

Critical Analysis of Principal's Perceptions and Interpretations of Instructional Leadership in Primary School, in Gauteng Province, South Africa

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Abstract

Instructional leadership is a crucial aspect of effective educational administration, playing an important role in shaping the quality of teaching and learning experiences in primary schools. This study aims to critically analyse principals' perceptions and interpretations of instructional leadership in Gauteng Province, South Africa. A qualitative research approach was deployed and purposive sampling was used to collect data. Data was collected using semi-structured interviews with 15 principals from Tshwane South, Gauteng Province which were analysed thematically. The findings suggest that feedback and teamwork play an important role in instructional leadership among principals' in primary schools. Principals create an atmosphere that supports all teachers' professional development in the school. Leading by example for teachers and students is important for the development and growth of the school. Finally, the study recommends that sufficient resources should be made available and ongoing training programmes should be implemented in order for principals to deliver instructional leadership to the best of their ability in their respective schools.

Keywords: Classroom, Instructional Leadership Perception, Interpretation, Professional Development.

INTRODUCTION

Instructional leadership in education focuses on how school leaders, such as principals may enhance teaching and learning in their schools. The premise that effective leadership significantly impacts student achievement and overall school success is emphasised (Hallinger et al., 2020). In order to enhance students' learning experiences, instructional leaders actively shape the techniques and strategies that instructors use in the classroom (Gurley et al., 2016). Instructional leaders are involved heavily in schools' curricula and instructional issues that impact student achievement. Accordingly, the demand by educational systems for principals to assume instructional leadership as their main responsibility has been spreading across the world (Rigby, 2014; Supovitz et al., 2010). In addition, the success of a school depends mostly on the leader's role. The school principal is the individual who takes on this duty in the context of the school and performs multiple duties. The principal is regarded as the school's most important and influential person (Zepeda, 2014). The principal facilitates professional development practices within the school to ensure that teachers have the chance to acquire the knowledge they require to implement changes in instruction that will impact student learning. Further research revealed that strong principals positively influence teachers who improved the school's performance across a range of metrics, not the least of which was student learning (Jenkins, 2009). However, only a few instructional leadership characteristics connected to enhancing the teaching and learning process have been found by researchers and the phenomenon requires further study to determine additional characteristics.

Literature Review

Principal as Instructional Leader

The leadership that schools and the larger community receive from their principals is crucial in achieving enhanced performance of the school. This is especially true nowadays when principals are expected to pay close attention to educational objectives and events in the school environment. An understanding of leadership techniques, particularly instructional leadership, is essential if the school principal is to achieve educational objectives (Hallinger et al., 2016). There are several facets to instructional leadership. Assuring the calibre of

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instruction and instructional materials, modelling instructional strategies, and overseeing the curriculum are typical practices (Bendikson et al., 2012). Therefore, principals' active roles as instructional leaders can raise the bar in schools (Hallinger et al., 2020).

Principals' instructional leadership influence on teachers

For a school to be effective, it must have competent teachers who keep the students interested. The administrators must also support the teachers' efforts. Similarly, teachers' influence on educational development is influenced by school principals' attitudes and behaviour (Park & Ham, 2016). Principals' leadership significantly impacts educational reforms, student progress, and instructors' ability to help students meet the school's goals and objectives, where teaching and learning are essential (Gurley et al., 2016). The leadership role of the principals in the educational system determines the success of the school, and their roles are complicated because they involve a wide range of tasks and responsibilities, including developing relationships with the local community, developing the school's culture, improving instruction, resolving administrative conflicts, handling emergencies, and maintaining the strictest discipline possible (Lunenburg, 2010). Being an instructional leader who will ensure that teachers receive professional development to enhance their teaching is one of the most important roles.

