

The instructional leadership role of the school principal on learners' academic achievement

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ABSTRACT

This manuscript reports on the role of the instructional leadership practices of secondary school principals on learner academic achievement. A phenomenological research design under the qualitative research methodology was utilised to explore this phenomenon. The study was conducted in the Capricorn District, Limpopo Province in South Africa. Five secondary schools from previously disadvantaged backgrounds with high Grade12 results were purposively sampled. Three participants who experienced the phenomenon under study, which included the principal, the deputy principal and head of department from each of the schools were interviewed with the intention of generating in-depth data that clarified misconceptions about this study. Findings of the study came up with the following as elements that instructional leadership have on learner academic achievement: improvement of learner academic achievement, motivation and positive influence, instructional management, creation of a positive teaching and learning culture, learner support, parental involvement, and interchangeable usage of leadership styles.

Keywords: Principal, instructional leadership, academic achievement, secondary school, teachers, learners, curriculum.

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INTRODUCTION

School principals in the South African school setting are recognised as leaders and managers who have a great role to impact on the livelihood of their schools by setting the tone and ethos of teaching and learning activities (Clarke, 2012; Naidu et al., 2008). Effectiveness of teaching and learning programmes come to be measured through learner academic achievement with the expectation that school principals are the vital instrument towards enhanced instructional delivery in their schools. Their mode of operation together with their School Management Teams members (SMTs), senior and master teachers, as well as subject heads in ensuring good curriculum delivery was of a pivotal nature towards improved learner results (Naidu et al., 2008). Agasisti et al. (2012) in their study on whether managerial characteristics of school principals had influence on performance of learners established that there are a number of attributes to such a phenomenon. In executing their managerial characteristics, principals needed to

draw clear goals, visions and missions guiding their schools, plan school activities and provide guidelines to achieve those plans, respect and respond to the wishes of the school population, renege from being dictators while leading school organisations, network for the school and make timeous contacts. Principals were furthermore expected to consult with all relevant school stakeholders, accept new ideas, and encourage teamwork in order to initiate constructive changes. For effective teaching and learning activities to take place, principals were expected to motivate their co-workers while creating leadership geared towards improved teaching learning activities (Agasisti et al., 2012; Farah, 2013). Up and above the managerial characteristics, management styles, participation in decision-making, assessment practices, teachers' behaviour, and parents' involvement were among others in assisting school initiatives to improve learner academic achievement. Similar findings were made by Steyn (2005) in his study on the influence of

educational leadership in inviting schools. The two studies shared their commonalities pertaining to principals having a clear vision, creating a school culture and school environment that supported teachers, and stimulation of teachers' effort to enhance their teaching performance. Collaborative working relations among teachers, and commitment also emanated as trivial aspects that contributed to high learner academic achievement (Agasisti et al., 2012; Steyn, 2005).

In a study made about factors influencing academic achievement in public schools, the findings made indicated that instructional leadership practices of school principals was the fundamental basis of influencing the academic achievement of learners (Waweru et al., 2013). Other factors contributing towards quality learner results, which some also were found in other studies included: alignment to school vision and mission in instructional delivery, safety and orderliness of schools, expectations for success, time on task, monitoring of learner progress, healthy home school relationships (Clarke, 2012; Marishane et al., 2011; Waweru et al., 2013). The backdrop of all these findings was further findings which specified that the principal as the instructional leader requires to set the instructional tone that has to be followed by teachers and learners in pursuit of attainment of expected learner academic outcomes (Mthiyane et al., 2014). In setting such a foundation of operation, principals are expected to build positive relationships geared towards achieving good learner results (O'Donnell and White 2005). Principals, in setting such a tone, were expected to create effective communication channels with all stakeholders meant to confront matters of educators' performance in their teaching practice (Le Fevre and Robinson, 2015).

