2, no. 3 (2021): 362–77.

⁵ Abdul Rahim Abdul Rahman et al., "Exploring Challenges in Practicing Instructional Leadership: Insights from Senior Secondary Principals," *Universal Journal of Educational Research* 8, no. 11C (November 2020): 83–96, <https://doi.org/10.13189/ujer.2020.082310>.

⁶ Bongani Innocent Nkambule, "Organisational Learning and Knowledge Sharing Culture in Township Schools: An Exploration of Effective and Ineffective Practices," *Jurnal Penelitian Dan Pengkajian Ilmu Pendidikan: E-Saintika* 7, no. 1 (2023): 60–74.

⁷ Nkambule, "Organisational Learning and Knowledge Sharing Culture in Township Schools: An Exploration of Effective and Ineffective Practices."

⁸ Jerome Khulekani Zulu, Thamsanqa Thulani Bhengu, and Bongani Nhlanhla Mkhize, "Leadership Challenges and Responses to Complex Township School Life: Perspectives from Four Secondary Schools in South Africa," *International Journal of Leadership in Education* 24, no. 2 (March 4, 2021): 206–25, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603124.2019.1623918>.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Instructional Leadership

Instructional leadership emerged out of the effective school literature in the 1960s⁹ and came to be prominent as a paradigm that looks at school teaching and learning,¹⁰ leadership and management in the USA in the 1980s.¹¹ It became a concept that sought to move focus from the principal's role as administrator to being an instructional leader at school. Manaseh defines instructional leadership as "an educational leadership that focuses on the core responsibility of a school, namely teaching, and learning, by "defining the school vision, mission and goals, managing the instructional programme and promoting the school climate."¹² It is a school leadership that prioritises enhancing the quality of teaching and learning where staff members meet on a regular basis to discuss their work, collaborate to solve problems, reflect on their jobs, and take responsibility for what learners learn. Van der Bijl and Kruger describe instructional leadership as the leadership and management of aspects of a school that directly influence learner achievement as it covers all the managerial and leadership tasks that are involved in teaching and learning delivery on a daily basis at a school.¹³

Instructional leadership has been conceptualised in many ways by different researchers. The most commonly conceptualised is the model of Hallinger and Murphy. Hallinger and Murphy's model created a three-dimensional conceptualisation of instructional leadership which is delineated into ten instructional leadership functions.¹⁴ Dimension 1 defines the school's mission and has two functions (a) *framing the school's goals* and, (b) *communicating these goals*. This dimension requires the principal to work collaboratively with the school's staff in ensuring the progress of learners academically by creating goals that focus on learner results.¹⁵ An instructional leader should articulate his/her vision into a plan of action in which all parties can participate and feel a sense of ownership that will enable quality learning to occur. The second dimension is Managing the Instructional Programme. It is a function that emphasises the management behaviours of the principal and incorporates three leadership functions of (a) *supervising and evaluating instruction*, (b) *Coordinating the Curriculum*, and (c) *Monitoring Learner Progress*. It is a dimension that focuses on the planning and monitoring of instruction and curriculum. The principal, through active participation, needs to motivate, supervise, and oversee teaching and learning at school. The third dimension, Promoting a Positive Learning Climate has five functions (a) *Protecting Instructional Time*, (b) *Promoting Professional Development*, (c) *Maintaining High Visibility*, (d) *Providing Incentives for Educators*, and (e) *Providing Incentives for Learning*. This dimension maintains that it is expected of the principal to oversee the improvement of the school environment and ensure that a high level of excellence is maintained.¹⁶ When principals enact these functions, they create an 'academic press' and a culture

⁹ George N Shava, Jan Heystek, and Thompson Chasara, "Instructional Leadership: Its Role in Sustaining School Improvement in South African Schools," *International Journal of Social Learning (IJSL)* 1, no. 2 (2021): 117–34.

¹⁰ Haim Shaked, "Instructional Leadership in School Middle Leaders," *International Journal of Educational Management* 37, no. 6/7 (December 4, 2023): 1288–1302, <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJEM-03-2023-0089>.

¹¹ 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>.

¹² Aaron Mkanga Manaseh, "Instructional Leadership: The Role of Heads of Schools in Managing the Instructional Programme," *International Journal of Educational Leadership and Management* 4, no. 1 (2016): 30–47.

¹³ A. Van der Bijl and A.G. Kruger, *Managing and Leading the Pedagogical-Instructional Programme* (Cape Town: Van Schaik Publishers, 2016).

¹⁴ Hallinger, Gümüş, and Bellibaş, "'Are Principals Instructional Leaders yet?' A Science Map of the Knowledge Base on Instructional Leadership, 1940–2018."

¹⁵ Shava, Heystek, and Chasara, "Instructional Leadership: Its Role in Sustaining School Improvement in South African Schools."