Furthermore, teachers prefer that principals participate actively in all school programmes and activities, including teaching (by attending seminars and staff development programmes) (Zepeda, 2014). To foster a positive school climate through efficient leadership techniques, principals help teachers to perform well (Gurley et al., 2016). As instructional leaders, principals affect teachers by inspiring them, motivating them, and fostering a culture of cooperation and trust (Jenkins, 2009). They must also encourage students to evaluate teachers' strengths and weaknesses and offer the necessary coaching on curriculum creation and methodology. In reality, intentional and focused instructional leadership fosters cooperation, offers assistance with teaching, and supports the advancement of teaching methods (Park & Ham, 2016). When a collaborative work environment is established, it gives teachers a chance to increase their knowledge and abilities, fostering lifelong learners and increasing student accomplishment.

Theoretical Framework

Student achievement and overall school effectiveness are directly impacted by instructional leadership (Kwan, 2020), which is important in determining how teaching and learning are carried out. This study aims to critically analyse principals' perceptions and interpretations of instructional leadership in primary schools within Gauteng Province, South Africa. This study uses transformational leadership theory as its paradigm. This theory can be successfully used to shed light on the dynamics of educational administration since it strongly emphasises inspiring and motivating teachers and students to achieve better performance and personal improvement (Kwan, 2020). Transformational leadership theory is when a leader collaborates and works together with all the staff members to achieve the required change in the school. Together with all the staff members, a transformational leader detects the changes needed, creates a vision that is used to monitor the changes, and collectively works towards the realisation of the changes (Moreno et al., 2022).

This theory would underpin the study by influencing how principals approach their instructional leadership duties in the school. These leaders would present a compelling vision for improving teaching and learning experiences because as principals, they have a visionary viewpoint. A shared feeling of purpose and direction would be fostered by sharing this vision with the teachers, enabling the improvement of instructional strategies and raising the standard of education.

In addition, the theory focuses on stimulating the mind and motivating principals to support creative thinking and teamwork among staff members (Thien et al., 2023). Teachers are encouraged to assess current instructional practices critically and investigate strategies that meet the learning requirements of pupils.

Understanding principals' perspectives on instructional leadership was the main objective of this study, and the theory emphasises personalised support and vision of leadership which contribute to the achievement of this aim (Dos Santos, 2019). In this situation, teachers would benefit from specialised professional development opportunities offered by transformational leaders (Shavit & Moshe, 2019). Principals can foster a culture of

continuous learning and growth by attending to the particular requirements of teachers. This will improve instructional methods and, as a result, enhance students' learning experiences.

The transformational leadership theory was used to explore whether existing leadership structures within schools in Tshwane South, Gauteng can encourage and support all staff members in achieving the goals of the school, in particular student performance. It was also used to advance some recommendations on how the instructional leaders within schools can adapt into the general transformation of schools.

Research Methodology

This research was conducted in primary schools in Tshwane South, Gauteng Province, South Africa. This qualitative research method using semi-structured interviews with 15 principals from Gauteng Province. The initial step in analysing qualitative interview data is frequently reading the transcripts of the interviews (Lewis, 2022). It is important to take detailed notes during the interviews or to record the interviews to obtain verbatim transcripts. Semi-structured interviews are widely used in research projects to verify data from other sources (Maxwell, 2021). They are relatively short in terms of timespan and usually consist of the participant answering open-ended questions. It also makes it possible to probe and elaborate on answers. Qualitative research was used in this research article because of its numerous advantages. In qualitative research, there is a significantly lower chance of getting an inadequate response because of misunderstanding (Levitt et al., 2021). Fifteen school principals in Tshwane South out of 131 primary schools were sampled. All 15 principals in this research were experienced, with experience ranging from 4 to 20 years.

Research Objectives

To assess the challenges of implementing instructional leadership strategies by the primary school principals.

To explore instructional leadership strategies that are recommended for implementation by primary school principals.

Research Questions

How do primary school principals deal with the challenges they face in the implementation of instructional leadership strategies?

Which instructional leadership strategies can be recommended for primary school principals?

Data Analysis

With the qualitative method of study, thematic analysis is commonly used to determine the themes contained in the information (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This procedure involves a hunt for significant themes related to the research question (Daly et al., 1997). According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis is a primary process for any qualitative evaluation. There are six stages of thematic analysis which are given by Braun and Clarke (2006).

