



## PRINCIPALS' KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCES IN EXECUTING INSTRUCTIONAL ROLES IN SCHOOLS

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### ABSTRACT

This article sought to examine the ways in which secondary school principals support School Management Teams (SMTs) in carrying out their duties as instructional leaders. How can principals empower the SMTs is the main thesis of this article. The emphasis will be on principals' experiences carrying out their instructional leadership responsibilities in the South African province of Gauteng's Tshwane-West District. The thesis of this essay is that when principals fail to fulfill their obligations to support the school administration, student performance does not increase. Therefore, it becomes an issue if the administrator is not held responsible for raising student and teacher performance levels in the classroom. Design, method, and strategy A questionnaire was used to obtain the data. Through a thorough application of the knowledge gathered from the literature study, the questionnaire's content was made to hold up. To validate the questionnaire, a pilot study was done. The triangulation of data from many sources, including focus-group interviews and the questionnaire, served as the primary method of reliability in this study. Principals of secondary schools in South Africa's Gauteng province's Tshwane-West District made up the study's sample. All 55 secondary schools located in the Tshwane West District were included in the study using the total sample methodology.

Keywords: *instruction, principal, execute, empower, instructional leadership.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The study investigated how secondary school principals give School Management Teams (SMTs) the authority to carry out their duties as instructional leaders. The article's main focus is on secondary school principals' perspectives on their responsibilities in light of the obligations set forth in the South African Schools Act No. 84 of 1996. The focus was on carrying out SASA-mandated empowerment tasks for the school administration team. Throughout this text, the school management team shall be referred to as SMT. Since they are the key figure in promoting reform, change, and innovation, school principals have recently come under growing pressure to develop their leadership and managerial abilities. However, carrying out these duties poses challenges for educational leaders. The principal is also entrusted with the obligation to communicate the school's vision and mission, which support excellent teaching and learning. The argument about the role of the school principal as leaders and managers in enhancing student performance has heated up because of requests from around the world in the past ten years for schools to enhance performance in general and the quality of student success. An increasing body of evidence supports the significance of effective leadership and management of teaching and learning. School management teams (SMT) should be given more authority by principals to oversee and direct teaching and learning activities in classrooms. Most principals deal with financial, resource management, and policy issues rather than focusing on equipping management teams with instructional leadership to improve teaching and learning.

The reduction in student accomplishment in national and international assessments and the absence of a culture of teaching and learning in many schools have drawn attention to the instructional leadership of principals and the SMT. As a result, there are many dysfunctional

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schools with a broken culture of teaching and learning. The incapacity of principals is to blame for the breakdown in the culture of teaching and learning. The restoration of an effective culture of teaching and learning presents a significant problem in South Africa due to the ineffective supervision of teaching. One of the principal's core responsibilities is to manage teaching and learning. In order to achieve quality education, it is crucial to make sure that South African schools hold principals accountable for equipping the school administration team with the necessary skills. The South African School Act encapsulates the principal's responsibility for exercising leadership and ensuring that learner achievement is increased (Department of Education, 1996). A public school shall be professionally managed by the principal under the direction of the Head of Department in accordance with Section 16(3) of the South African School Act. The principal's responsibility in performing this job is to make sure that the learners' education is promoted appropriately and in compliance with established policies. A yearly report on the academic performance of that school must also be prepared and submitted to the Head of Department in accordance with Section 16A(b)(i)-(iii) of the Act (Department of Education, 1996). The principal is ultimately responsible for creating a strategy outlining how academic achievement at the school will be improved. The principal's responsibilities include providing instructional leadership within the school by directing, supervising, and mentoring the school management team, ensuring fair workload distribution among staff, taking part in appraisal systems to enhance teaching and learning, and ensuring the proper and effective organization of all evaluations and assessments carried out in the school.

