

## Instructional Leadership: Its Role in Sustaining School Improvement in South African Schools

George. N. Shava<sup>1\*</sup>, Jan Heystek<sup>2</sup> and Thompson Chasara<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1,3</sup>*Faculty of Science and Technology Education, National University of Science and Technology, Bulawayo, Zimbabwe*

<sup>2</sup>*Faculty of Education, North West University, Potchefstroom Campus, South Africa*

\*email: [gnsrava@gmail.com](mailto:gnsrava@gmail.com)

### ABSTRACT

*Recent studies conducted around the world have revealed a clear link between the instructional position of principal leadership and school improvement. Instructional leadership, which aims to foster a teaching and learning community, is seen as a key component of successful teaching and long-term school improvement. The rise in site-specific management roles, which are based on instructional leadership experiences, is one of the initiatives launched by the South African government to reform education. In South Africa, school principals are responsible for academic development. This qualitative research aimed to learn more about the role of principals in sustaining school improvement in the North West Province of South Africa. Premised in the qualitative research approach, a purposive sampling technique was used to select six schools that had sustained school improvement for some years. Findings from the study revealed that principals play a crucial role in sustaining school improvement. The study findings reinforce recent literature that identifies instructional leadership as a cornerstone for school improvement.*

### Keywords:

Instructional Leadership; Principals; School Improvement; School Leadership; Teaching and Learning

### ABSTRAK

*Studi terbaru yang dilakukan di seluruh dunia telah mengungkapkan hubungan yang jelas antara posisi instruksional kepemimpinan kepala sekolah dan peningkatan sekolah. Kepemimpinan instruksional, yang bertujuan untuk membina komunitas belajar-mengajar, dipandang sebagai komponen kunci dari pengajaran*

*yang sukses dan perbaikan sekolah jangka panjang. Peningkatan peran manajemen spesifik lokasi, yang didasarkan pada pengalaman kepemimpinan instruksional, merupakan salah satu inisiatif yang diluncurkan oleh pemerintah Afrika Selatan untuk mereformasi pendidikan. Di Afrika Selatan, kepala sekolah bertanggung jawab atas pengembangan akademik. Tujuan dari penelitian kualitatif ini adalah untuk mempelajari lebih lanjut tentang peran kepala sekolah dalam mempertahankan perbaikan sekolah di Provinsi Barat Laut Afrika Selatan. Ditetapkan dalam pendekatan penelitian kualitatif, teknik purposive sampling digunakan untuk memilih enam sekolah yang telah mengalami perbaikan sekolah selama beberapa tahun. Temuan dari penelitian tersebut mengungkapkan bahwa kepala sekolah memainkan peran penting dalam mempertahankan peningkatan sekolah. Temuan studi memperkuat literatur terbaru yang mengidentifikasi kepemimpinan instruksional sebagai landasan untuk perbaikan sekolah.*

**Kata Kunci:**

Kepemimpinan Instruksional; Kepala Sekolah; Peningkatan Sekolah; Kepemimpinan Sekolah; Pengajaran dan Pembelajaran

## 1. Introduction

Instructional leadership (IL) has a long-rooted history which (Hallinger, 2013) emerged out of the effective school literature in the 1960s (Leithwood, Harris & Hopkins, 2008; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008). Since it is connected to students, teachers, instruction, and learning methods, IL is special to the field of education and varies from other forms of leadership (Hoy & Hoy, 2003). IL, on the other hand, according to Hallinger (2011; 2013), assists principals in identifying a school mission, empowering and inspiring teachers, and innovating school classroom-based methods to enhance teaching and learning for teachers and students in the new millennium. IL focuses on the organization as much as individuals in the school environment by promoting positive learning conditions for all students, helping teachers and learners in meeting curriculum standards, and supporting teacher development, all the while being mindful of the culture and context of schools to match improvement strategies with changing context over time (Hoy, 2012).

School principals today must possess and demonstrate an increasingly complex and diverse set of technical and adaptive leadership skills to strengthen learning by concentrating on the teaching-learning process and the circumstances that sustain it. Learning environments are evolving, and the crop of learners in schools is changing, so school principals must possess and demonstrate an increasingly complex and diverse set of technical and adaptive leadership skills. Successful principals today understand the complex complexities of school organizations, according to Hoy (2012), and work deliberately to foster creative and safe learning environments that have a positive impact on school improvement. The essence of IL suggests that the more concentrated a principal's job is on teaching and learning processes, the more positive the impact on student learning results would be (Robinson et al, 2008; Supovitz & Buckley, 2008). Principals, as instructional leaders, should guide the learners to ensure that the school is a competitive learning environment and promote a culture of

accomplishment for all learners by communicating and executing a common vision and purpose that is shared by all stakeholders, according to the Policy on Standards for Principals (South African, 2016).

