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CONDITIONS FOR EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP IN TOWNSHIP SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN THE WESTERN CAPE: A CASE STUDY

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Abstract

In this empirical paper, the researchers determine the conditions for the implementation of instructional leadership to be effectively implemented in township secondary schools in the Western Cape. The paper comes with the background that instructional leadership is key to the effectiveness of the school and learner achievement. Critical Emancipatory Research (CER) which advocates peace, hope, equality, freedom and social justice couches the study. A transformative paradigm under the qualitative approach and participatory action research design was adopted to analyse the experiences of the stakeholders of the research school. Focus group discussions were conducted with the school management team (SMT) which has eight members, including the school principal. The participants responded to the following two research questions: What are the conditions for the effective implementation of instructional leadership and how do we determine that these are implemented at the school, basing them on the context of the school? The findings showed that effective communication, clear goals and collaboration are key to the effective implementation of instructional leadership. Considering the findings, the study argues that effective communication, formulation of clear goals, and collaboration of all stakeholders are a prerequisite for the implementation of effective instructional leadership in schools. This paper is arranged as follows: Discussion will be made on the theoretical framework of the study, followed by the methodology and lastly, the findings and conclusion will be dealt with.

Keywords: instructional leadership; critical emancipatory research; participatory action research; learner achievement; collaboration.

Introduction

The paper comes with the background that when instructional leadership is implemented effectively in township secondary schools, learners are bound to achieve more in the National Senior Certificate (NSC). Instructional leadership is the most useful tool that school principals use for effective teaching and learning at schools. It has a significant impact on the positive effect of school effectiveness and learner achievement (Kilag et al., 2023). It refers to the principal's management of school curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Zeinabadi et al. (2023) while exploring instructional leadership in Iranian public primary schools, describe instructional leadership as having three dimensions (i) paying attention to the school goals and vision, (ii) managing the instructional programme, and (iii) promoting a healthy learning climate. This means that for the principal to be effective in instructional leadership, he/she should define the school mission, manage instructional programmes and develop a positive learning climate as all these will focus on improving educators' effectiveness. Groenewald et al. (2023) examined the relationship between a principal's instructional leadership practices and educator performances and mentioned that it is important that clear instructional goals are established. This leads to visionary leadership which in turn leads to enhanced educator performance. This creates opportunities for educators to collaborate, share knowledge and continue to develop professionally to a positive culture that enhances learner achievement. This view is supported by Onedigbo and Okorji (2023) in their determination of

the principals' practices found out that the principal's instructional practices at school were significant contributors to educator effectiveness. This effectiveness contributes to learner achievement. The principal's instructional leadership can make a difference in improving learner achievement.

While the studies above bring knowledge about what the principal in schools should do to enhance learner achievement, none of them have focused on the township schools in the Western Cape. This study is unique in that, it highlights the conditions of instructional leadership as they should be implemented in a township setting in the Western Cape. This paper intends to highlight that proper communication, clear goals and collaboration are for the effective implementation of instructional leadership in a township setting. The paper is arranged in the following manner: After discussing the theoretical framework, the methodology will be presented, and then the findings and a conclusion.

Theoretical framework

This study adopted Critical Emancipatory Research (CER) as the theoretical framework to pursue its objectives. CER originated as an offshoot of critical theory of the Frankfurt school which arose in Germany in the 1920s. It emerged from a group of men who saw the atrocities inflicted by humans on humans (Christoph, 2022). This theory was developed by Jurgen Habermas who was a member of the Frankfurt School that represented a left-wing group which aimed to redress the contested terrain in Europe and find a solution to it. Its mandate was to change oppressive structures and make sure that those who were oppressed could discover their state of oppression and emancipate themselves from it (Daire et al., 2023). The objectives of CER are participatory and collaborative. Those who are marginalized are empowered (Christoph, 2022). The major assumptions of CER are based on advancing the agenda of equity, social justice, peace, freedom, and hope (Daire et al., 2023). Through CER those who are oppressed are liberated from the conditions of domination, powerlessness, and oppression as it is geared towards social justice, it enhances the principles of democracy. In short, the theory of CER is relevant for this paper since it argues for conditions that promote inclusion, social justice, and participation of all affected in the challenges faced by township secondary schools in implementing instructional leadership that results in poor performance by learners (Daire et al., 2023). With CER, we seek to reinvent new thinking towards the implementation of instructional leadership and involve all affected stakeholders of the school. The following section discussed participatory action research (PAR) which is the methodology of the study.

Methodology

The study is situated within the transformative paradigm. It used a qualitative study design and Participatory Action Research (PAR). PAR is a philosophical approach to research that promotes collaborative knowledge construction between the researcher and participant and recognizes the need for the persons being studied to participate in the design and conduct of all phases of research that involve them (Bou & Sales, 2022; Cornish et al., 2023). It is a research approach that seeks to transform the lives of marginalised people in societies. It is a methodology that allows those who are experiencing the issue to be involved in taking action to produce emancipatory change making use of their newly gained knowledge (Cornish et al., 2023). It embraces a democratic approach because it provides an opportunity for participants to voice their concerns and contribute to the research process, ensuring that their perspectives are not overlooked or misrepresented. These participants collaborate with researchers to build understanding and solve problems that are relevant to their situation (Cockerham, 2023). To implement PAR and gather data for this research, we used purposive sampling to identify one school and selected the SMT comprising nine members for our focus group discussions. They were all selected as part of school leadership and were best suited to provide insight into the research questions being investigated. The assembling of such a team was aimed at finding the best solutions emanating from the people experiencing and affected by the problem.

