Exploring Instructional Leadership as a Praxis in Schools

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Abstract

The importance of instructional leadership in promoting school growth and renewal is significant, however, it has received limited research attention and is not fully understood. The absence of clear communication hampers the ability of school leaders to improve teacher performance and student outcomes. Instructional leadership encompasses the proactive and efficient involvement of principals in initiating, organizing, and executing activities aimed at enhancing curriculum and instruction. Efficient instructional leaders foster teacher collaboration, facilitate professional development, and enhance student achievement. They employ a methodology that relies on data to make informed decisions and cultivate a nurturing school environment. Successfully implementing a change requires overcoming resistance and gaining the support of stakeholders. Instructional leaders must actively participate in ongoing improvement practices, with a specific emphasis on establishing environments that are favourable for high-quality instruction. Through the comprehension and implementation of efficient instructional leadership, educational institutions have the potential to greatly enhance student academic achievement and overall school efficacy.

Keywords: Instructional leadership, educational innovation, Professional development, Student performance, Collaborative relationships

Introduction to Instructional Leadership

The growth and renewal of schools can only be achieved through instructional leadership (Hallinger et al., 2020; Kwan, 2020; Chance, 2022; Gedro et al., 2020). According to Mommers, J., Runhaar, P., & Den Brok, P. (2024) global studies on educational leadership indicate that school leaders significantly influence the quality of educational institutions and the academic performance of students.But within educational leadership, the topic of instructional leadership has been severely neglected, with scant research and minimal development. It is our firm belief that many people have a hazy understanding of what instructional leadership is and how it can be used to foster positive relationships, productive rapport, collegial interactions, effective teams, ownership of high-quality student outcomes, and reflective evaluation and growth practices. We worry that school leaders will be unable to effectively have the necessary conversations with their staff and put into practice effective practices due to the lack of definition surrounding instructional leadership. Given the present state of education, it is imperative that instructional leadership be asserted and pursued as a proactive strategy for continuous improvement in schools (Meyer et al., 2023; Leithwood, 2021)

School leaders must wait until then to guarantee high-quality student performance. When that happens, even the most unmotivated teachers will start to see results in their classrooms and take an interest in their students' academic success. If we want to see change that lasts, we need leaders. It is necessary to conduct research that highlights the positive aspects of schools rather than dwelling on their negative aspects. We can start to fill our schools with leaders who possess the qualities and abilities we need once we have a clear idea of what we're searching for. Bonal and González (2020) and Ngwacho (2020) cite a number of important

factors that are known to impact student learning progress. These include government directives regarding the "big picture" (e.g., test results, reporting, curriculum, policy, culture, and community), adequate funding, and successful programs. When contrasted with the impact of effective or ineffective instructional leadership, however, all of these factors become insignificant. In order to secure our schools' future, educational innovation and change must occur at the intersection of teacher leadership and student learning progress

Definition and Conceptual Framework

A school's instructional leadership is the principal's actions during the planning, execution, and evaluation of initiatives to enhance the curriculum and pedagogical practices of the school's students (Chabalala & Naidoo, 2021). Leaders of elementary and secondary schools engage in this set of actions when they want to promote, monitor, assess, and influence teachers' performance. All of these things add up to better student grades because they foster an atmosphere where teachers can do their jobs better and where students can participate in meaningful, real-world learning. Effective schools and, by extension, improved student learning are the end goal of instructional leadership (Bellibaş et al., 2021; Kwan, 2020). It is crucial for all initiatives to improve schools to consistently focus on students' readiness for college and careers.

School leaders' efforts to create and sustain an environment conducive to high-quality teaching are collectively known as instructional leadership (Shava et al., 2021; Stronge & Xu, 2021). Ensuring that all students attend high-quality schools ought to be their top priority. One definition of instructional leadership is the capacity of school principals to influence classroom instruction by guiding and developing teachers' professional responsibilities. Although the term "instructional leadership" is most commonly linked with the head of the school, it is also understood to encompass the duties of other school administrators.

Theoretical Foundations of Instructional Leadership

In the subsequent section, we will delve into the literature that establishes the connection between concepts such as instructional leadership and the specific role of teachers in a more concentrated manner than our previous attempts. The following sections will provide a more comprehensive examination of the ontological and conceptual basis of the adopted position. This will be followed by an analysis of instructional leadership as we propose it should be understood. Finally, a concluding section will outline the practical implications of these findings. Theoretical frameworks and models pertaining to instructional leadership. This article focuses on analysing instructional leadership as a praxis in schools. It is contended that to cultivate or engage in this type of leadership, one must consider the school as a workplace and acknowledge the role of the teacher as a practitioner.