### **1.1.PURPOSE OF THE PAPER**

This article sought to examine the ways in which secondary school principals support School Management Teams (SMTs) in carrying out their duties as instructional leaders. In other words, it aims to determine whether or not South African school principals are held accountable for carrying out their empowering obligations with regard to instructional leadership. How can principals empower the SMTs is the main thesis of this article? The emphasis will be on principals' experiences carrying out their instructional leadership responsibilities in the South African province of Gauteng's Tshwane-West District.

The article will be responding to questions one and two on the interview protocol attached at the end of the article.

The questions are stated below.

- ✓ *Describe in your own words what you understand by the term "Instructional leadership"?*
- ✓ *Explain the duties you perform as an instructional leader in your school?*

### **1.2.BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY**

In South Africa's Gauteng Province's Tshwane West District, this study was carried out. Through instructional leadership in schools, principals and School Management Teams (SMTs) are expected to guide and oversee the processes of teaching and learning. The knowledge and experiences of the principals in carrying out instructional leadership duties in Schools were the main subject of this study. To implement instructional leadership, principals are expected to collaborate with deputy principals and department heads. At the conclusion of the study, it was anticipated that principals would be able to support SMT members in carrying out their roles as instructional leaders in schools.



## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. The concept of instructional leadership

The job of school principals is anchored in curriculum and instruction by instructional leadership, which calls for them to be intensely and consistently involved in a variety of initiatives that support the learning and development of all students (Neumerski et al., 2018). In the future, school leaders can be assigned to roles that match their skills and motivations regardless of their ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or other potentially marginalizing qualities thanks to instructional leadership, which emerged from a social justice perspective (DeMatthews, 2018). The ability to develop positive working relationships with the management team and the teachers, enhance teaching techniques through supervision, and develop management team competencies to lead and manage efficient teaching and learning in the school are just a few of the capabilities that make it possible to apply instructional leadership. Principals must also be dedicated to influencing and enhancing student outcomes (Leithwood et al., 2020). Shaked (2021) thinks that instructional leadership qualities are expected of school principals. In his study, Shaked (2021) discovered that some principals merely place a secondary value on instructional leadership, with only a tiny percentage of principals' time going toward these activities. Therefore, principals must put enhancing instruction and curriculum ahead of managerial responsibilities in their role as instructional leaders. Coordination of the curriculum, supervision and evaluation of instruction, and progress tracking of students should be the principals' responsibilities in terms of instructional leadership. Principals must be led by evidence-based treatments that are informed by students' strengths-based, individualized student profiles when performing their instructional tasks (Fitzgerald & Radford, 2022).

### 2.2. Experiences of principals in executing their instructional leadership roles

Merritt and Wang (2022) assert that in order to guarantee that teachers employ top-notch curricula, instruction, and evaluation, principals who serve as instructional leaders must develop school goals with student learning as the main priority. This could help teachers and students feel more comfortable in the classroom. Principals must create systems of accountability that prioritize student learning in all decisions to fulfill their duties as instructional leadership roles. According to Bhujel (2021), each school's principal should serve as a mentor, change agent, role model, director of the educational institution, and manager of human resources to empower SMTs. The student behavior and academic outcomes must be the principal's main concerns when empowering the SMTs. Yang and Liu (2019) discovered a positive relationship between servant leadership and follower psychological empowerment and employee creativity. Once more, Yang and Liu (2019) cite Bhujel (2021) as their source when they assert that empowerment occurs when servant leaders assist and enable their followers' personal growth, which must include independent decision-making, information sharing, and creative performance activities. According to them (Yang and Liu, 2019), it is critical that principals foster the growth of SMT competencies and act independently. Academic success and school effectiveness can be improved in schools where the principle has adopted a participatory leadership style and encouraged the management team to accept sharing responsibility and decision-making.