¹⁶ Shava, Heystek, and Chasara, "Instructional Leadership: Its Role in Sustaining School Improvement in South African Schools."

that fosters and rewards continuous learning and improvement.¹⁷ Figure 1 depicts Hallinger and Murphy's instructional management system from 1985.¹⁸

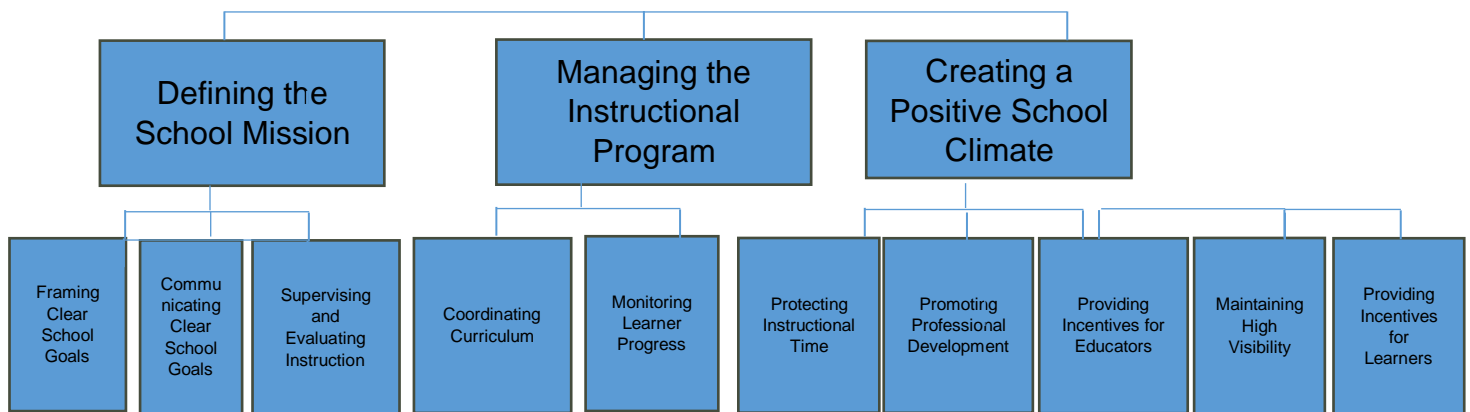


Figure 1. Hallinger and Murphy's Instructional Management System from 1985

The principal, as the instructional leader, needs to be 'hip-deep' in instruction. The role of the instructional leader is valuable for setting clear objectives, managing curriculum, monitoring lesson plans, allocating resources and evaluating educators' performance regularly. A principal needs to have a clear vision for the school, establish school goals and communicate these to the staff. He/she needs to coordinate the school curriculum, monitor learner progress, develop instructional strategies, observe, supervise, and evaluate educators' instructional practices make use of appropriate tools, and provide feedback. To motivate sustained development, the principal should provide incentives for educators to promote their professional development. Learners should also be provided with incentives for their progress. If all these are undertaken, it means that those who are instructional leaders are aware of what goes on in the classrooms and develop the capacities of their staff by building on their strengths and reducing their weaknesses.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study adopted Critical Emancipatory Research (CER) as the theoretical framework to pursue its objectives. CER originated as an offshoot of critical theory of the Frankfurt school which arose in Germany in the 1920s. It emerged from a group of men who witnessed the atrocities inflicted by humans on humans.¹⁹ This theory was developed by Jurgen Habermas who was a member of the Frankfurt School that represented a left-wing group which aimed to redress the contested terrain in Europe and find a solution to it.²⁰ Its mandate was to change oppressive structures and make sure that those who were oppressed could discover their state of oppression and emancipate themselves from it.²¹ The objectives of CER are participatory and collaborative. Those who are marginalized are

¹⁷ F Yasser and R Amal, "Teachers' Perceptions of Principals' Instructional Leadership in Omani Schools," *American Journal of Educational Research* 3, no. 12 (2015): 1504–10.

¹⁸ Hallinger, Gümüş, and Bellibaş, "Are Principals Instructional Leaders yet? A Science Map of the Knowledge Base on Instructional Leadership, 1940–2018."

¹⁹ Lesley-Ann Noel, "Promoting an Emancipatory Research Paradigm in Design Education and Practice," 2016, <https://doi.org/10.21606/drs.2016.355>.

²⁰ B. Dube and D. Hlalele, "Revisiting Critical Emancipatory Research in School Violence Narratives. A Quest for a Safe School," *Educational Research for Social Change* 8, no. 4 (2018): 74–86; Bekithemba Dube and Xolisile P. Ndaba, "Educating Progressed Learners in Times of COVID-19: How Can Bricolage Help?," *Research in Social Sciences and Technology* 6, no. 2 (September 9, 2021): 22–36, <https://doi.org/10.46303/ressat.2021.9>.