Principals have previously been responsible for running a well-run school in South Africa and other developing countries, including management of teaching, which includes handling teaching and learning. Managing team members, designing rules and procedures, and overseeing the school's overall activities have always been part of the work (Bush & Glover, 2009). Effective (Hoy, 2012) schools were characterized by an environment or culture oriented toward learning, as reflected in high achievement standards and aspirations of learners, a focus on basic skills, a high level of involvement in decision making, and professionalism among teaches (Robinson et al, 2008).

A further shift in the principal's role, beginning in the mid-1990s, involved the expectations that principals should provide IL (Marks & Printy, 2003). This implied that the principal's role had changed from management to IL. Bush & Glover (2009) also refers to the South African context claim that principals as instructional leaders focus strongly on overseeing curriculum implementation across the school. Principals ensure the availability of appropriate learning and teaching support material that is crucial to create a culture of teaching and learning. Besides, arrange a program for class visits followed by feedback to both the learners and educators. Principals promote school-wide professional development to increase teacher competencies. School principals define and communicate shared goals to both teachers and the learners. In short, the principal working with teachers creates the conditions and structures to support effective learning and teaching for all (Hoy, 2012).

It is therefore the purpose of our study to understand the IL practices of six principals in the North West Province in South Africa. The paper begins by providing a conceptualization of IL as expounded in the literature. We then go on to give a brief account of the research methodology adopted in the study. This was followed by the presentation of our study findings. Thereafter we present a discussion on the salient issues about IL in the context of the South African education system. We conclude by providing conclusions derived from the findings of the study.

## **2. Methods**

We designed a qualitative study to better understand the perceptions and experiences of eight principals from the South African school context in enacting the concept of IL and sustaining school improvement by juxtaposing the ongoing (Shava & Heystek, 2018) emphasis on IL for principals with scholarly critiques of the ongoing conceptualization and implementation of IL.

We used interpretive analysis to investigate the experiences and behavior of participants through the conceptual lens of IL (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Creswell, 2012). In this qualitative research, we examined the experiences of six public school principals who are noted by the area manager as instructional leaders through their ability to change underperforming schools to

sustainable school improvement. The attributes of entities, processes, and meanings that are not experimentally evaluated or calculated in terms of quantity, number, or frequency are emphasized in a qualitative approach (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Through semi-structured interviews we worked to understand the world from the participants' points of view, to unravel the sense of people's interactions. Researchers argue that qualitative studies of educational leadership are needed to capture principals' thought and behavior in their context (Firestone & Riehl, 2005).

Finally, we were interested in the overall question of instructional leadership and how individuals carry out their duties as instructional leaders to help underperforming schools progress over time. We used a purposeful sampling method to connect our cases by identifiable IL characteristics (Creswell, 2012; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). We requested referrals for participants from the education area manager from which the schools were selected. The area manager position was credibly suited to determine principals who have managed to change underperforming schools through the emphasis of IL. We gave the area manager the following working description for IL: a principal who creates a vision, team, and process that prioritizes and improves the educational environment to transform underperforming schools into high-performing ones. This term was chosen because it concisely summarizes the extensive literature on IL while also providing a strong but limited basis for nominations. The six schools nominated were three secondary schools, there are two primary schools, and one farm school. Two men and four women participated, with principal experience ranging from five to more than ten years (see table 1).

To gather a breath of contextual (Shava & Heystek, 2018) information about each case, we took about one hour or longer with each principal. This was the intended length of our interviews, but some interviews took longer depending on the participants' schedules. We took detailed field notes on the events, people, and settings that we obtained directly from the participants. We used Lincoln and Guba's (2011) trustworthiness norms, namely integrity, transferability, dependability, and conformity, to ensure the study's trustworthiness. Longer interaction, member checks, and peer debriefing were all used to boost morale that the researchers had recorded the phenomenon correctly. Schools were coded as schools A to F to protect their identity. To establish a good working relationship, we made telephone contact with each participant. The North West University, Potchefstroom Campus Ethics Committee, the North West Department of Education, and the participants all gave their consent. Participants were informed that they may withdraw from the study at any time and that confidentiality and anonymity would be observed during and after the study was completed.