Research findings made indicated that there are other factors besides the instructional leadership role of the school principals that had a hand influencing academic achievement of learners (Farrington et al., 2012). Such factors include among others learners' interaction with the educational context, learners' attitudes, motivation and achievement, academic behaviour, perseverance, mind-sets, learning strategies, and social skills (Farrington et al., 2012). On the other hand, the principals' longevity appeared to lead with a high correlation with learners' achievement in that the more experienced they were, the better the chances of them leading and managing their school towards better learner results (Swearingen, 2014). All these strategies and factors were perceived to playing a vital role in instructional delivery. Other strategies of inconsistent curriculum monitoring, inconsistencies surrounding learner assessment, and financial burdens of learners where apparent reasons for not realising learner enhanced results (Nzoka and Orodho, 2014). Interestingly, findings of one study had contrasting perceptions where principals indicated effective leadership behaviour had an impact on learner results, while teachers where opposed to that belief (Tatlah et al.,

2014).

In some instances, the concept of instructional leadership has portrayed diverse perceptions where educators concentrated on the personal characteristics of the principals in their definition of instructional leadership. Teachers emphasised the need for them to receive support from the principals. Principals on the other hand defined the concept instructional leadership based on the various activities that they were set to accomplish with regard to teaching and learning activities and creation of a supporting culture to such teaching and learning (Gedifew, 2014).

In essence most studies indicated that the principals are responsible for ensuring that learner results are good by building good relationships among the school stakeholders, setting function-oriented expectations for essential goals of standard-based subject instruction, creation of open communication channels between teachers and principals, as well as balancing the democratic and autocratic leadership styles while leading and managing curriculum (Elliott and Clifford, 2014; Mkhize, 2005; Katterfeld, 2013; Naidoo et al., 2015). According to Bush and Heystek (2006), principals had not as yet conceptualised their role as leaders in curriculum as their focus was mainly on "managing finances of the school, issues pertaining to staffing, as well as governing body responsibilities".

It was against this backdrop that the researcher realised the need for this study. The researcher believes that principals need not be one dimensional by focusing mainly of teaching and learning as there are other factors that are a build-up towards good instructional leadership and delivery. The proficient exercise of teaching-learning activities involves a range of factors which have a positive bearing on learner academic results. With a few digressions identified in the various articulations from numerous research findings on what influences academic achievement of learners, the researcher believes that leadership has a way it influences learner achievement. This article was based on the notion that leadership styles of principals might or might not have a manner in which it influences learner results. The reason for such in the researcher's belief is that there are schools with principals that seem to be good yet there are poor learner results.

On the other hand, there are schools whose principals seem to be not so good but yet learners perform well. In other instances principals appear to be good and the achievement of their learners is also good. This is despite the resources availability in those various schools as others that seemed to have good resources are still outshined by the poorly resourced schools. Based on all those arguments and the researcher's perceptions, the researcher deemed it fit to conduct a research from previously disadvantaged schools which are doing well academically to extract the good practices from those schools. Furthermore, to engage school stakeholders and see what influences such good performance, be it the

instructional leadership of principals or if there are any other relevant factors that play a role in yielding such good learner achievement.

METHODOLOGY

Design of the study

The study was based on the ontological assumptions that instructional leaders have a certain influential role they play in the academic achievement of learners. "Ontology is the theory of 'being' and the nature of reality" (Furlong and Marsh, 2010). Ontological assumption refers to multiple realities which were explored and reconstructed through interaction with research participants (Furlong and Marsh, 2010). This article intended to gain such realities by engaging with relevant stakeholders through interviews in order to gain their different experiences of the reality about the researched phenomenon. Through the interpretive paradigm, a qualitative research methodology was employed to extract the multiple realities and points of view of various school stakeholders.

The researcher followed the descriptive phenomenological research design as the main aim of this research article was to extract the richness of content found within the various complexities of lived experiences of the research participants around the influence of instructional leadership on learner academic achievement (Denzin and Lincoln, 2008). The in-depth data of the reality of this phenomenon was attained through interviews with a small sample of principals, deputy principals, and heads of departments who provided a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under the spotlight (Giorgi, 2012).