²¹ Dube and Hlalele, "Revisiting Critical Emancipatory Research in School Violence Narratives. A Quest for a Safe School"; Ndaba Xolisile and Dube Bekithemba, "Critical Emancipatory Research Approach to Enhance Performance Among Progressed Learners in Life Sciences," *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences* 12, no. 4 (July 8, 2021): 53, <https://doi.org/10.36941/mjss-2021-0027>; Noel, "Promoting an Emancipatory Research Paradigm in Design Education and Practice."

empowered.²² The major assumptions of CER are based on advancing the agenda of equity, social justice, peace, freedom, and hope.²³ Through CER those who are oppressed are liberated from the conditions of domination, powerlessness, and oppression as it is geared towards social justice, and enhances the principles of democracy.²⁴ In short, the theory of CER is relevant for this paper since it argues for conditions that promote inclusion and social justice. It also argues for the participation of all affected by the challenges faced by township secondary schools in implementing instructional leadership that results in poor performance by learners.²⁵ With CER, there is a move to reinvent new thinking toward the implementation of instructional leadership and involve all affected stakeholders of the school.

METHODOLOGY

The study is situated within the transformative paradigm. It employed a qualitative study design and Participatory Action Research (PAR). PAR is a philosophical approach to research that recognizes the need for the persons being studied to participate in the design and conduct of all phases of research involving them.²⁶ It is a research approach that seeks to transform the lives of marginalised people in societies.²⁷ It also provides an opportunity for participants to voice their concerns and contribute to the research process, ensuring that their perspectives are not overlooked or misrepresented. To implement PAR and gather data for this research, the researchers used purposive sampling, identified one school in one of the districts in the Western Cape and selected the SMT comprising eight members for the focus group discussions. They were all selected as part of school leadership and were best suited to provide insight into the research questions being investigated. The assembling of such a team was aimed at finding the best solutions emanating from the people experiencing and affected by the problem.

Data was gathered over a month through focus group meetings. The study adhered to ethical principles, such as requiring participants to sign consent forms, indicating that they had the right to withdraw from the research, and using pseudonyms to protect the identities of the school and participants. The data was returned to the participants for member checking. The participants agreed with the researcher that the themes for analysis reflected their ideas and reflections on the implementation of effective instructional leadership.

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

This first section presents and discusses findings that respond to the first question of the research which seeks to know what challenges are encountered in implementing instructional leadership in township secondary schools. The data is arranged according to the themes identified. The responses of the participants to this question revealed some of the factors that impede the implementation of effective instructional leadership.

Lack of teamwork among the members of the School Management Team

²² Shirley R. Steinberg and Joe L. Kincheloe, "Employing the Bricolage as Critical Research in Science Education," in *Second International Handbook of Science Education* (Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 2012), 1485–1500, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4020-9041-7_95.

²³ Sechaba Mahlomaholo, "Critical Emancipatory Research and Academic Identity," *Africa Education Review* 6, no. 2 (October 2009): 224–37, <https://doi.org/10.1080/18146620903274555>; D. Hlalele, "Introducing Participatory Rural Appraisal Methodologies to Rural Education Research," in *Conference Proceedings* (Bergen, Norway, 2013).

²⁴ Mahlomaholo, "Critical Emancipatory Research and Academic Identity."

²⁵ Xolisile and Bekithemba, "Critical Emancipatory Research Approach to Enhance Performance Among Progressed Learners in Life Sciences."

²⁶ Moana Eruera, "Ma Te Whānau Te Huarahi Motuhake: Whānau Participatory Action Research Groups," *Mai Review* 3, no. 1 (2010): 1–9.

²⁷ Xolisile and Bekithemba, "Critical Emancipatory Research Approach to Enhance Performance Among Progressed Learners in Life Sciences."

The first challenge raised by the participants relates to the absence of teamwork which includes cooperation, collaboration, and trust, thus having a negative influence on the school achieving its aims of teaching and learning. Educators mentioned that instructional leadership at their schools is impeded by a lack of teamwork. As the so-called management team of the school, they felt that they were left behind in many developments of the school. During the discussion, Ms. Mahlathi, one of the heads of the department, said:

I have just seen the School Improvement Plan (SIP) and the Annual Academic Performance Review (AAPR) and am not sure how the principal got to the targets that are mentioned in those documents. There are targets and goals, but they were never discussed. I know that the principal once spoke about them during the briefings one morning but never expatiated.

The principal responded:

I have the goals and targets for the year. Here they are. I am very sorry that I sometimes even forget that I have not shared some information with the rest of the staff. This is because you, as the SMT, are never available to stay behind and work with me on many issues.