The initial stage involves getting acquainted with the information via recording, reading and constant reading of information. It is essential that the researcher familiarises themselves with the information to get acquainted with the complexity of the information. Once the researcher has a thorough understanding of the information, preliminary themes can be determined. The next stage is producing preliminary themes. The third stage includes searching for themes and trends, the fourth stage includes the theme evaluation, the fifth stage includes describing and classifying such themes and the sixth stage involves writing the research report and evaluation.

The thematic analysis model of Braun and Clarke (2006) was used to assess the information obtained through interviews. Thematic analysis was the most appropriate process for analysis of data for this research.

Ethical Considerations

According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), ensuring confidentiality entails protecting participants' anonymity or privacy by concealing their identities. The researchers ensured that they respected the anonymity of the participants by using pseudonyms instead of their names. The codes P1 to P15 were used as identifiers.

The participation was voluntary, and all participants were assured that the information they provided would be utilised only for the research's purposes.

Ethical clearance was first completed from the University of South Africa as well as the Department of Education in Gauteng Province. A letter requesting permission to do this study was sent to principals of selected schools. This letter emphasised the goals and objectives of this study. They agreed to participate voluntarily by signing a consent form before commencing with the interviews.

Findings

Meaningful Feedback and Collaborative Approach

Principals model instructional leadership by creating an environment in their schools that encourages all teachers to pursue ongoing professional development. This was found to be the focus area for the majority of the principals who were more inclined towards the development of their staff. Not only this, but the statements shared by the principals also recommended it. For instance, P12 elaborated on this point and highlighted that:

To get them to think independently becomes a bit more of a difficult task. So we do try very hard to differentiate the assessments that we give our children. And in the differentiation of the assessments, we would then look at the higher order of questions to get the children to think more independently and to develop critical thinking skills. So we hope for that. By the time they go to high school, they've got enough of those skills to enable them to think critically, to work independently.” (P12)

Similar to this practice of guiding, other practices were highlighted by the participants, where leading by example was the most common practice among the primary school principals. For instance:

So, we ensure that number one, I lead as an example. I thought that if we have targets, I try to meet them and then I lead by example. And then the other thing when it comes to the instructional leadership that I'm talking about... (P13)

Another important finding was that a collaborative approach helps to overcome the negative attitudes that might be present in the school. For instance, P12 stated that the collaborative approach helps to collectively tackle the problems which might hinder the application of effective instructional strategies. Reflecting on the COVID-19 situation, the participant stated:

There is, for example, we having a Saturday workshop because there was an issue that we realised with the stress of COVID-19 and full capacity and everything that is happening with the school, we all needed to be workshopped on how to manage our stress. (P12)

The emphasis on this workshop and collaboratively responding to the chaotic situation was explained by the same participant. The strategy also highlights that the principal as an instructional leader should understand that in times like these the principal cannot act independently as there are constant new demands that they have to cater for. For instance:

Not only do you have the children that you have to deal with, but you have also got your colleagues, you've got your peers, you've got the importance of education. You've got to supervise. That's going to make demands on you, the parents that are going to make demands on you. (P12)

The impact that the guiding of the teacher has on their teaching capability is likely to be reflected in their delivery of education to the learners, eventually setting the base for their development in the world. This was reported by P14 as:

For those learners now to become responsible adults when they contribute positive things, will entail that your vision is achieved because you have to I mean, you cannot walk blind, you have to be guided. (P14)

However, this collaborative approach does not always lead to positive outcomes. This might be because this collaboration adds a burden to the teachers where they feel that they not only have to work with the students but also ensure that they become involved in curriculum planning and reporting to the Heads of Department (HoDs) or the principals. This was recognised by P07 as stated below:

So to be able to do things that we want to implement in the school and try to change and to support teachers, they see it is an extra burden for them. (P07)

Incorporating a Shared Vision

The focus of most of the participants was on the modelling of the behaviour so that the teachers are able to adopt the instructional strategies without having to put in additional effort. For instance, the P01 stated:

I would say, like the way I'm doing it right now, like modelling it, providing direction to my teachers, working with them, supporting them wherever they are falling short, working with the children as well. Not just with my teachers, with the children. And like I said, through working with our assistance as well, working with my ground staff, working with the security, working with everybody that has a say in the school, in the running of the school, or in the upliftment of the school. (P01)

Because I am a vision holder. I have introduced so many things that were not here. (P03)

The significance of the need for the shared vision was highlighted by P9 as follows:

Our vision and mission of the school will be adhered to. And then we'll have good results... We are going to impart knowledge to them. And if all of us do things together, I think as a school, we'll have good results. (P09)

The participant highlighted that collaborating and having a shared vision was necessary for imparting knowledge as well as for getting good results. For instance, P04 highlighted:

It depends on the instruction. But most of the times I have management meetings, I have staff meetings, we have developmental workshops depending on what we want to achieve. (P04)

Another practice is the yearly planning that is found to lead to effective outcomes in terms of shared vision development. For instance, P08 noted:

I believe that, you know, when you do planning for the following year, you have to get the entire staff involved. I don't like to, you know, do the planning. Somebody does the planning and we give it to the teachers and we say, this is what you've got to do. What I do is I would draw up like almost like a questionnaire, you know, asking them for their input on what do they think we can do about this. (P08)

Another principle reported to help in achieving effective learning outcomes is understanding the learning styles of children, so that the relevant thinking and practices can be developed, such as:

We try to make use of as many different methods of teaching so that we try to reach out to as many of the children as possible, given that all of them learn very differently. (P12).

Being a principal who serves as an inspiration to the teachers is necessary for attaining effective outcomes:

So I think my role as an instructional leader is to help teachers, to support teachers, to be able to provide resources and a sound structure for learning to take place. It involves a lot of mentoring and support and collaboration with my teachers and my school management team. So I try to be the type of principal that will inspire my teachers to do the best that they can in the classrooms. (P07)

This shows that vision of the principal helps develop the learning atmosphere at the institute. This leads to better integration of the instructional leadership strategies.

Improving practice by developing rapport

The developing of rapport relies on achieving positive work outcomes for the teachers. This rapport development is linked with the earlier identified theme of developing a shared vision, as this helps establish shared experiences or views. Different methods were found to enhance instructional leading, for instance P09 reports:

Normally we do have meetings monthly and meetings every week with this committee and once a week with the staff members, and then we plan together. (P09)

So it starts from the management. We sit together and do this analysis. Then we take it down to the teachers and break the information and ask them to come up with any ideas as to what do they think might work better for them because they with the children the whole day in the class. (P07)

Like I go to class, I have my own file, I have my own planning to do and the other strategy that we use as well, you know, this is very exciting. We use booklets in our school, we use booklets, we don't really use textbooks because if you check them the CAPS document, you will not really get a textbook that covers everything. You'll still need to consult other sources so that you can get the content that you look for. So, we compiled our own booklets. (P13)

As a part of the rapport development, the regular visits are found to be effective, given that they help in the development of relationships. However, regular visits were found to be different for the principals as some preferred to do scheduled visits while some preferred to do random visits. P15 was found to be more inclined towards random visit as she believed that this would help her to see teachers at their best:

I prefer random visits and I usually do that one because that's where I find them at their own best. (P15)

On the other hand, P12 highlighted that she was engaged in both formal as well as informal visits and ensure support to teachers in the class.

I try to cover all of the teachers in the year. So it's not always possible because I'm teaching as well. But when we do the visits, I will go in. I join our departmental heads so that I have gone to every class formally for the year. Informally, I will go to classes where I know that the teachers need support so that I can go in the end to try and help as far as I can... (P12)

Coaching and Leadership

Almost every principal that the researcher interviewed was of view that they were indeed visionary with their role. For instance, P04 stated that:

Because I try to comply with what my schooling is saying to aim to achieve in terms of the vision which is aligned to the school vision and mission. And also, if I would like to make it happen, make the change, be in charge. (P04)

However, none was found to be autocratic in their leadership. This was best put by P14, who recalled his practice and indicated:

We don't rule by being autocratic. When you give out instructions, you also have to enter into healthy dialogue with all. So with my assembly, when we give instructions and we have meetings, you know, so it's a healthy, open dialogue. (P14).