### **3. Results and Discussion**

The IL strategy was born out of the effective (Hoy, 2012) school movement of the late 1970s and rose to prominence during the early 1990s standards-based reform movement (Terosky, 2014). Other recent reviews of the literature on principal leadership (e.g., Hallinger, 2011; Southworth, 2002; Terosky, 2014) indicate that the IL framework is still alive and well in the fields of strategy, science, and practice in school leadership and management twenty years later. Indeed, the increased global

focus on transparency (Terosky, 2014) appears to have reignited interest in IL (Hallinger, 2005; , Horng, Klasik & Loeb, 2009) since the turn of the twenty-first century.

Despite the numerous studies on IL (Hallinger, 2011) and the worldwide publicity it gets, there are still concerns about the concept's meaning, application, and utility. Some scholars claim that the definition of IL is still underdeveloped (Hallinger, 2011) and that the behaviors correlated with its implementation are too wide. Critics also say that the concept focuses too much on transactional leadership and superficial slogans (Leithwood, Harris & Hopkins, 2008; Hallinger & Heck, 1996). Furthermore, despite the recent focus on IL, educational studies continue to show that the vast majority of a principal's day is comprised of administrative activities (Hallinger, 2011), such as school facility management, school protection, enforcement paperwork, and non-instructional based programs (Kafka, 2009), bringing into question the effectiveness of IL implementation (Horng, Klasik & Loeb, 2009; Jenkins, 2009; Kafka, 2009).

Despite the criticism of instructional leadership, this article aims to examine the practices of six principals in South Africa's North West province and assess how these practices contribute to school development.

### *3.1 Conceptual Dimensions Of Instructional Leadership*

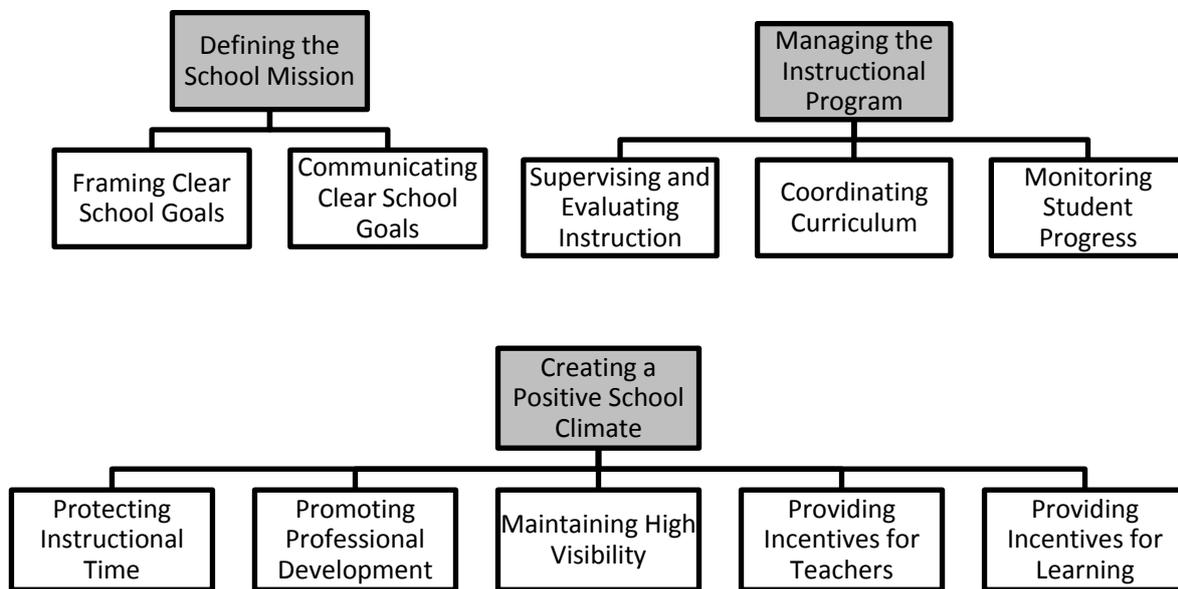
Several notable IL models have been proposed (Hallinger, 2011). (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Hallinger, 2003, 2011; Leithwood & Montgomery, 1982). We'll concentrate on the model suggested by Hallinger and Murphy (1985) since it's the one that's been used the most in empirical studies. Hallinger and Murphy (1985) created a three-dimensional conceptualization of IL for the IL position of principals, which included: (1) identifying the school's mission, (2) managing the instructional program, and (3) fostering a positive school environment. These three dimensions are further broken down into ten different types of instructional leadership roles (see figure 1).