According to Lee, Lyubovnikova, et al. (2020), the principal must implement and exhibit SMT empowerment capabilities if he or she wants to inspire underperforming SMTs in schools. Once this happens, the SMTs will gradually start to emulate the principal's behavior and be eager to contribute positively to their schools. Limon (2022) advises principals that when empowering SMTs, the following considerations must be kept in mind, specifically: To foster trust in SMTs, the principal must develop shared management structures, ensure SMT participation in problem-solving and decision-making mechanisms, enable SMT autonomy, encourage innovation, creativity, and risk-taking, offer support by delegating authority to SMTs, provide them with

intellectual stimulation, affirm, and appreciate their accomplishments. The principle should serve as a positive role model by exhibiting qualities like interest, enthusiasm, optimism, honesty, and approachability.

### **2.3.Roles of principals in Executing their instructional leadership in schools**

According to Muyunda (2022), although it is well recognized that the principal's leadership style has a crucial role in fostering the teaching and learning process, it is less obvious how SMTs experience and put that leadership into effect in the classroom. The following qualities are necessary for principals to perform their jobs as instructional leaders: They must possess morals, values, and goals, as well as vision. Similar to this, instructional leadership, according to Lamsal (2022), is the role in any educational setting that may make use of unique abilities and knowledge to guarantee kids' academic performance while providing the essential assistance to all teachers, pupils, and school personnel. Planning, curriculum design and development, training delivery and professional development, teacher evaluation and monitoring, and student assessment are just a few of the different aspects and dimensions of instructional leadership. As a result, Tedla and Redda (2022) counsel principals that they should function as decision-makers by exhibiting leadership qualities such a strong personality, the capacity to handle problems, and decision-making/problem-solving skills. Modern school leaders oversee the intricate structures known as schools rather than just being "the principal instructor." As a result, principals are expected to develop a working relationship with other stakeholders as well as the SMTs. School principals must address the issues of effective stakeholder participation and empowerment if they are to accomplish their schools' objectives. Zulu, who support the idea that the duty of the school administrator must entail working with other stakeholders like the SMTs and aiding them with the necessary abilities, reaffirm this viewpoint.

The Department of Basic Education (2020) in South Africa urged principals to be more helpful than directive and asked for a completely new method of conducting business. Since it is essential to all school operations, principals were asked to implement change by giving SMTs instructions on how to carry out shared educational objectives. Since then, the same appeal has been supported as a component of the 2030 school vision. The school principal is required to serve as an instructional leader by engaging in instructional projects, expressing the school's mission and vision with SMTs, and fostering an atmosphere that supports teaching and learning (Polatcan & Cansoy, 2019). In order to fulfill their responsibilities, principals must be receptive to innovative working procedures that use SMTs to enhance instructional leadership in classrooms. The principals are anticipated to act as mentors in the development of SMTs' skills.

### **3.RESEARCH METHOD**

Both qualitative and quantitative methodologies were used in this article. The post-positivist, phenomenological, and interpretivist paradigms were utilised, with the latter two predominating in the paper. A questionnaire was used to obtain the data. Through a thorough application of the knowledge gathered from the literature study, the questionnaire's content was made to hold up. To validate the questionnaire, a pilot study was done. The primary method of reliability employed in this study was the triangulation of information from many sources, including focus groups and questionnaires. Principals of secondary schools in South Africa's Gauteng province's Tshwane-West District made up the study's sample. All 55 secondary schools located in the Tshwane West District were included in the study using the total sample methodology. Each school's principal (n=55) participated in the study. In the quantitative approach, the data were described using descriptive statistics like frequencies and mean scores as well as explanatory methods and inferential statistics like factor analysis and Cronbach's alpha coefficient. SMT (principals,



department heads, and deputy principals) were among the participants; other SGB members were purposefully left out.

### 3.1. Sampling procedure

The knowledge and experiences of principals' roles in instructional leadership in schools were examined in this study using purposive sampling. The goal was to determine the knowledge and expertise of principals in instructional leadership roles. There were 55 participants. Principal SMT members who were available for interviews made up the inclusion criteria. Only principals, vice principals, and department heads made up the SMT for this study. The sampling process was designed with the expectation that a sampled population of principals, deputy principals, and head of departments (HODs) would provide thorough and varied information about their experiences (Nomatshila, Apalata, & Mabunda, 2022).