Site selection and sampling method

The research methods used entailed the selection of the research population, sampling techniques, and data collection methods (Creswell, 2014). Research participants were selected from the Capricorn District of the Limpopo Province in South Africa. The Limpopo Province Department of Education has a demarcation of five Districts with 134 Circuit offices. The province in question shares borders with Botswana, Zimbabwe and Mozambique. This is one of the most rural provinces in South Africa whose grade 12 National Senior Certificate (NSC) results are not so well. The schools were selected based on their good NSC results and the preparedness of their principals to participate in the research. Each of the schools was in the top five schools within their circuits with their NSC results and also from the previously disadvantaged backgrounds. Data was collected from a population of five secondary school principals, five of their deputies and five heads of departments from the

identified schools. A probability purposive sampling of five schools was used in this case. Total reliance was on the participants' life experiences of the phenomenon and their ingenuity. The article also relied on previous research findings made as a basis for obtaining unit of analysis deliberately. Average top achieving schools for the past three years, i.e. 2014-2016 in their NSC grade 12 results were selected. Grade 12 is the last year in the Further Education and Training (FET) band of the secondary school with results considered for tertiary admission purposes. The researcher used the above criterion with the assumption in mind that high learner achievement could mean effective instructional leadership within the context of this research. Previously under-privileged school were given extra funding by the Department of Basic Education (DBE) in order to augment the available resources they had in order to enhance learner results. The researcher targeted those top performing schools in previously disadvantaged communities with the aim of identifying good practices of their instructional leaders. Also to extract any other relevant factors available in those schools that make those schools perform well as against their other counterparts whose results were not good.

The sample size was purely based on the varied life experiences of the participants, and the fact that there is no specific answer related to samples size the qualitative research ought to have except that it depends on the research design used (Creswell, 2013). The researcher envisaged that the sample used in this manuscript would assist formulate instructional leadership findings imperative for this study. The school principals helped in the snowballing process of heads of departments whom it was assumed they were better positioned to help generate rich data. The snowball process had the potential to yield bias responses as the principals could identify their alibis but in comparison to the other two participants, the researcher thought trustworthy finding would be made.

Data collection methods

Descriptive or narrative qualitative data was gathered through in-depth interviews schedules prepared and also through follow-up questions made throughout the interview process of the various research participants (Padilla-Diaz, 2015; Punch and Oancea, 2014). The researcher used semi-structured phenomenological in-depth interviews whereby paraphrases, clarity seeking questions, summaries, reflection of participants' feelings were made (Padilla-Diaz, 2015). Such semi-structured interviews were used in order to obtain deep information about the participants' thoughts, beliefs, knowledge, reasoning, motivations, and feelings about the phenomenon under study.

The interview process was guided by the developed set of interview questions on an interview schedule. That

developed set of questions provided the researcher with the freedom to probe areas of interest that arose as a result of participants' interests and concerns pertaining to the phenomenon (Smith and Osborn, 2007). The researcher ensured that interviews focused on the actual core without putting words in the participants' mouths. Verbatim records of responses and reactions of all that the participants articulated were kept (Leedy and Ormrod, 2005).

Data analysis and interpretation

There are possibilities that during data analysis process information may be influenced, distorted or filtered. Such possibility during data analysis might affect the trustworthiness and credibility of the collected data. It is therefore necessary for the researcher to ensure they suspend any predisposition they might have during this process of data analysis (Sale, 2007). In this case, the researcher adopted mechanisms required to follow phenomenological data analysis process that calls for the researcher to return to the participants of the study in order to validate their results (Polit and Beck, 2010). In this phenomenological data analysis, the researcher identified common meanings and core features found in the collected data by horizontalisation. This is the description and exploration of data to expose the meaning of the data by naming the obvious and what might have been left unnoticed and unattended in the interview responses. This process also includes the textual and structural data analysis (Padilla-Diaz, 2015). The researcher also interpreted the context of the various participants, their texts and information as this is required by data analysis in phenomenology (Wolcott, 2009). Personal experiences of participants, list of statements significant to the study, significant elements, description of what the various participants experienced with the phenomenon and description of how instructional leadership practices of secondary school principals, and composite descriptions of the phenomenon were all analysed and interpreted in this article (Creswell, 2013).