Two main functions, framing the school's goals and communicating the school's goals, comprise the first dimension, defining the school's mission. Working with the staff to define the school's mission entails ensuring that the school has specific and achievable priorities that are communicated within the school community. The dimension focuses on the principal's role in collaborating with staff to ensure that the school has consistent, measurable, time-based targets that are focused on students' academic progress. The emphasis of goal creation is regarded as less important than the result (Hallinger, 2011). The objectives are mainly concerned with the student's academic success.

The second dimension, instructional program management, focuses on the planning and monitoring of instruction and curriculum. This component encompasses three leadership functions: supervising and assessing teaching, curriculum coordination, and learner progress tracking. This dimension necessitates the principal's active participation in motivating, supervising, and overseeing teaching and learning (Hallinger, 2011). These responsibilities (Shava & Heystek 2018) necessitate

the principal's knowledge of teaching and learning (Hallinger, 2011), as well as a dedication to school development.

The third dimension, promoting a positive school learning climate, which includes several functions: protecting instructional time, promoting professional development, maintaining high visibility, providing incentives and rewards for teachers and learners. The nature and function of this dimension are far broader. It supports the idea that successful schools cultivate an intellectual press (Shava & Tlou, 2018) by instilling high standards and expectations in students and teachers. The principal is also in charge of improving the school's environment by ensuring that a high level of excellence is maintained (Shava & Tlou 2018). The principal must set an example of principles and behaviors that foster an environment of continuous improvement in teaching and learning (Dwyer, 1986; Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). Figure 1 depicts Hallinger and Murphy's instructional management system from 1985.



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

### 3.2 Instructional Leadership, A Core Strategy for Influencing Learner Achievement.

Proponents of IL argued that if the primary mission of schools was to teach and learn, then the primary mission of school leaders should be to do the same (Firestone & Riehl, 2005). Education leadership is synonymous with instructional leadership in that principals are required to focus their efforts on improving teaching environments and, as a result, student achievement (Hallinger, 2011; Terosky, 2014). Previous research has found that the principal's leadership style has a significant impact on a variety of aspects of the school environment, including teacher and staff attitudes, student learning, and academic achievement (Bush, 2013). IL has gotten the most coverage out of all the hypotheses in the literature (Robinson et al, 2008). IL focuses primarily on the role of the school

principal in planning, monitoring, supervising, and improving curriculum and instruction in the school (Supvitz et al, 2009; Hallinger, 2010; Shava & Heystek, 2018).

IL is a collection of behaviors and practices implemented by principals to foster teacher instructional development, and these activities are closely linked to student achievement (Hallinger, 2011). (Robinson et al, 2008; Supovitz & Buckley, 2008). Leithwood et al (2004) concluded that “leadership is second only to classroom instruction among all school-related variables that contribute to what students learn at school” in their study of school leadership and student learning outcomes. Robinson et al (2008), as well as Hoy and Miskel (2013), have shown that school leadership, especially instructional leadership, has a positive impact on student achievement. This suggests that, because of their instructional function (Shava & Heystek, 2018), principals play a critical role in enhancing student learning. Leadership has an underappreciated influence, with direct and indirect effects accounting for about a quarter of a school's effectiveness (Leithwood et al, 2004).

Principals who operate as instructional leaders aim to increase instructional effectiveness in their schools (Hallinger, 2011) through quality interactions with teachers and in an informative process of supervision. As instructional leaders, principals primarily direct teaching for effective learning and support teachers (Shava & Heystek 2018) and students in their work towards educational excellence. IL is the leadership function associated with teaching and learning specifically concerning duties and responsibilities principals need to perform on daily basis to support teachers and learners towards educational excellence (DeMatthews, 2014).