### 3.2. Data collection and Focus group discussions

Data for this study were gathered using a variety of methods. To learn more about principals' involvement in instructional leadership in schools, surveys and focus groups were conducted. The talks that were held to examine the perspectives and expertise of SMTs about principals' roles in instructional leadership were open to all participants. There was only one focus group interview session, which lasted for roughly 60 minutes and had six participants. The researchers supported the talks by posing open-ended, unstructured questions in accordance with interview methodology. The meeting was held in English, which was widely accepted as an official language. An audio recorder was used to capture the conversations. The researchers next conducted verbatim transcription of the data in order to prepare it for analysis (Nomatshila, et al., 2022).

### 3.3. Data analyses

Thematic analysis was used to examine the focus group's narrative data. Additionally, field data was verbatim transcribed from voice tapes. The transcribed information was completed as soon as the interviews were conducted in order to prevent incorrect interpretation of crucial information from the recordings and focus group interviews. To give the transcriptions meaning that was consistent with the participants' responses, they were written down in English text. To accurately capture the information on the audio tapes, the recordings were played in spurts. The major transcripts of all the themes included all the meanings, ensuring the completeness of the data. The researchers read the transcripts several times to decipher the meaning and significance of the data. Themes were then specified to symbolize the clustered categories, which were categories with comparable meanings that were put together. The evidence foundation from which this article's conclusions were drawn was composed of the themes and sub-themes that were identified using this method (Nomatshila, et al., 2022).

## 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study was conducted to explore the experiences and knowledge of principals in executing their instructional roles in secondary schools. A total of fifty-five principals ( $n=55$ ) from SMT members from six schools in Tshwane West District of Gauteng Province in South Africa formed part of the study. There were six (6) participants for the focus group, whilst the questions were five in number. The focus group session took 60 min and to complete. The findings are presented below. Participant deputy principals differ from the heads of department and the principals with medium effect size of (0.47). There is no difference between the heads of department and the principals. Thus, the deputy principals understand the construct of instructional leadership better

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than the principals and the heads of department. This is surprising because the principal, as the head of the school, should understand instructional leadership better than the deputies and the heads of departments.

The participants of the focus group discussion showed a deep understanding of the concept instructional leadership; unlike the respondents of the questionnaire who showed little understanding of the concept. Principal B said; *"It's the type of leader who is personally in charge of the curriculum and added"*, The instructional leader focuses on teaching and learning in the school. This was supported by principal A and D who said, *"Respectively, according to me an instructional leader should be ensuring that each student receives the highest-level activity instruction daily, so as to improve the activity of teaching and learning"*. While the other principal said, *"an instructional leader must manage the curriculum"*. He must focus on attaining instructional objectives and vision. Most of the participants pointed out that the instructional leader should be a role model in many ways. The role model attribute that the participants wanted in principals are that he or she must be an instructional leader with the features of fairness, consistency, honesty, trustworthiness, and accountability in leading the school.

Principal E put it this way: *"Attributes which an instructional leader should have in order to perform his duties effectively are among others, to be honest, trustful and be a true leader with good leadership skills"*. Principal C added, *"...an instructional leader must be fair, be consistent and decisive"*. In addition, Principal D said: *"an instructional leader are to be visionary, to lead by example, manage people in this case teachers and learners, be passionate about his/her work. He needs to be a role model both at school and in the society"*. Participant principals differed with the deputy principals and the heads of department with a medium effect size of 0.45 and 0.66. This means that the principals viewed the attributes to be more important than the deputy principals and the heads of department. This is understandable as the deputies and the heads of department are performing their duties in the shadow of the principal. Hence, they do not realize the important attributes that are needed to be a principal.