The researcher used triangulation to ensure credibility and trustworthiness of the research findings. Cohen et al. (2013) define triangulation as "the use of two or more methods of data collection in the study of some aspect of human behaviour". In this study the researcher used interviews to generate data as this is the most common data collection method in phenomenological research design (Denscombe, 2014). The researcher also employed peer debriefing with colleagues who held impartial views concerning the study in order to reduce the researcher's biases. Peer review feedback assisted the researcher to identify both overemphasised and underemphasised points, vague descriptions and general errors in the analysed data, as well as various assumptions the researcher had which had the potential to reduce the credibility and trustworthiness of the

findings made (Fouché, 2002). An outside audit of the research was also carried out by the external reviewer who assisted in providing feedback on the strengths as well as the weaknesses of this study (Creswell, 2008).

RESULTS

This section presents the empirical study findings on the instructional leadership role of the school principal on learner academic achievement. The following elements emanated from the research participants: improvement of learner academic achievement, motivation and positive influence, instructional management, creation of a positive teaching and learning culture, learner support, parental involvement, and interchangeable usage of leadership styles.

Improvement of learner academic achievement

Through their experiences on learner academic achievement of their schools, participants were asked to articulate what their experiences on instructional leadership role and its role on learner academic results. The majority of these participants perceived learners academic achievement as the core responsibility of the school principals. Their desire was that principals ought to enhance and support teaching and learning by providing required educational resources with their main leadership focus being on improved learner academic achievement. Principals in this research had tendencies of reviewing learner achievement per term as a build towards improved final results. Such term results review was geared towards providing remedial interventions where content gap was identified. This was echoed by some of the following responses from some participants:

For any need that might arise, she assists us in academic performance...she makes funds available for learner support material for as long as it is to good use for the improvement of the learner academic achievement. DP5 (Deputy Principal 5)

On quarterly we look at the term performance of the learners...for learners that have performed well we tag. P1 (Principal 1)

Instructional leader's motivation and positive influence

Motivation was cited as a fundamental attribute of the leadership role of principals as school instructional leaders. The study portrayed the motivation level and positive influence of the instructional leader as a great contributor towards good learner academic results. They

showed that such motivation and support to both teachers and learners in the form of scheduling motivational sessions, and awarding good performance as significant elements that boosted their teaching learning morale. Such motivations in their schools were focused on both achieving and non-achieving individuals. For those that achieved well, it was a way of encouraging them to uphold the good practices, while for those who achieved poorly it was a way to encourage them to get their acts together and perform up to the expected levels in either their respective roles as teachers and learners.

Instructional leaders were expected to guard against demoralising good performance by lacking good communication approaches to those that are subordinate to them. Participants indicated that principals needed to be socially sound in that they would think for, and sympathise with their juniors where need be in order that their commitment levels would always be good. Greater job satisfaction from motivated staff and learners which cascaded from the principals, had the tendencies of reciprocated feeling of mutual respect among all stakeholders, which in turn makes all of them value their teaching and learning roles. Research participants indicated that such job satisfaction emanating from positive influence on both teachers and learners was core for improved learner academic performance.

The other thing is to ensure that we have continuous motivational sessions with learners, normally I ensure that we engage the alumnus when they have got the time because those are the people they can relate to, those are the people who know the environment they go through, the same classes, the same teachers, and they assist a lot to make these grade 12 learners to be what they are. (P2)

My influence makes sure that the learners are greatly motivated, the learners want to do more. (P4)

Remember the motivation should be for teachers as well as for learners. HOD3 (Head of Department 3)

Actually, my role is to influence the educators because they are the ones who are responsible for the results. If teachers are not performing, if learners as well are not doing their work, as the principal you may not succeed. (P5)

Instructional management

Various responses by the research participants echoed one voice that instructional management was a pivotal tool that possessed positive influence towards learners'

academic achievement. Such instructional management matters as portrayed encompassed good planning that gives rise to quality curriculum delivery in the form of class attendance monitoring by both teachers and learners, encouragement of teaching as teams among teachers, quality lesson preparations, time on task, as well as control mechanisms or tools of written work output.