Principals who serve as instructional leaders strive to improve instructional effectiveness in their schools (Hallinger, 2011) by interacting with teachers and engagingly supervising them. Principals' primary role as instructional leaders is to guide teaching for successful learning and to encourage teachers (Shava & Heystek, 2018) and students in their pursuit of educational excellence. Instructional leadership refers to the roles and obligations that principals must carry out regularly to assist teachers and students in achieving educational excellence (DeMatthews, 2014).

In IL, the principal's main responsibilities are to communicate high standards to teachers and students, supervise teaching, track evaluation, and student development, coordinate the school's curriculum, promote an atmosphere conducive to successful learning, and create a positive work environment (Marks & Printy, 2003). We suggest the following working definition of IL-based on these conceptual issues: a school principal who establishes a specific vision, team, community, and framework that prioritizes and improves a school's instructional environment Our meaning may be similar to that of Jita and Mokhele (2013), who are of the view that IL incorporates the process of creating and sustaining an environment in which the highly complex, socially textured tasks of effective schooling can take place (Shava & Heystek, 2018).

### 3.3 *Instructional Leadership and Learner Achievement*

DiPaola and Hoy (2015) also supported the argument by indicating that several comprehensive meta-analyses have linked IL to student learning achievement. They concluded that several empirical studies have established that the principal's IL (Shava & Heystek, 2018) behaviors indirectly and positively impacted school climate, culture, and organization. School mission, goals, and high academic expectations were IL behaviors that manifested themselves in classroom instruction to positively impact student outcomes (May & Supovitz, 2011). Studies published between 1978 and 2006, the authors found that practices associated with establishing school goals, supervision of instruction, and professional learning were highly impactful and concluded, "the more leaders focus their relationships, their work, and their learning on the core business of teaching and learning, the greater their influence on student outcomes" (Robinson et al, 2008).

IL has been the subject of many reports. Several studies have concluded that principals who use an IL style have some control over student outcomes, typically by the teacher or organizational means, according to Hallinger (2011), who published a study of the IL. According to Marks and Printy (2003), a principal's IL has an indirect impact on student reading achievement and a direct effect on school environment variables. School-level factors like school environment or classroom-level factors like teacher effectiveness, motivation, and job satisfaction often mediate the relationship between instructional leadership and student achievement.

Also supported by DiPaola and Hoy (2015) that the IL has been related to student learning achievement in several systematic meta-analyses They concluded that several empirical studies have shown that the principal's IL (Shava & Heystek, 2018) activities influenced school environment, community, and organization indirectly and positively. IL habits that expressed themselves in classroom instruction to positively affect student outcomes were the school mission, priorities, and high academic standards (May & Supovitz, 2011). The authors of studies conducted between 1978 and 2006 concluded that activities correlated with setting school priorities, management of teaching, and professional learning had a significant effect, and that "the more leaders focus their relationships, their work, and their learning on the core business of teaching and learning, the greater their influence on student outcomes" (Robinson et al, 2008).

### 3.4 *Instructional Leadership and Its Impact On Teaching Practices.*

In the last 15 years, several educational studies (Shava & Heystek, 2018) have demonstrated the importance of high-quality, centered principal-teacher interactions regarding particular instructional strategies that influence teaching practices (May & Supovitz, 2011; Robinson et al, 2008). On the other hand, Supovitz and Buckley (2008) and Supovitz et al, (2009) in their studies concluded that there is a connection between the principal's IL behaviors and teachers' innovation, creativity, integrity, and loyalty to the school and their colleagues. Recent research has expanded the scope of IL to include collaboration among teachers, the creation of opportunities for professional

growth (Shava & Tlou, 2018), and the formation of professional learning communities (Marks & Printy, 2003).

From the teachers' perspectives, Blasé and Blasé (1999) discovered two major themes that influenced their motivation, ingenuity, effectiveness, and diverse use of instructional strategies. As principals and teachers talk about teaching, it encourages teachers to think about what they're doing. The reflective attitudes and behaviors of classroom teachers improved dramatically when principals promoted collaboration among teachers to research teaching and learning, as well as opportunities for teachers to prepare and promote quality professional learning consistent with learning principles. Supovitz and Buckley (2008) refer to these themes as, “high- leverage IL: evidence-based feedback given by principals that induce teachers to examine their instruction to improve the effectiveness of their practice”. Individualized IL behaviors, such as giving detailed input on a lesson encountered, are more likely to improve a teacher's practices. Finally, the amount of time a principal devotes to IL activities is linked to positive classroom instructional change and long-term school growth. Classroom practice and leadership are the two key factors affecting the quality of education, according to international studies on school improvement (Bush, 2013).