The achievements of every student could be attributed to a good working relationship between the principal and teacher. P14 practices this by ensuring that the up-to-date practices are used for teaching, as:

Yes, most definitely. You know, we have a good system to ensure that teachers are using up-to-date syllabus and following the curriculum. And also at the same time, allowing teachers to be creative in their teaching. (P14)

Right. So your leadership should be in terms of what the department wants to achieve as a whole. (P04)

The focus is also on achieving the goals leading to better outcomes.

But also to show that I'm with them. Yes. And whatever they are doing, that is good. I'm happy about it and commend them for it. And if there's a loophole, then I can advise on that. (P13)

Training or orientation of the new teachers

The new teacher training and development is critical. It is because these are at the initial phase of their career, and the right guidance and planning, they can be able to effectively implement the instructional strategies for effective outcomes. The principals were also aware of its significance, and is the reason ensured to give these teachers their due time despite the workload. This is observed in the statement of the P15:

As of now, of course, I am not actually involved in teaching right now because of the workload. But in a way where there is a need for me, particularly when it comes to the newly appointed educators. So it is my duty to ensure that the orientation programme and of course, I lead in terms of orientation programme. (P15)

Some of the principals dedicated their time to properly monitoring the teachers once or twice a term, while regular visits were conducted by the HoDs.

I don't do the regular visits since the HoDs do the regular visits... I can just monitor them once or twice a month (P10)

P10 mentioned that working as team can be beneficial for the upliftment of the school.

Actually, we work as a team... I would not like to display the weakness of my colleague, however, when we are having the meeting, we discuss the challenges that we found... (P10)

Challenges and problems that were encountered were discussed in a way which would not expose a teacher's weaknesses to a colleague.

Building Teacher Capacity

P01 exemplified the use of instructional strategy in classroom, making it easy for the teachers to either replicate or use something similar to it.

Well, I showed them, I showed them the benefits of it. They actually see the benefits of it because like I'm saying, if I model the kind of activity that I want done and they see that it can be done, it can be achieved, they see the kind of results I'm getting with my learners. (P01)

In addition to inspiring, P01's approach to displaying effective teaching techniques demonstrated that successful outcomes were possible. Principals could persuade teachers to use successful classroom teaching methods by modelling as an example.

By informing teachers about the opportunities and courses available, they could take charge of their professional development and, as a result, improve the quality of instruction they delivered in the classroom.

Teachers have to enrol and there are a number of courses. So we make sure we let the teachers know this is what is available and this is what they can enrol for. (P12)

An example of an organised approach to ensuring instructional alignment and accountability was P13's methodical monitoring of the Annual Teaching Plan (ATP).

We have two cycles pattern where we check the ATP, that is the annual teaching plan. If they have at least met the requirements for what they were supposed to be teaching in that particular cycle. So mostly on the fifth week, we ensure that they, they submit such work to their subject heads and the HoDs and then the check and then the subject heads would then submit their own work to the deputy principals and they also submit their reports on what they did with the teachers. And then the deputy principal will ensure that they monitor the work that was conducted by the HoDs, as well as their own work. And then all those reports are submitted to the principal in order to check if everybody is doing what they are supposed to be doing. So, at some point, although the deputy principals are also given classes, that is obviously my test to ensure that they are also complying. (P13)

The ATP plan can promote uniformity in the workplace and assist in upholding excellent teaching standards. In order to ensure accountability and alignment with instructional goals, P13 also described a systematic approach to monitoring instructors' compliance with the ATP.

P14 strongly emphasised team building and workshops to enhance teachers' personal and professional development while promoting a supportive and cooperative environment.