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

Findings and discussions

In this first section, we will present and discuss and present findings that respond to the first question of the research which is, what are the conditions for the effective implementation of instructional leadership in a township setting? Data will be arranged according to the themes identified. Participants brought up a few

suggestions on what the conditions for the implementation of instructional leadership could be. However, we will only limit the discussion to only two that were prominent in the discussion.

Conditions for the implementation of change management in a school

The first point that was raised by the participants was the way change should generally be handled at school. They mentioned that during the COVID-19 pandemic, many changes had to be implemented in how things were to be done. The department of education demanded that learners had to be brought back to school but the number of learners and the capacity of the school ought to be considered. However, the department did not give details or mechanisms on how this should be done.

Ms. Gubayo, the principal, started the conversation in this way:

We were caught off-guard by the changes we had to implement when we returned during the pandemic. None of us knew how to handle the changes that we were supposed to implement. However, we implemented them to the best of our abilities for the benefit of our learners and their achievement at the end of the year. I was more concerned with the grade 12s but we handled them well with vigour.

According to Walk (2023), the principal, as the leader, is instrumental in the successful implementation of change. It does not matter whether the change is brought by them or not, they are supposed to execute that change. Principals, and instructional leaders, need to play a role in school organisation as a positive influence on educators, preparing them for the change. Their leadership is essential to every reform and change that the school implements (Aziz et al., 2021).

Mr Jezile, the deputy principal, responded:

True, principal. You did your utmost best to show and lead us, and you were willing to accept any suggestion from us. You rallied around us. It simply shows that if we collaborate and work together, we can achieve more.

Change needs to be managed effectively. Meyer et al. (2023) believe that adaptation to address new situations is important for the staff to be motivated by the change agents. This requires the creation of a positive climate and innovative practices. This can only happen when educators collaborate and collectively identify what is good for the school and implement it for the benefit of the school. The principal is even more needed to support them in making sure that educators have what they need to be able to implement the necessary changes.

Ms. Mahlathi, one of the HODs, added excitedly and said:

What really impressed me most was the fact that we all embraced the change and we cooperated. This showed the learners that we were united on the implementation of this change. We all welcomed the learners, and we were all teaching normally as if we knew that the pandemic was coming. Principal, you were always walking around and checking on attendance of learners and contacting parents when learners were absent. I liked the fact that we were checking the learner's temperatures before the start of the day. That was a smooth process.

The implementation of change in a school requires that there should be positive relationships and communication between the principal, educators and the whole school community, including parents and learners (Murphy & Devine, (2023).

Ms Sonamzi, the other deputy principal, added:

I was impressed with the fact that we were able to keep all our stakeholders informed. We informed the parents and addressed the learners on what will be the order of the day. We tried to let everybody know what will happen, although we did not give them any opportunity to put their views. However, they listened to us and there was some kind of teaching and learning taking place. Our educators were on the ball. They cooperated with us.

Conditions for the implementation of educator supervision in a school

Supervision is one of the many responsibilities of the principal to improve the quality of education that is being delivered at a school (Yolviansyah & Hermanto, 2023). Many researchers view educational supervision as the real instrument that can be used to build the reputation and quality of education with emphasis on the professional development of educators (Aprilianti et al., 2023; Amelia et al., 2022; Lorensius et al., 2022; Livers et al., 2022). It is carried out in the context of mentoring, directing and coaching educators to improve their performance in the classroom (Zohriah et al., (2022). This is all done to maintain a positive image of the school and the educators while the performance of the educators satisfies the parents and learners (Aprilianti et al., 2023). The participants discussed this important issue at length and how it developed them professionally and has an impact on learner achievement.

Mr. Jali, the HOD, started the discussion on supervision:

Supervision should be carried out by the principal who is the instructional leader of the school to improve the performance of all of us as educators of this school. This will definitely be a motivation to all educators of the school to always improve their knowledge in their teaching and get good results at the end of the year.

Ms. Sonamzi, the deputy principal, added:

I agree with you on that one, but we also need to know how to carry out this important task. The principal cannot be everywhere and some of the supervisory role can be delegated to us as the SMT of the school. She can deal with other educators, including us while we handle other educators who are beginners or new to our school.

Mr. Dyantyi added:

This also makes sure that educators are in line with what the school desires to achieve as agreed. Educators will not deviate from the agreed targets and will be in line with the agreed targets. We can monitor that and keep educators aligned to them.

Ms. Memani, the HOD, cautioned:

All these aspects of supervision need to be communicated to all the affected parties. This means that the educators need to know the purpose of supervision, the schedule of the visits, the implementation stage that includes the pre-observation, observation and post observation stages. Educators need to know that there will be follow up visit and this could be done by someone else than the one who did the initial visit. The educators need to appreciate cooperation and collaboration among all of us.