The study participants further alluded to the fact that a well-managed curriculum within the school has the potential to give rise to enabled quality teaching and learning activities that will unfold. With such good management of curriculum, educators were likely to ensure that there was syllabi coverage with learners given quality assessment tasks. With instructional management, principals were also able to ascertain that assessment tasks given to learners were well controlled, marked, and timeous feedback provided to the learners to work on their faults and areas of need. Based on the articulations given by various participants of this study, the researcher assumes that this could afford principals time to quality assure the assessments given through pre and post moderation processes provided in each case. With identified challenges during the quality assurance, different departments within the school, subject committees as well as curriculum committees would be able to come up with intervention mechanisms that will curb any identified anomalies and bring about learner academic achievement improvement strategies required for each individual subject done.

You manage everything, even attendance of classes. We have the period attendance registers which the learner leaders and grade managers responsible for those grades use. (P5)

Instructionally we tell them to be in class on time every day, otherwise the teachers will come with all excuses. (P1)

Then we request the class rep to write the time when the teacher went out of the class so that when they talk they are using that as evidence. (HOD5)

Creation of a positive teaching and learning culture

The common challenge identified in relation to learner academic results in all sites where research was conducted was with regard to the creation of a culture of teaching and learning on the part of the school principals. These challenges included among others, involvement of all stakeholders in curriculum planning activities of their schools, creation of a culture of commitment and hard-work, and ensuring that there is a climate of healthy competition among staff members. One participant in

particular indicated that their principal does not view it as part of their role and responsibility to create such a culture of teaching and learning within the school. Participants unanimously agreed that school principals have an obligation to set school goals; and come up with expectations and the vision that clearly direct all activities, expected teachers' behaviour, as well as the behaviour of learners pertaining to how curriculum needs to roll out. With such emphasis on the creation of a positive culture of teaching and learning, the researcher believes there might be an underlying fear from the participants of instability that might prevail with the ever-changing leadership that happens in schools. Believing that a good school culture has the potential to last longer, gradual changes in curriculum matters have a better effects than abrupt ones with only procedures and protocols that may change from time to time. With gradual changes within an environment of positive instructional culture, there is likely to be stability and commitment from the stakeholders in relation to curriculum delivery. Such stability and commitment as the participants indicate have the prospects to uphold good learner results. This is what the participants had to say about the above sentiments.

My role is to create a culture that will still remain even if I am gone, the positive culture for learning...I make sure that I plan for the learners so that they can be able to perform well. (P2)

You see, if the principal has got programmes that are very evident to everyone, to say this is where we are concerning achievement and this is where we hope to go, and ...I think that will work. (HOD2)

In order to instruct the teachers, especially to influence them to go to class...teachers who are not going to class they will be seen.

He was reporting at 8 o'clock himself and we were reporting at 06h30. He was working smart and we knew what we have to do. (DP2)

Learner support

The support that the principal has on learners was viewed by participant to be of great importance in influencing learners' achievement. Support such as adoption of learners by individual educators in order to serve as their secondary parents, conducting workshops in order to build educator capacity in dealing with learners, creating time to address learners' educational needs with affected learners, outsourcing of expert educators to help tackle areas of concern in certain subjects, and providing of leadership by principals in

aspects of the school curriculum life were all seen as vital pillars of support required for enhanced learner achievement. All these participants indicated were significant as learners are all faced with varied individual challenges that could hamper their study progress. With such support, learners could develop self confidence in their studies and end up improving their individual academic performance.

The educators in the institution adopt all the 175 learners. So every learner apart from their parents at home, also have parents here in the institution. I have four children, and the reason for that is that I believe that apart from teaching Math in class the learners may still go through other challenges at home. It may be social challenges, whatever, psychosocial challenges that which may need us as educators to support them. (P2)

The principal has a role of workshopping the educators in terms of establishing good relations with learners. (DP5)

Yah, in most cases what I've discovered, the learners can see the principal as the mother, as the father, somebody who always care about them, somebody who has feelings about them, somebody who is supportive for them they don't want to disappoint this person. (DP2)

She also get some people who are more qualified to help the learners to achieve best, especially in subjects like Life Sciences where teachers lack she also go out and get some extra tutors to help the learners to achieve. (HOD5)

Parental involvement

All the stakeholders in this study seemed to share the same sentiments that parental involvement formed an integral part that helps heighten instructional leadership roles of instructional leaders and coaches within the school. The participants communicated the prerequisite for principals to encompass parents so that these parents could help upkeep the learning process of their children by providing and augmenting all their educational needs. Almost all the participants in this research seem to agree in their value and confidence in the parental involvement within the instructional activities of their children in the school.