Ms Dlulemnyango, another HOD, added:

Principal, this is the whole of the SMT, and I am surprised that we have goals and targets, but we have never discussed them in any meeting. I think we are not working as a team here. At the same time, as far as I know, we have to own these and present them to the rest of the school, including parents and learners. How are we going to motivate the staff to work towards achieving them if we also have no idea how they were formulated?

Mr Jezile, one deputy principal indicated that:

The principal refuses to be transparent with us and does not communicate with us. We are a team, but she prefers to do things on her own and does not delegate. We are preaching teamwork to the rest of the educators, but we are not practicing it as the SMT. It is our duty, as the whole team, to monitor what is happening in the classrooms so that we can come up with strategies to improve performance, but we are not given that opportunity. Why is there no transparency and open communication among us? To me, it is very clear that she does not trust us.

Ms Mahlathi added:

If these targets are not even known to you, Mr Jezile as the deputy principal, how would they be known to us? We are supposed to be a team, as we are called SMT. How is teamwork affected if the principal does not delegate or communicate with us regarding what she sends to the district office? The learners and their parents ought to know about the targets so that they know what is needed on their side to achieve these desired goals, but I do not think this information will filter down to them. This lack of communication can exacerbate tensions at school.

The participants in this discussion highlighted the absence of teamwork among themselves as the SMT. They regarded teamwork as paramount in the implementation of effective instructional leadership. If the SMT does not work as a team the rest of the staff can see this and will capitalise on it. Nadi et al assert that dynamic relationships, trust, and cooperation are essential for building a most effective team.²⁸ Svanbjornsdotter et al, assert that collaboration is a critical issue in teamwork because

²⁸ Mojtaba Nadi, Ahmad Keykha, and Parinaz Rahmani Barouji, "Reconstruction of The Role of Team Building And Teamwork on The Accepting And Creating of Organizational Changes: An Exploration of The Lived Experiences of School Administrators," *School Administration* 10, no. 4 (2023): 42–62.

it supports learner achievement.²⁹ These important aspects of instructional leadership seem to be lacking at this school and are affecting learner achievement adversely. Mr. Jezile, the deputy principal, mentions the lack of trust in the principal, which is an element of teamwork. Ms. Mahlathi made mention of communication. These are crucial for teamwork because people in a team share information through communication and trust.

Non-sharing of workload as a consequence of ineffective instructional leadership

The other challenge at schools is the administrative workload which demands a great deal from both the principal and the educators. The introduction of the South African Schools Act, No. 84 of 1996 and the decentralisation of decision-making at the school level brought with it an increased workload for the principals.³⁰ This decentralisation created more pressure on school principals in that they neglected their important responsibility of being instructional leaders.³¹ Wang, et al assert that these unmanageable time demands may have an adverse effect on the well-being of schools and principals.³² This view is shared by Creagh et al. who claim that this workload may affect the capacity of educators to deliver quality teaching and learning to the learners.³³

During one of the meetings, Mr Dyantyi indicated:

It seems as though at our school there is no succession plan. I am saying this because the principal does not delegate any responsibility to us as the management team. She does everything herself. It is surprising that the admin person knows more about what needs to be submitted to the district office than we do.

Ms Dlulemnyango added:

I fully agree with you, Mr Dyantyi. Our principal would rather come to work even when she is not feeling well. She does not trust us. It seems as if we can spoil what she has started. She handles everything. She handles learner discipline, attends to parent complaints and other trivial matters that could be delegated to us as the management team. She is always behind the closed door of her office and does not care what happens in the classrooms.

Mr Jali, the deputy pointed out that:

Guys, you have alluded to many crucial points. I am of the opinion that the most important task that brought us here to school is to teach and make sure that learners learn and progress. If the principal could assist us in making sure that teaching and learning are happening in classrooms by asking what challenges we are facing and how she can be of assistance to these, we will be heading in the right direction. The energy she spends on administrative work could be spent on the purpose of the school, which is teaching and learning. We are overburdened by teaching and learning as much as she is overburdened by administrative work.

²⁹ Birna María Svabjörnsdóttir, Allyson Macdonald, and Gudmundur Heidar Frimannsson, "Teamwork in Establishing a Professional Learning Community in a New Icelandic School," *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research* 60, no. 1 (2016): 90–109.

³⁰ "Constitution of the Republic of South Africa," Pub. L. No. Section 7-39, Bill of Rights (1996), <https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b5de4.html>.

³¹ Malesela Gilbert Sepuru and Mokgadi Agnes Mohlakwana, "The Perspectives of Beginner Principals on Their New Roles in School Leadership and Management: A South African Case Study," *South African Journal of Education* 40, no. 2 (May 31, 2020): 1–11, <https://doi.org/10.15700/saje.v40n2a1755>; Raj Mestry, "The Innovative Role of the Principal as Instructional Leader: A Prerequisite for High Student Achievement," *International Proceedings of Economics Development and Research* 60, no. 25 (2013): 119–23.