The indication of the application of the conditions of change management at the school

The school should always and regularly examine how they are doing things and adapt to the changing times and requirements if these have a positive effect on learner achievement. This means that the principal and the educators as well as the learners should act as change agents and collaborate in their school thus creating a conducive climate for the improvement of their situation. The participants reviewed how they were implementing change management in the context of their school and made some recommendations.

Ms. Gubayo, the principal, said:

We have introduced some changes at our school, and I request that we all embrace them. We need to collaborate and work together to see these changes successfully implemented. We are the ones who identified the needs, developed the targets and implemented the innovations. Let us now live up to our targets. Let us not drop the ball.

Mr. Jali, the HOD responded:

I would suggest that we draw up a change management plan so that we all know all the steps that ought to be followed in our school when a change is envisaged. We cannot always bring some changes, even when they are not necessary. The change agent is Mr. Jezile who has been elected to lead us in every aspect of change management at our school. He is the one who will do all the spade work do the consultation and get the felling of all the affected persons before we can work on the implementation of that change.

Ms. Dlulemnyango, the HOD, added:

Yes, Mr Jali. We need to look at the capacity and readiness of our school to implement the change. If an innovation worked at a neighbouring school, it does not mean that it should work at our school. We need to be sure that we have the capacity and the means to implement it at our school. This means thorough planning on our side under the leadership of the principal and Mr Jezile.

The discussions of the participants to this question revealed that there were unique conditions to the implementation of instructional leadership in a township setting in the Western Cape and these can be beneficial to the achievement of learners. The implementation of change management at a school requires the commitment of all educators. The principal as the instructional leader should ensure the readiness and commitment of all educators in a school for the successful implementation of changes. She/he should promote collaboration of the educators. This can only be achieved through open communication and cooperation.

The indication that the conditions of supervision are applied at the school

The participating team were excited to look at how they were implementing the conditions of supervision at their school.

Ms Mahlathi, the HOD noted:

I think the school is doing a good job when it comes to the supervision of educators. We do not seem to have any resistance on this aspect. Everybody sees its value and there is a good chance of professional development. Credit needs to go to you, the principal for how you let our school handle supervision. The management team also need to equip themselves more on this aspect of professional development.

Mr Jezile, the deputy principal mentioned:

During my informal discussion with a grade 11 educator, she felt that it is good that we are differentiating our approach to supervision as she is more senior to other educators in Grade 11 and the approach the school is taking towards him is different from the way other educators are being supervised. What excites him most is that learning is taking place vigorously in the classrooms and the parents and learners acknowledge it.

Ms. Sonamzi added:

The educators are very comfortable with how we undertake this very important task because it was explained to them, and all the stages thereof were explained. We are all assured of good results at the end of the year because every educator feels they are on the ball. Furthermore, the principal is not the only one who is supervising but the approach is the same. They appreciate the fact that everything is communicated and explained and there is a schedule of visits.

Mr. Jali, the HOD said:

One educator said he enjoys the post-observation stage of supervision where all the positives and negatives are put to her, including suggestions on how she can overcome the errors found. We need to vigorously take some time to induct the new educators to this aspect of professional development. They seem not to understand who we do things here at our school and we need to let them know that we are doing it for the benefit of the learners and to reach the targets we have set for our school.

Ms. Dlulemnyango, the HOD, commented:

I am constantly getting feedback from educators that they are growing professionally since the school had started implementing this supervision aspect of professional development at school. They tell me that they are feeling more confident in their teaching and learning and always look forward to the next visit. They tell me that learners are now learning, and they are sure to get good results at the end of the year.

The participating team felt good that they were doing a good job when it comes to supervising their educators. They felt that their principal took a leading role in guiding and motivating them and the educators were very authoritative and followed the requirements and adapted them to the context of their school and community at large. They were impressed with the communication level of the principal as well as how they collaborated in the execution of supervision at their school.

Conclusion

The conditions for the implementation of effective instructional leadership require open communication and collaboration among all the people who will be affected. Change requires that the principal and the school management team take the lead. The people who will be affected by the change need to be consulted widely to get their commitment and cooperation. The purpose should only be for the benefit of the learners. This means that the need for change should be identified and make sure that all those who will be affected should be part of coming up with a strategy for change management. Supervision of educators should enhance the professional development of educators to be masters in what they do in the classroom for the benefit of the learners and the school at large. This also requires collaboration and cooperation of all involved. If the principal, as the instructional leader does not communicate with the rest of the staff there may be resistance to both change management and supervision and may adversely impact learner achievement. The participants in the study have highlighted that through communication and collaboration, the instructional leader can achieve the intended goals of the school for the benefit of the learners. Based on the findings, the recommendation is that the universities that train educators should include a module on change management and supervision in the curriculum for educator training. These would include open communication and problem-solving skills and should also be included in the in-service training of all managers of schools. The school leaders should be monitored on their implementation of these important aspects and motivated to make use of them regularly. These will impact positively on the professional development of educators and also the academic achievement of learners at school.

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