Our research aimed to learn more about how instructional leaders in six different schools affect successful teaching and learning in their schools to change underperforming schools to sustainable improvement. With the study’s purpose in mind, data analysis of the six principals noted for their instructional leadership yielded several key themes of which we will discuss in this article. The study participants were made up of two men and four women. The schools' location breakdown was one combined school from the farms, two primary schools, and three secondary schools. Principals' experience ranged from five to ten years (see table 1). The five schools are located in a mixed-race township. To locate the cases within their contextual nuances, we gathered a variety of data forms (Creswell, 2012). Soon after the interviews were finished, data analysis began.

**Table 1.** Shows the participating principals and the schools’ demographics

| School | Location        | Number of learners | Number of Trs | Years as Principal | Qualification of Principal |
|--------|-----------------|--------------------|---------------|--------------------|----------------------------|
| A      | Township school | 1452               | 44            | 20 yrs+            | B.Ed hons<br>Mgt           |
| B      | Township school | 1475               | 40            | 14yrs+             | Masters in<br>Public Admin |
| C      | Township school | 1037               | 30            | 5yrs               | Masters<br>Edu. Mgt        |
| D      | Township school | 550                | 19            | 10yrs+             | BA Hons<br>Lit             |
| E      | Farm School     | 618<br>Gr R to 12  | 20            | 7yrs               | Bed Hons<br>Mgt            |
| F      | Township school | 1120               | 30            | 10yrs+             | Bed Hons<br>Mgt            |

From our interviews with all principals, we established that the communities served by the six schools exhibited a range of problems which include; high levels of poverty especial at the farm school, teenage pregnancy including learners especially in the townships, unemployment, lack of parental support to schools especially secondary schools, child-headed families, school break-ins especially in the townships and premature deaths due to the prevalence of HIV and AIDS in both the townships and the farming communities. While these mostly external school conditions have a significant impact on school improvement, all six principals indicated that these challenges affected their school leadership but they try as much as possible to do the best under such conditions in the interest of learner improvement. All six schools have enough classrooms for the learners. The buildings are in good shape although in two primary schools the structures looked old they are well looked after which creates a conducive learning environment.

### 3.5 Perceptions of Principals of Their Core Instructional Functions

The analysis of data gathered from principals showed that principals as instructional leaders play a vital role in improving school teaching and learning Principals play an important role in ensuring school progress, according to all six principals. The six principals who were interviewed all had a thorough understanding of the situation of their core instructional functions.

Principal A commented in this regard:

*This school was a trap school for years, this means it was underperforming, the school had a lot of problems. I did not wait for the department to come and solve these problems but to solve the problems by ensuring that effective teaching and learning takes place on daily basis. I instructed every teacher to focus on the core business of the school ie teaching and learning and that is it.*

Principal B:

*I do a lot to ensure effective teaching and learning takes place. Every day I move from class to class to ensure that it's business all the time While the academic deputy head is in charge of the academic side, I also ensure that all teachers are doing their work every day. I make sure that teaching and learning take place in every class by closely monitoring the teaching process by all teachers and learners who come to school early.*

Principal F:

*I do not teach, but every day I am here, I go around the classrooms assisting teachers, I also go around asking teachers how they expect me to help them improve their classroom teaching. I also rely more on my HODs but I monitor a lot.*

Participants C, D and F spoke extensively of their key roles as instructional leadership which in summary include:

- a. Monitoring the teaching and learning process closely daily.
- b. Direct supervision of teachers by both principal and SMT.
- c. Providing the necessary resources and support for teaching and learning in all classes.
- d. Allocating a larger budget for effective teaching and learning (school D)
- e. Managing the instructional program in the schools.
- f. Creating conditions for effective teaching and learning by motivating both teachers and learners.
- g. Communicating regularly with learners, teachers, and parents.
- h. Coordinating and evaluating curriculum activities.
- i. Monitoring students' progress and attendance
- j. Designing systems for effective teaching and learning
- k. Management by walking around the school.

These views from principals coincide with Blasé & Blasé (1999) who found in their research on instructional leadership that even “walking through” visits without dialogue or feedback by the principal has a positive effect on students, encouraging encouragement, better preparation, concentration, and creativity.