³² Ting Wang, Dianne F. Olivier, and Peiyang Chen, "Creating Individual and Organizational Readiness for Change: Conceptualization of System Readiness for Change in School Education," *International Journal of Leadership in Education* 26, no. 6 (November 2, 2023): 1037–61, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603124.2020.1818131>.

³³ Sue Creagh et al., "Workload, Work Intensification and Time Poverty for Teachers and School Leaders: A Systematic Research Synthesis," *Educational Review*, April 24, 2023, 1–20, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2023.2196607>.

Mr Dyantyi added that:

I think that is why you find that some educators are always sick and cannot attend school on certain days because they feel that they are not appreciated, and the principal does not support them. Their challenges with curriculum delivery are not known by the principal who does not have time to attend to them.

The workload of principals and educators has become a thorny issue in schools. Judging from the comments of the participants, the principal is doing too much on her own. Principals have a limited capacity to focus on their roles of instructional leadership as there is always intrusion into the daily operational matters of the school that they have to deal with.³⁴ At the same time, these events occur suddenly, take a long time to complete, and are related to some areas in which the principal does not specialise and requires additional skills which the principal may not possess at the time.³⁵ As a result, participants reported that the workload of the principal affects the smooth running of the school and has an adverse effect on the delivery of the curriculum at school.

Lack of conflict resolution skills

A school is a workplace that has people from different backgrounds who have differing traits, attitudes, goals, personalities, cultures, values, beliefs, needs, preferences goals, interests, and perspectives Muindi et al., 2017.³⁶ Interaction of these individuals and parties increases the chance of conflict occurring in schools.³⁷ This requires a skill in conflict management for effective teaching and learning to take place. The school is not adhering to the strategies of conflict management. The participants also alluded to the fact that the principal has no desire to resolve conflicts that are brewing at the school.

During this discussion, Mr Dyantyi indicated:

Conflict is another matter that needs serious attention at our school. I am not happy with the relationship between Ms. Mahlathi and Ms. Jali. The relationship between these two educators has deteriorated to the worst level which, in my opinion, is affecting the learners, and the principal is not doing anything about it.

Mr Jezile, the deputy principal responded:

I have brought this matter to the attention of the principal, in confidence, but up to now she still has not diagnosed that there is a conflict between these two educators. I am of the opinion that she does not know how to resolve it or just does not care.

Ms Dlulemnyango added to this:

If we think that learners are not aware of this conflict, we are joking. These kids are old enough to discern when something is not right. I noticed it when I went for Accounting in Grade 11D. The writing was on the wall when Ms Jali left the classroom to allow me to come in. Even some educators have started taking sides on this misunderstanding.

³⁴ Parvathy Naidoo, "Perceptions of Teachers and School Management Teams of the Leadership Roles of Public School Principals," *South African Journal of Education* 39, no. 2 (2019).

³⁵ Muhammet Emin Türkoğlu and Ramazan Cansoy, "School Principals' Opinions on the Meaning and Sources of Workload," *International Journal of Contemporary Educational Research* 7, no. 1 (October 30, 2022): 177–91, <https://doi.org/10.33200/ijcer.657994>; N.P. Tacinco, "Conflict Management Skills of School Administrators in State Universities of Eastern Visayas," *International Journal of Engineering Sciences & Research Technology* 5, no. 7 (2016): 951–61; Süleyman Göksoy and Türkan Argon, "Conflicts at Schools and Their Impact on Teachers.," *Journal of Education and Training Studies* 4, no. 4 (2016): 197–205.

³⁶ Rahayu Larasati and Setya Raharja, "Conflict Management in Improving Schools Effectiveness," in *3rd International Conference on Learning Innovation and Quality Education (ICLIQE 2019)* (Atlantis Press, 2020), 191–97.

³⁷ Richard Njugi Wainaina, Charles Magoma, and Daniel Mange, "Influence Of Principals' conflict Management Strategies On Conflict Resolutions In Secondary Schools In Murang'a County, Kenya," *European Journal of Education Studies*, (2020), 100.

Ms Sonamzi also had an addition:

I have been approached by some educators to find out if we as the SMT of the school are not aware of this conflict or whether we just do not care. I could not give an exact response, but I could see that it is really affecting the whole school, as it is. If we are not doing anything about it, it will reach the parents and we know how our parents are when it comes to a matter of disagreement among us. We need to resolve this matter as soon as possible.

The principal had to defend herself and said:

I must admit that I was not aware of this conflict until Mr Jezile brought it to my attention. I decided to ignore it with the hope that it would resolve itself. I am avoiding a situation where I am also roped into their conflict and being accused of taking sides.