Due consideration of this attribute of parental involvement by principals as instructional leaders seemed to have yielded positive results in learners' educational matters. Parents were regarded as a strong support

structure by these participants in that they were able to provide educational materials required by the schools with the inclusion of emotional and social support learners required to perform well. It seems perpetual parental collaborative relationship with the teachers in supporting and monitoring learner performance were able to construct a positive home-school relationship. Such an indirect relational support of instructional leadership of school principals has the ability to produce good learner academic results.

We also tell the parent to take care of the uniform, take care of the child, and motivate your child. Even to that child we keep saying, you don't have to worry about the condition of your family, the status of your family now you are the one that is supposed to bring changes, that is how we motivate these learners. (P5)

You know, the department will only supply learners with one book but I ask and say go to parents and people whom you know that they don't have money, tell them that we are aware that you don't have money but let them at least buy you the study guide that will be different from this book. (P3)

From the onset he calls the parents and say okay, this is your child's performance. From here we are going to work together. The child will be here and the parent will be here, and they shall be sharing, and from here they are going to work together. (DP4)

Interchangeable usage of leadership styles

Even in leading instruction, almost all the stakeholders were in support of the principal to use situational leadership style. Diverse opinions were articulated on how principals as instructional leaders were not expected to employ a single leadership style in leading and managing curriculum delivery at all levels. Participants stated how they desired that the principals should delegate duties to their staff members in the endeavour to accomplish a holistic instructional approach, which as they claimed, would culminate in developing holistic learners who achieve well academically. By varying leadership styles in their instructional leadership, it suggested that principals required knowledge of these leadership styles and possess the know-how to apply each of them appropriately. Having people skills as well as interpersonal relationship by the principals were regarded as other contributing factors towards principals knowing which leadership style to adopt and when. The stakeholders highlighted that knowledge of various leadership skills in isolation from knowing their staff well

would help to a minimal degree. Principals were also expected to be emotionally intelligent, situationally intelligent, as well as flexible in order to be assertive and exercise the powers and authority vested on their position in order to get things done. A combination of all those attributes were viewed as a vital tool for principals to carry out their instructional leadership practices with distinction for the attainment of quality learner results.

Remember as a principal you have to take responsibility to the SMT so that they can assist you with managing. (P5)

He starts by making you friends, you know if you make someone your friend he ends up following what you want him to do, and you get point...I think the autocratic approach worked for me, it worked for him in essence because now the system is running and learners' results are improving and we are happy about it, we are already used to it. (HOD4)

Doing things well you sometimes need to negotiate, show them the way, but where there is a need you must make an instruction... Also make the person who did not follow the instruction account. (P3)

DISCUSSION

This study report focuses on the influence of the instructional leadership role of the school principal on learner academic achievement in the Capricorn District of Limpopo province in South Africa. It examines from the perspectives of secondary principals, deputy principals, and heads of departments how instructional leadership of their principals influenced learners' results. The findings suggest that the principals as instructional leaders are mainly responsible for creating a platform whereby teaching and learning practices are able to yield expected learner academic achievements. The similar key factor of principals as key elements towards learner academic achievement was reported by O'Donnell and White (2005), Valentine and Prater (2011) and Tyagi (2010) who in their study conducted in Pennsylvania perceived school principals as vital predictors of improved learning climate and learner academic achievement.

In line with previous research on instructional leadership and learner performance, the study found creation of a teaching and learning culture to be at the heart of instructional leadership practices. The study also found teacher/learner motivation and positive influence, instructional management, support of teachers and learners, parental involvement and interchangeable usage of various leadership styles to be of crucial significance within the instructional leadership role. Here and there are similarities with previous studies but there are also other new issues that emanated.