All the six principals indicated that they visit classes regularly and provide support in an informal rather than in a formal way. The principal for school (C) noted that:

*Jus in an informal way—usually it's more of an informal visit, I just walk into a class or walk past a class or decide to go in the class and greet both the learners and their teacher. During such a visit I talk to learners as well as their teacher on their learning progress. I have discovered that such visits motivate both the learners and their teachers. I avoid faultfinding visits to classrooms as this demotivates teachers. I visit to reward.*

While the direct class visits for classroom observation are delegated to SMT in some cases principals also do direct classroom teaching observations and according to the interviewed principals, this helps them to have a comprehensive understanding of what takes place in the classrooms. This also helps the principal to have a comprehensive record of the class and their teacher.

### *3.6 Promoting A Culture of Teaching and Learning in the Schools*

As explained earlier, principals of schools adopt several strategies to change underperforming schools using their instructional function. Principals confirmed the presence and essence of a high degree of reliance on their HODs and SMTs when performing their most important roles as instructional leaders. A common comment from principals was that :

---In the absence of our HODs and SMT I really doubt whether we can change underperforming schools.

Such comments were raised by almost all the six principals though they were stated differently. The following comment from one of the principals (school B) is similar to many we heard in the six schools: *We work hand in hand with our senior management teams.* A study by Shava & Heytek (2018) in South Africa also established that HODs and SMTs Play a crucial role in changing underperforming schools towards improved learning outcomes

*It is important that with our teachers together we sit and set our targets, we tackle problems in the school together, we attend to most of the problems as a team, we work as a team, we connect our efforts, we seek for effective communication, we provide space for teachers to talk, we remove the fear element among our teachers and that way we are assured of changing our schools towards improved performance.*

All the participants interviewed considered their duties to include promoting a culture of teaching and learning by:

- a. Creating an environment where teachers and learners may reach their full potential by motivating them.
- b. Managing learner discipline.
- c. Promoting teaching and learning by securing resources.
- d. Monitoring and evaluating teaching and learning by providing the necessary resources.
- e. Ensuring a climate conducive to teaching and learning.
- f. Communicating with parents on issues affecting teaching and learning.
- g. Coordinating curriculum activities in the school.
- h. Proactive in and involved in continuous professional development.

In all their comments principals indicated that they were overwhelmed by the work of their teachers and they were professionally obliged to coordinate and implement the state curriculum. There was also consensus among the interviewed participants that they conducted class observations on regular basis to ensure effective teaching and teachers are happy about these visits since they are meant to develop them. Principal (A) described his efforts to work collaboratively with a mining company that has since financial assistance to build computer science labs in the school, an accomplishment that is indirectly related to the improvement of teaching and learning. The main subject at the schools was teaching and learning and everyone was focused on issues related to teaching and learning.

### 3.7 Managing Instructional Program

During our interviews with principals, we established that principals as managers of instructional programs in schools ensured an environment where teachers confident in expanding their capacities so that others could similarly thrive and grow. This was done through professional

development programs facilitated by teachers or HODs to improve the teaching skills of their colleagues. In all the secondary schools there are positions of subject heads who are also responsible for the management of all aspects of the particular subject including workload allocation, timetabling, and supervision. Despite subject heads assuming the responsibility of curriculum supervision, principals also supervise both the subject head and teachers. It emerged that while the subject head is responsible for subject policy, planning for the subject in the school and the implementation of any new techniques or approaches are coordinated and approved by the principal who is overall in charge of planning, organizing, leading, and controlling instructional programs in the school.

Academic achievement is one of the pillars of all schools' success around the world and all schools covered in the study are focused on improving teaching and learning. In the field of educational leadership, the principal plays a major role to ensure the achievement of academic excellence by creating a culture that is focused on teaching and learning. Academic excellence can only be achieved (Shava & Heystek, 2018) if all stakeholders in the school setup are directly focused on teaching and learning and this can be achieved through initiatives by the principal. At school (D) the principal explained as follows:

*With regards to examination results my intervention is very strong. I make sure all teachers produce good results. I also closely monitor the performance of learners through a comprehensive analysis of the examination results both internal and external examinations. I am always there to supervise and advise.*

Similarly, at school (B) the principal remarked that:

*I keep a record of the analysis of results for all teachers through a spreadsheet showing learner averages and subject averages. This record is discussed with the teachers and we seek ways to improve where learners are not performing well. Where there is always high performance we reward both the teacher and learners. We always seek to motivate and encourage hard working among our teachers and learners. My leadership is not only limited to teachers but I also consider communicating with parents and learners especially where performance is poor.*

In all six schools, the instructional time is protected and managed properly. Principals and HODs are involved in the allocation of work and the design of personal time table for teachers and they ensure that these timetables are followed. A similar study by Shava and Heystek (2018) established that teachers however have an input into the academic allocation of work and usually they feel comfortable with the subject and workload allocation. The involvement of teachers in subject allocation and decision-making about the allocation of work stimulates their professional growth and influences the organizational culture of teaching and learning.

This research results contribute to the existing evidence base on the role of instructional leaders in enhancing school improvement by identifying insights into roles of instructional leadership in

South African school contexts. Our findings expand the current knowledge base and add several nuances to instructional leadership. Regarding our research questions, We discovered that leadership had a significant effect on school progress in all six schools. The school principal is regarded as a critical component of progress, especially in terms of student academic performance. Principals as instructional leaders play a major role by effectively managing external and internal environments to create a culture of teaching and learning, which is a condition for school academic success.

The six principals take priority on continuous professional development and motivating teachers as characteristics of a competent leader A good school leader, according to Lithwood et al (2008), is capable of setting direction, managing families, and overseeing teaching and learning programs. Our study in the six schools in the North West Province of South Africa established that the six schools have high-quality leadership, which is dedicated to ensuring school improvement. We established that principals achieve school improvement by setting the direction of the schools and establishing a straightforward course of action that everybody, including the community, and establishing high expectations for their schools. Principals prioritized teaching and learning activities together with staff development and giving the necessary support and training to succeed. They ensure that the full scope of rewards and conditions in the schools fully supports rather than inhibits teaching and learning.

Scholars have observed that contributions from English-speaking Western societies have dominated the literature on educational leadership and management (Shava & Heystek, 2018; Shava & Ndebele, 2016; Shava & Heystek, 2015), and consequently, in Africa understanding of how IL educational leadership influences learning outcomes is limited. Recognizing this limitation, this study conducted in South African schools established that IL leadership is essential for promoting learner achievement. It can also help the school solve problems appropriately, and it can lead to various improvements in the school set-up. The potential IL skills of the principal are seen informing and creating a vision for the school. Leadership in IL is crucial to school improvement. According to this research, schools at various stages of growth will need different leadership emphases. Based on the results of this report, what is important to a leader's ability to enhance teaching and learning is motivational strategies, collaborative decision-making, and interpersonal skills, which should be essential for leadership and key to IL. The study established that school leaders and staff collaborate to review and improve teaching.

Leadership in the schools investigated in the study is directly involved in coordinating the curriculum across the school. This includes activities such as setting goals and developing progressions of teaching objectives. Involvement of the principal, higher output was also linked to classroom evaluation and feedback. Principals also systematically monitor student progress.

#### **4. Conclusions**

The school principal is an important component of successful teaching and school reform because he or she sets the tone for the school and is responsible for its instructional programs. Due to

his or her main role in fostering a culture of teaching and learning in the classroom, an instructional leader is without a doubt the cornerstone of school change. Our findings also show that the school principal, along with the SMT, provides solid foundations for school reform, with the principal remaining the primary source of leadership power.

We discovered that principals delegate duties to other members in all situations and that this concerted attempt to share leadership roles influenced learner achievement. Teachers will contribute by sharing their experience with colleagues as part of the distributed leadership model. The conventional view of instructional leadership emphasizes principals' responsibilities as representatives of hierarchical systems that keep teachers from making decisions or taking leadership positions. The current wave of educational reform in South Africa today has influenced the nature of leadership in such a way that they have to devise new and innovative practices of instructional leadership with elements of shared participative and democratic leadership.

All in all the findings illustrate a move away from the traditional authoritarian type of instructional leadership towards a more collaborative and democratic approach which proved successful in school improvement. The approach to establish and maintain a sound culture of teaching and learning through sharing of the instructional leadership responsibilities was found to be effective, applicable to all the six schools, and hence resulting in school improvement. Findings from our interviews resonate with the findings from our literature review, which established that principals through their instructional leadership are the cornerstones of school improvement and ingredients for success in schools.

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