Mr Jezile rebuked the principal and said:

That is not the way to deal with it, principal. You should tackle it head-on. There are many approaches to conflict management and avoidance is not one of them. The tension that is among educators here at school is unbearable. If one speaks with an educator from a certain clique, one is suspected of belonging to that clique.

Ms Dlulemnyango supported Mr Jezile and said:

I concur with Mr Jezile. The principal cannot be quiet about this situation and avoid dealing with this conflict. Conflicts arise from communication breakdowns. When they are not handled properly, they lead to unhappiness that can lead to the formation of cliques which are bad for the school environment.

Conflicts have an enormous negative effect on the school if they are not properly managed. The principal needs to mitigate them efficiently.³⁸ Conflict can also retard the progress of the school, especially if there has not been any diagnosis of it. It has the potential to create a chain of antagonistic interactions among staff members and can lead to a school being dysfunctional. This may counter the reason why the school exists because it will not be delivering on the needs of the learners who will be affected and perform well under par in their final examinations. The next section addresses the second question and finds out how the challenges of instructional leadership can be circumvented.

Circumventing the challenges of instructional leadership

The paper does not only highlight the challenges of instructional leadership but also presents possible solutions as they were discussed by the participants when they were responding to the second question, which is, how can the challenges of instructional leadership be addressed?

School Management Team working as a team

In a school, the principal, as the leader of a team, has a responsibility to manage the team and to help it achieve its goals. The principal should not be the only one who is vested with the running of the school. All those who work at a school should be involved in the formulation of school goals.³⁹ Teamwork determines the success of the school because activities are coordinated and responsibilities

³⁸ Wainaina, Magoma, and Mange, "Influence Of Principals' conflict Management Strategies On Conflict Resolutions In Secondary Schools In Murang'a County, Kenya."

³⁹ Yahya Don and Raman Arumugam, "School Management and Leadership: Teamwork in School," *Multidisciplinary Journal of Instruction (MDJI)* 1, no. 2 (2019): 14–36.

are shared.⁴⁰ This would enable the school to achieve its goals. The quality of teamwork determines how successful the school will be, as this has now become complex and complicated.⁴¹

Mr Jezile, the deputy principal said:

I think it is high time that the principal starts involving us in the running of the school so that she can have enough time to monitor the work of all educators and be of assistance to them.

Nadi et al. assert that dynamic relationships, trust, and cooperation are essential for building a most effective team.⁴² This view is shared by Svanbjörnsdóttir et al, who are of the view that collaboration is a critical issue in teamwork because it supports learner achievement.⁴³ DeMatthews et al argued that principals are critical to improving schools but they should not do this alone.⁴⁴

Ms Dlulemnyango added:

We need to collaborate and appear as a team to the rest of the staff. It is important that we build a good working relationship as we collaborate. We need to all assist our educators to be as effective in the delivery of curriculum as possible.

Burnout can limit educators' effectiveness and can lead to turnover. This view is supported by Creagh et al. who claim that the effects of workload negatively impact educators and lead to attrition.⁴⁵ Turkoglu and Cansoy mention that workload is work that limits time to devote to improving education, and this requires workload management which is a process of efficiently distributing and managing work within the team.⁴⁶ These points were highlighted by the participants.

Mr Dyantyi finally said:

If we do not work as a team, we will be demotivated. This means that we should therefore work as a team. We should support our educators so that they get motivated, and this will enhance the performance of our learners. I am sure our results at the end of the year will improve if we all collaborate and do what is necessary.

Every idea should be communicated to the rest of the staff so that it becomes everybody's responsibility and people can own it. The school should always begin the year by setting the goals of the school for the year. These should be communicated to every stakeholder of the school. Educators and learners should know the goals of the school and every decision at school should not be known to the principal alone. The principal must share and delegate some work to some members of the staff. He/she should not do everything by himself/herself. The discussion on these important aspects of instructional leadership was a contentious one. The effectiveness of communication in teamwork should be highlighted and should increase teamwork among educators at school. The participants felt that every one of them should be a team leader who encourages members and provides opportunities for educators to exhibit their creativity. Team leaders should empower members and give them more

⁴⁰ Scott Reeves, Andreas Xyrichis, and Merrick Zwarenstein, "Teamwork, Collaboration, Coordination, and Networking: Why We Need to Distinguish between Different Types of Interprofessional Practice," *Journal of Interprofessional Care* 32, no. 1 (January 2, 2018): 1–3, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13561820.2017.1400150>.

⁴¹ Bantu Sijako, "The Role of Principals as Instructional Leaders in Two Underperforming Senior Secondary Schools in the King William's Town Education District" (University of Fort Hare, 2017).