Other studies reported that the principals as instructional leaders have an important role towards academic achievement of learners through their influence on teachers to deliver instruction as anticipated (Adeyemi and Bolarinwa, 2013; Elliott and Clifford, 2014; Gedifew, 2014; Mulford and Silins, 2003; Nyagaka and Odongo, 2013; Tatlah et al., 2014; Swearingen, 2014). The above reported studies are indications of the principals' realisation that as instructional leaders, principals play a central role towards learner achievement. What the studies suggest is the fact that the moment principals become aware of the significant role they play, they might perceive their need to reinforce practices that are productive towards improving learner academic achievement.

The findings in this articles showed that principals were not only expected to motivate teachers but learners as well. Such findings were in support of the previous researchers mentioned above who also indicated the need for instructional leaders to influence in a positive manner both teachers and learners in order to enhance the teaching learning processes. Literature by Francera and Bliss (2011), Nettles and Herrington (2007) and Robinson et al. (2008) suggested the need for principals to include praise for teachers and learners for good work as a way to encourage them to carry out their curriculum responsibilities in an effective way within their varying school contexts. The learner community which is not motivated and influenced accordingly could also yield poor academic results. It therefore gives the impression that instructional leaders have a responsibility to ensure learners are perpetually motivated.

Another finding made showed that good instructional management is a vital tool towards influencing learner results. The finding corroborates the finding made by Francera and Bliss (2011), which articulates the need for principals to provide instructional management coupled with mastery experiences, verbal persuasion, and emotional encouragement. Neumerski (2012) suggested the need for instructional leaders to draw a common ground of departure in defining a clearer instructional management. The researcher, in this article is of the view that principals as curriculum managers are a driving force behind all curriculum matters within the schools. The researcher also acknowledges the need for instructional leaders to explore divergent instructional expertise of various teachers as well as their content knowledge in order that they can assist in managing instruction with the school. The reason for such a view is that principals themselves are not subject specialists for all the various subjects offered at school. In doing that, principals could build capacity among their subordinates, also help create and boost an element of trust with their staff members, and the willingness to carry out instructional duties with ease within the school. The willingness to carry out curriculum activities by educators thereof has the possibility of improving the academic achievement of

learners.

In line with the findings of this study on the creation of a teaching and learning culture by principals, such a culture was viewed as a fundamental responsibility of the school principal (Nettles and Herrington, 2007). The participants' expectations were that the principals ought to create a safe and orderly educational environment that gives rise to effective teaching and learning. Previous studies demonstrated that successful principals formed an academic press and culture that forged a continuous learning environment (Hallinger and Lee, 2014). Such learning environments stood a good opportunity of creating an authentic metamorphosis in the learners' academic life (Mendels, 2012).

The researcher identifies this academic way of life as one where school stakeholders share a collective approach to the school culture. The researcher observed that all stakeholders viewed the principal's instructional leadership as a crucial element that has a vital role on learner results. Though the identified schools had good learner performance, there seemed to be some dissatisfactions from other participants on the manner their school principals led instruction. It appeared to be the deep-rooted culture of good work ethics that helped those schools to perform at the level they were performing despite some weaknesses visible on the principals as instructional leaders. Deputy Principals and heads of departments aspired that their principals could do more, while principals themselves also indicated the need for maximum support from their subordinates. Some principals acknowledged the good work that their teaching staff was doing while also acknowledging their shortfalls as leaders. School cultures will obviously vary from one school to the other as schools are unique entities founded in diverse communal settings. With such diversity of schools management of teaching and learning will also be distinct from one school culture to the other, but good learner results remains good learner results. With common ways of doing things, varying individual perceptions emanating from different backgrounds of individual stakeholders in the school, are not likely to adversely affect learners' results.