Of course, you know, the thing is, it's very important to develop as a person, a teacher and then his profession as a leader at school, I organise teambuilding for teachers. You know, it's always good this way. Example, taking them on team building exercises on the weekend to do you know, just to ensure that teachers see the discipline

simply because they get to learn to work with each other and also support each other. Also, if there's a development for learners that teaches that, for example, of struggling with discipline, I will ensure that I can get it professional and having a disciplined workshop...(P14)

Team building is important for the development of teachers and also creates good rapport amongst the teachers. Principals help to create a cooperative and supportive learning environment by investing in these initiatives.

P07 highlighted the responsibility of principals in locating and offering helpful information on opportunities for professional development. P07's dedication to training and workshops about professional development opportunities exemplifies a proactive approach to ensuring that teachers are updated on the most recent instructional methods.

But if the information I get in terms of what district is holding, but also what other private service providers have, I give it to the teachers. I send it to them. I encourage them to participate in it. I get to be involved by ensuring that they give me a budget for professional growth for teachers. And in that, we are constantly updated with what is out there in how they can better themselves. If I find something that is useful, like, for example, a math's workshop or a math's development training, I ensure that all my math teachers go for it so that they can be updated and they can get some form of professional development. (P07)

Principals help their teachers to continuously improve their abilities by facilitating access to relevant materials such as training and workshops. They exhibit a commitment to teachers' development and the promotion of instructional approaches by providing pertinent resources and promoting engagement.

Responsive to Individual Needs

The interviews that were conducted helped in highlighting that there was a need to ensure that the principals were responsive to the individual needs of the teachers. P01 highlighted:

They are all registered on the education site. There is a site for educator development and training that happens, and each time they register for a different course, they come to me because I actually have to approve their training. And based on that, I can keep track of what my teachers are busy with... (P01)

The principals' action is essential in helping staff, parents, and students understand the school's mission and goals. However, to further advance the need to assess the achievement, the hiring process should be adequately implemented where qualified teachers are included.

I think for us what is very important is that in our hiring process, we are trying very hard to make sure that we are actually employing teachers who can go in and teach the content and they know they are qualified. Well, we know that they are qualified on paper at least to teach what they have been appointed to teach. So it's not a matter of making sure that you actually know your work, but are you able to deliver that content to the children as effectively as you can? We also make use of CCTV to quite a large extent. So if there is something happening in a class that, you know, draws your attention, those are the classes that I would focus on. So in short, in a nutshell, at least in the year, I have to go formally to every single teacher at the school and informally it would be focused on the teachers that need mentoring. (P12)

Because we do have the committee that is called school based assessment, we use the school based assessment. It gives me a report on weekly basis. So if there are some learners that are struggling and in the area. Then of course, I can just go there and assist the educators in terms of how to deal with that.(P15)

The amount of feedback and the relationship principals had with the teachers was very important for the happiness of the teacher so that they were motivated to come to school every day. P11 stated:

Walk through your school, be aware know what is going on. It is very important to have personal relationships. If you don't have a relationship with the teachers they would not be happy if we just call them into the office to discipline. You have to be honest to your staff... (P11)

Individualising support

This theme emerged from the question of whether the principals provided feedback to the teachers on their performance. In order to ensure effective practice of instructional leadership, they believed that feedback was necessary. For instance, P01 stated:

Yes, I do. I give them feedback immediately as far as possible. I try to do it as soon as I can so that it's still fresh in their minds and they can see what I'm talking about. (P01)

The support was not only provided in the form of feedback but was enhanced by attendance at workshops. These workshops were not only held at school level but also at the district level for better results as indicated by P04.

We have a new teacher comes in depending on which subject that particular teacher is teaching. The department is to mentor the teacher, right? And also you must have knowledge of your teacher. I think Department of Education within the district will have workshops for new teachers for induction. But when it comes to curriculum, it becomes the responsibility of the head of department. (P04)

I do have a look at all the reports that are given to me by the department and the deputy principal. And if I find there's a need to do a formal inspection of one of the teachers, I would say. (P14).