⁴² Nadi, Keykha, and Rahmani Barouji, "Reconstruction of The Role of Team Building And Teamwork on The Accepting And Creating of Organizational Changes: An Exploration of The Lived Experiences of School Administrators."

⁴³ Svanbjörnsdóttir, Macdonald, and Frimannsson, "Teamwork in Establishing a Professional Learning Community in a New Icelandic School."

⁴⁴ David DeMatthews et al., "School Leadership Burnout and Job-Related Stress: Recommendations for District Administrators and Principals," *The Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues and Ideas* 94, no. 4 (July 4, 2021): 159–67, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00098655.2021.1894083>.

⁴⁵ Sue Creagh et al., "Workload, Work Intensification and Time Poverty for Teachers and School Leaders: A Systematic Research Synthesis," *Educational Review*, April 24, 2023, 1–20, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2023.2196607>.

⁴⁶ Türkoğlu and CANSOY, "School Principals' Opinions on the Meaning and Sources of Workload."

responsibilities, recognise and appreciate their efforts. Teamwork and collaboration ensure efficient workflow in an organisation. This would enhance their performance in the classroom, thus improving learner achievement.

Workload sharing is a prerequisite for successful instructional leadership

Principals are expected to do a lot at their schools although their hands are full.⁴⁷ Daily, they have to handle complaints by parents as well as mobilising educators, matters that have nothing to do with instructional leadership. They should not allow these to interfere with their role as instructional leaders of their schools.⁴⁸ This matter was raised by the participants in their discussion.

Mr Dyantyi addressed the principal:

We all know that you are the principal and would like to see things happen at your school. However, this should not be done at the expense of your role as the instructional leader of our school. Remember that this school is not yours alone. We are also associated with this school. When there is success, you take the credit but we are always blamed when learners are not doing well. Issues related to curriculum delivery should be your major concern and not secondary to all these administrative issues.

Principals should know how to be of assistance to educators when they run into difficulties in the classroom. However, they are uncomfortable visiting educators' classrooms and they do not have a thorough knowledge or capacity to guide them as some educators feel that their practice or the way they do things is the best that can be.⁴⁹ This is caused by an unnecessary workload which they exert upon themselves.

Ms Mayaphi, one of the HODs added:

I agree with you, Mr. Dyantyi. We do supervise educators in the classrooms but the assistance we may get from the principal would make a huge difference. At the same time, I think the principal has lost touch with teaching requirements and methods and feels insecure. If only the principal could start not making her administrative responsibilities her primary concern, she could have time to be and instructional leader of our school.

Abdullah et al. assert that principals should delegate and empower other educators to exercise instructional leadership in some areas and share responsibilities.⁵⁰

Ms Sonamzi added:

I think the principal should empower us as members of the SMT so that in her absence she knows that things are still taken care of. At this rate, we just cannot be of assistance to her in her absence because we have not been empowered. When she comes back from leave she has a lot to catch up on and that causes her not to have time to devote to instructional leadership. I suggest that next week we draw up the responsibilities of each member of the SMT and give each other responsibilities to assist the principal by sharing her workload. This can give our principal ample time to concentrate on her role as instructional leader.

The principal responded:

⁴⁷ Chimwechiyi Ndoziya, "The Instructional Leadership Roles of the Secondary School Principal towards Quality School Improvement in Zimbabwean Schools" (University of South Africa, 2014).

⁴⁸ Sarah Oben Egwu, "Principals' Performance in Supervision of Classroom Instruction in Ebonyi State Secondary Schools.," *Journal of Education and Practice* 6, no. 15 (2015): 99–105.

⁴⁹ Liisa Brolund, "Student Success through Instructional Leadership.," *BU Journal of Graduate Studies in Education* 8, no. 2 (2016): 42.

⁵⁰ Abdul Ghani Kanesan Abdullah et al., "Exploring Capacity of Midde Managers as Instructional Leadership to Lead Transformations of Teaching and Learning in Malaysian High Performing Schools," *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences* 9, no. 3 (March 13, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v9-i3/5773>.

I heard what you had to say and propose, and I appreciate the fact that you have brought this topic up. I am in agreement with you that I tend to want to carry this school on my shoulders and neglect my duties as the instructional leader of the school. I will draw up all the responsibilities that I normally take care of and see who can be of assistance to each and every one of them.

The principal came to realise that she was taking on more responsibilities than she was supposed to. This resulted in her neglecting her responsibility as the instructional leader of the school. She pledged to share her workload with the rest of the staff. For instance, learner discipline would be handled by the deputy principal. Some administrative duties could be handled by the administrative clerk under her supervision. Parents could be attended to after contact time. All these will allow the principal ample time to attend to what educators need to enhance their teaching and to support them.