One other finding made from this study was that principals need to provide individualised support for learners. The following dimensions of support were emphasised: adoption of learners by teachers, team-building workshops of teachers on how to support learners, learner individual attention, outsourcing of subject specialists to tackle content gap identified in learners, and provisioning of leadership in teaching learning matters. Neumerski (2012) states that the preliminary notion of instructional leadership excluded learner support as an aspect of instructional leadership. Earlier studies by Horng and Loeb (2010), Knapp et al. (2010) and Neumerski (2012) on instructional leadership appeared to focus mainly on school principals as leaders, others focused on the mentoring process of principals,

modelling of instruction, and addressed other organisational management issues that make up the school and brought about support dimension of instructional leadership to light. The researcher views those initial perceptions and notions as narrow-minded approaches as they excluded other relevant notions to teaching and learning. Notions that teaching and learning processes encompass multi-dimensional people with multi-faceted teaching learning abilities including the researcher's belief that it might be difficult to teach a hungry learner and expect them to perform to their utmost best academically, that learners engulfed by numerous socio-economic challenges might not be capable to achieve as expected, and that teachers with psychosocial and subject content challenges might not be able to teach effectively. It is on the basis of the latter indications that the researcher supports the all-inclusive perceptions of instructional leadership needs of the school as stated by Horng and Loeb (2010). The same sentiments were alluded to by Calik et al. (2012) who indicated that effective instructional leaders are those that create a platform for the creation of effective teaching and learning environment with enhanced quality education by moving their schools towards an ideal position. In support of Calik et al. (2012), the researcher believes that effective curriculum outcomes can be achieved by focusing on all elements linked to the school community life as the findings of this study depicts.

The final findings made by this article were the expectations for parental involvement in the learning process of their children. These findings are reflected in the findings made by Averill et al. (2016) who also indicated that positive learner achievement was encountered when parents got involved in the education of their children. The experiences of such parental involvement included parent-devised and parent-led discussions, as well as activities based on children's learning to parents' interaction with the entire school (Goodall and Montgomery, 2014).

According to Epstein et al. (2011), LaRocque et al. (2011) and Mutch and Collins (2012), parental involvement includes communication, parenting, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and community collaboration with the inclusion of school leadership that prioritises development of partnerships of all school stakeholders. The researcher supports the findings of this study mainly because parents are an integral part of the learning process of their children. Parents are also a vital school stakeholder that needs to be included in all crucial matters of the instructional matters that involve their children. Learners' parents are in a strategic position to liaise with the school with regard to any challenges children might have at home as well as provide the necessary support the school might be in need of in relation to their own children.

It became eminent from this study that learner academic achievement is a significant responsibility of

the school principal as the instructional leader. Schools principals need to be cognisant of their roles and responsibilities of bringing together the entire school population to work towards one common goal of enhancing learner performance. They need to realise that no stakeholder has the potential to single-handedly improve learner results. With careful consideration, principals' positive influence might create a climate and culture where teaching and learning are delivered with pride and confidence yielding a learning culture that makes learners achieve to the best of their ability. It therefore appears that the ability and the positive attitude of the principal could create a united school force that works towards one common goal. On the contrary, principals who are not focused and lacking vision and purpose might help defeat the main purpose of schooling which is proper curriculum delivery. From the researcher's interaction with the various stakeholders, it became clear that though educational resources have the potential to help improve teaching and learning, absence of such resources does not imply total doom towards proper teaching and learning activities.

Even in the absence of proper educational resources, a well-managed curriculum, which is properly and closely monitored, syllabi coverage, quality assessment of learners and provision of effective and efficient feedback to curriculum clients who are parents and learners, all seem to have a great role to play in conjunction with purposeful instructional leadership towards improved learner academic achievement. Principals with a lot of workload they are faced with, have a great responsibility to build instructional leadership and coaching capacity within their juniors through delegation of responsibilities. Through such delegation of curriculum responsibility, the culture of teamwork, commitment and healthy competition is likely to be created among staff members who might aspire to perform more than expected. Creation of a collaborative working relation even with the learners' parents possesses much ability for every stakeholder to work even better. The researcher asserts that it is important for school principals to be conscious about the vulnerability of learners due to the various socio-economic backgrounds they each come from. In doing that, they could be able to know how pivotal it is needed for them to motivate, influence and inspire their learners in various ways for them to do more. Teachers on the other hand require principals who are motivational and supportive in nature so that they can perform their teaching roles with ease. It therefore remains the core duty of the principals to serve as a uniting force among all the various school stakeholders in order to experience improved learner academic achievement.

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