There were various other ways by which the principal engaged the teachers such as involving them in decision-making process on how they could help the principal in advancing the school curriculum activities and how much support they could provide the principal.

The best way to engage the teachers in our school curriculum activities, is the meeting of them with the influencers and motivators which best engage them with the school needs and support... (P09)

In the case of students, the principal can provide individualised support with the help of the teachers to build self-confidence in them. The principals with the help of the teachers make the environment of class interesting so that the students will easily involve themselves in learning and adapting to the changes around them.

Discussion of Findings

The results of the first theme indicate that meaningful feedback and collaboration have a major influence on the perceptions and interpretations of instructional leadership. The primary school principals benefit from having a meaningful feedback mechanism that allows them to receive feedback from school staff, parents and students as well as from other educational professionals (Park & Ham, 2016). Through feedback, the principal can identify areas for improvement and can understand and address the needs of the school community and develop new strategies. This can result in more informed and effective decision-making (Gurley et al., 2016).

According to Liu et al. (2021) in addition, collaboration between the principal and those with whom they interact can improve understanding and strengthen relationships. Through the development of a collaborative approach, the principal can work to create a culture of professional learning and collaboration, promote shared ownership in school goals, and ensure that staff, students and parents are engaged in meaningful conversations (Cansoy et al., 2022). Working together, school staff and the principal can identify ways to improve student outcomes, engage in instructional design, and create a positive school environment (Hallinger et al., 2016).

The results indicate that principals' model instructional leadership by creating an environment in their schools that encourages all teachers to pursue ongoing professional development (Zepeda, 2014). This is found to be the focus area for the majority of the principals who focus on the development of their staff. However, some of the participants stated that autonomy and collaboration is believed to be effective when it comes to achieving the set organizational objectives (Hallinger et al., 2020; Kwan, 2020). However, for this to be effective, proper planning is needed. Further, various practices were highlighted by the participants, where leading-by-example was the most commonly reported practice among the primary school principals.

On the other hand, the second theme indicated that training the new teachers by bringing together a panel of experienced primary school principals was key to instructional leadership (Karadag, 2020). These panel of teachers could provide new teachers with various perspectives and give them a clear understanding of instructional leadership and why it is needed (Karadag, 2020; Park & Ham, 2016). The teachers could discuss

the various aspects of instructional leadership, such as how to motivate students, effectively communicate with them, create a positive learning atmosphere, and foster collaborative learning environments and meaningful relationships with students (Kwan, 2020).

They could also explore how to evaluate and use research-based practices to inform instruction while providing practical strategies for managing challenging classroom behaviours, ensuring that all students are meaningfully engaged in learning (Zepeda, 2014). As per bin Abdullah (2021) these panel of teachers could also help the new teachers to think critically and reflectively about their practice and become more self-aware in their approach to instructional leadership.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

CONCLUSION

This research concludes that the perceptions and interpretations of instructional leadership among primary school principals varies from school to school, as there is no one-size-fits-all approach to instructional leadership. Different principals bring their leadership style to the role and are affected by their school's context, goals and objectives. It is important for principals to evaluate the efficacy of different approaches to instructional leadership proactively and to make sure their school provides a culture of learning, collaboration and high expectations. In order to support successful instructional leadership, principals must create an environment where teacher-leaders feel empowered to take risks, make decisions and collaborate. Through consistent feedback and evaluation, principals can ensure that their positive instructional leadership practices are shared and spread throughout the school. Ultimately, instructional leadership helps to create a strong learning culture, which has a positive effect on student achievement.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made for all stakeholders who play a role in instructional leadership. Schools should be given more power in the form of resources and ongoing training programmes to enable principals to deliver the best possible instructional leadership in their respective schools. Principals in primary schools in Gauteng must embrace and encourage innovation to foster a culture of creativity, collaboration and critical analysis, allowing principals and educators to implement effective instructional approaches effectively. Finally, principals must foster a collaborative culture by encouraging reflection about perceptions of instructional leadership, providing feedback to teachers and using academic research to inform instructional leadership models.

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