Resolving conflicts at the School Level

Conflicts need to be resolved and cannot only be regarded as a negative phenomenon. It provides benefits in the long term because the personnel in the school grow and mature which enables them to manage conflicts that may arise in the future.⁵¹

Mr Dyantyi put the following suggestion forward:

I think it is important that the principal attends to this dispute between the two educators as a matter of urgency. This will bring stability to the volatile situation we find ourselves in. You can invite some of us to be part of that conflict resolution, if possible.

Ms Jali added:

This will be a lesson to other educators that we do not condone any conflicts at this school. At the same time, we will send out a message to the rest of the staff that we know how to handle them when they are in conflict. This will at the same time grow us as the management team of the school thus enabling us to be able to manage these conflicts as they come in the future.

There are multiple ways of resolving conflicts at a school depending on the nature of the causes that led to the conflict. Conflicts are caused by differences in perception, lack of attention, miscommunication, and misunderstanding.⁵² Amie-Ogan and Nma recommend that principals should use conflict management strategies to resolve issues amicably with educators to enhance educators' performance in school.⁵³ This is reiterated by Sihotang and Murniarte who suggest that the school should have conflict management competencies. In this instance, three stages of conflict management are suggested.⁵⁴ These are, (i) planning in the form of problem identification that includes knowing the kind of conflict and its source, (ii) determining the approach to be applied in resolving the conflict, and (iii) evaluation. Communication is regarded as the main tool to be used in conflict management. This communication was stressed by educators in one of the sessions when they tackled conflict management.

Ms Dlulemnyango recommended the following:

⁵¹ Selcuk Dogan, Rose Pringle, and Jennifer Mesa, "The Impacts of Professional Learning Communities on Science Teachers' Knowledge, Practice and Student Learning: A Review," *Professional Development in Education* 42, no. 4 (August 7, 2016): 569–88, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19415257.2015.1065899>.

⁵² Indri Wahyu Rahmayanti, Muh Samsudin, and Moh Syifa A Widigdo, "Conflict Management And The Role Of Stakeholders In School," *AL-TANZIM: Jurnal Manajemen Pendidikan Islam* 5, no. 3 (2021): 95–105.

⁵³ Oponne Tekena Amie-Ogan and Eziri Ihuoma Nma, "Conflict Management Strategies and Teachers Performance in Public Senior Secondary Schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis of Rivers State," *International Journal of Innovative Psychology & Social Development* 9 (2021): 99–109.

⁵⁴ Hotmaulina Sihotang and Erni Murniarti, "Conflict Management among Students in Private Elementary School," *Psychology And Education* 58, no. 2 (2021): 10953–61.

We need to come up with what I call a “conflict management strategy” that should be shared with all and will be implemented at our school. I am of the opinion that we need to form a committee that will handle these. It should comprise one or two of us as the management team and add a few educators. This should bring conflicts under control and allow us as educators to concentrate on teaching and learning.

Participants came up with a strategy for handling conflicts at school. They all stressed the importance of not ignoring conflict and making sure that conflicts are tackled head-on. This will give the principal and the management team ample time to concentrate on the business of the school, which is, teaching and learning. The principal will also not be the one who handles conflict as these will be handled by a dedicated team. The principal will only get a report on the outcome of the meeting that handled the conflict. Most importantly, the team mentioned the issue of communication as the key to resolving conflicts. The outcome of the meeting will be communicated to the rest of the staff, and everybody will be informed.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and discussion, the recommendation is that the Department of Basic Education should have academies in each province where prospective principals are trained in principalship. The curriculum should include areas such as teamwork and delegation, conflict management, change management, and managing the school governing body, among others. Crisis management training should be incorporated into both pre-service and in-service training. There should be ongoing support for educational leaders to render professional guidance to bring about improvement in the practices of educational leaders thus impacting positively on the effectiveness of educators. Another area that needs attention is the levels of communication at school. Principals should develop an effective means for educators to communicate with one another. Principals should ensure that they are accessible to the educators of the school and that the lines of communication are open and effective with the rest of the staff.

CONCLUSION

The implementation of effective instructional leadership in schools can be impeded by several factors that include lack of teamwork, non-sharing of workload and ineffective handling of conflict, among others. If the principal does not share matters of the school and is transparent about them this could lead to a lack of ownership on the part of the staff because there will be no collaboration and cooperation among staff members. If work is centralised in the principal’s office the rest of the staff members, including the SMT may dissociate themselves from it or may not even know anything about it. Work should be shared with everybody at school as this will empower them and develop them professionally. Conflict should be investigated and addressed as soon as it occurs. Ignoring conflict is a sign of incompetence in conflict management skills and also shows a lack of communication skills. When these strategies are put in place, teamwork will be enhanced leading to an efficient leadership structure in the schools.

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