In responding to the question about the principals' knowledge and experiences of instructional leadership the participants found that the deputy principals understand the construct of instructional leadership better than the principals and the heads of department. This was not expected, and it came as a surprise to the researchers because the principals as managers and leaders in schools should understand instructional leadership better than the deputy principals and the heads of departments. The participants of the focus group discussion showed a deep understanding of the concept instructional leadership; unlike the respondents of the questionnaire who showed little understanding of the concept. Principal B said; *"It's the type of leader who is personally in charge of the curriculum and added"*, The instructional leader focuses on teaching and learning in the school. This is contrary to what Fitzgerald and Radford (2022) found that principals in carrying out their instructional roles they must be guided by evidenced-based interventions which are informed by strengths-based individualised profiling of students. The view held by Fitzgerald and Radford (2022) is supported by Shaked (2021) who believe that school principals must demonstrate instructional leadership skills.

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in problem-solving. Also, the Department of Basic Education (2020) in South Africa is of the view that principals must be more supportive than directive.

Knowledge and experiences of participants about attributes of instructional leaders is discussed below. Participant principals differed with the deputy principals and the heads of department with a medium effect size of 0.45 and 0.66. This means that the principals viewed the attributes to be more important than the deputy principals and the heads of department. This is understandable as the deputies and the heads of department are performing their duties in the shadow of the principal. The fact that the deputy principals and heads of department are performing instructional leadership in the shadow of the principal was confirmed by Rahman, Tahir and Ali (2022) who are of the view that principals' tacit knowledge can provide SMTs with an understanding of instructional leadership problem-solving capabilities which have the potential to improve school performance and its capacity to have effective teaching and learning. Similarly, Sanchez, Paul, et al. (2020) found that in executing their instructional roles in schools, the principals must reduce or eliminate the risk of communication breakdown in the SMTs in schools. To remedy the shortcoming of deputy principals being working under the shadow of principals, Sanchez, et al. (2020) advise that to overcome unproductive environments that may negatively affect the SMTs negatively, principals are expected to create positive school climate for effective teaching and learning.

## 5.CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

### 5.1.CONCLUSION

There was also a possibility that some participants would not be willing to say the truth as it is for fear of being victimized by other participants for exposing the status quo in their schools. The principal is therefore responsible for the day-to-day instructional leadership and management of the school because of this mandatory delegation. However, when things go wrong, it is the school that must be held liable. School principals must be held accountable in terms of which they are accountable to the employer only in so far as their professional responsibilities are concerned on school management in the first instance. The principals must reduce or eliminate the risk of communication breakdown in the SMTs in schools. To remedy the shortcoming of deputy principals being working under the shadow of principals, they need to be empowered.

### 5.2.SUGGESTIONS

The focus was on the experiences of school principals only. Participants could possibly not be comfortable and willing, to tell the truth as it is. Participants might have the fear that telling the truth could land them in trouble with the Department of Basic Education. Whilst participants were assured by the researchers of their anonymity and the confidentiality of the information given by them, there was no guarantee that the fear of being exposed would subdue completely.

The findings and recommendations from this study may be used by the Department of Basic Education and school principals as a source of information for policymakers and stakeholders to understand the roles of school principals in empowering of SMTs to ensure the accountability of school principals on issues of school management. Based on article, policymakers and schools will then be able to revisit their policies and practices for the purpose of strengthening them. They are accounting officers in schools. In the second instance, they are fully accountable to the head of department (HOD) in the province in the case of South Africa for issues relating to school management. Section 16A of SASA lists the functions and responsibilities for which the principal as an employee of the Department of Basic Education, and in his official capacity as contemplated in Sections 23(1) and 24(1) (j) of the same Act, is accountable to the head of department (HOD). The study provides a theoretical and empirical contribution to the existing literature on the empowerment of SMTs in secondary schools. The knowledge provided can add to the existing literature about instructional leadership in schools. Principals will tap into the new

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knowledge, and they will be able to create a sense of trust in SMTs. Also, they will be able to develop shared management structures and ensure that SMTs participate in problem-solving, decision-making, as well as encouraging innovation, creativity and risk-taking by affirming and appreciating SMTs in schools.

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