Lipman (2023) discusses the idea of dismantling hierarchies within schools, which suggests a need to redefine the roles and responsibilities of school leaders. Lipman (2023) contends that educators must possess a conceptual understanding of the wider power dynamics and contextual factors associated with schooling. In addition, we would like to emphasise two additional points. Firstly, it is crucial to acknowledge that there is a clear differentiation between leadership and management as distinct actions when utilising school leaders as agents of change. Secondly, it is imperative to recognise that the term "praxis" carries significant philosophical implications. Is it sufficient to merely comprehend the distinction between the terms, such as whether it is solely a matter of technical clarification, or does that knowledge possess the potential to exert a broader influence on social justice?

Transformational Leadership Theory

Moral intent is the key attribute that distinguishes transformational leadership. Transformational leadership relies on transformation factors that are rooted in the concept of value-laden behaviour. The theory posits that leaders ought to inspire and motivate their followers to attain their maximum capabilities (Groves, 2020). This approach highlights the significance of inspiring and motivating followers to reach their maximum capabilities. Furthermore, transformational leaders are recognised for cultivating a favourable organisational culture that encourages innovation and expansion. Put simply, value-based behaviours serve as a rationale for the recommended behaviours (Atasoy, 2020; Lasrado & Kassem, 2021; Virgiawan et al., 2021). Ultimately, supporters of transformational leadership theory adopt a comprehensive approach to

leadership, highlighting the importance of considering both the individual leader and the specific circumstances in which they operate.

Transformational leadership applicants are urged to engage in moral actions in order to exert influence over their followers. Hence, the primary objective of community transformation is to ensure that all members and followers have equal rights and responsibilities as the individual who initiates the transformation. Transformational leadership is a comprehensive leadership theory that aims to bring about significant changes in how leaders and school leaders influence members of an organisation or community (Kwan, 2020; Siangchokyoo et al., 2020). Transformational leadership entails the deliberate effort to inspire and motivate followers in order to collectively achieve shared objectives and drive constructive change within an organisation or community (Virgiawan et al., 2021). The text highlights the significance of vision, empowerment, and collaboration in promoting the growth and advancement of individuals and groups.

The objective of transformational leadership is to establish a nurturing and all-encompassing atmosphere in which every individual feels esteemed and driven to make meaningful contributions towards the achievement of the organization's goals. The theory of transformational leadership highlights the significance of inspiring and motivating followers to attain shared goals and objectives. The primary objective is to develop robust relationships and cultivate a collective vision and purpose among team members (Shafi et al., 2020). Bass (1990) identifies four distinct attributes that differentiate transformational leaders from transactional leaders. The four characteristics encompass leaders who: (1) express visions for the potential of the organisation; (2) act as exemplary figures that others aspire to emulate; (3) exhibit a genuine care for individuals across the organisation; and (4) attend to the needs and values of their followers (Srour et al., 2020; Alkadash et al., 2020; Collins et al., 2020).

Key Components of instructional Leadership

Instructional leaders are individuals who are prepared to establish a local school that guarantees every child is adequately prepared for their future, by creating a connection between the knowledge and experiences they have today and the demands of the future (Gurr & Drysdale, 2020; McLeod & Dulsky, 2021). Instructional leaders play a crucial role in implementing effective teaching strategies and creating a positive learning environment in the school community. Applicants are required to have proficient communication abilities and the capacity to inspire and motivate both educators and learners in order to attain academic accomplishments. In addition, it is important for instructional leaders to possess a deep understanding of current educational trends and research in order to make well-informed decisions regarding curriculum and instruction (Hallinger et al., 2020; Bonfield et al., 2020).

Instructional leaders can significantly impact the overall success of the school by prioritising collaboration, professional development, and student achievement. This fosters a sense of collective knowledge within the student community, which is then incorporated into the classroom setting. It creates an educational experience akin to a magical apprenticeship, where students are exposed to a wealth of information and receive positive feedback, rather than being confined to a passive and ineffective learning environment. The instructional leader motivates teachers to create a compelling and irresistible learning experience by establishing a specific pace, style, and approach (Knight, 2021; Werder & Otis, 2023). The remaining individuals, who are not instructional leaders, are primarily present for different purposes. They are not motivated by the captivating allure of the classroom, but rather by their commitment to serving the students. This role is less personal and less enticing.

Instructional leaders typically incorporate a variety of important values, skills, approaches, and strategies into their leadership practice to have a significant impact (Cordova et al., 2024). The primary focus is on prioritising teaching and learning to guide decision-making and shape the overall school environment. Their actions aim to facilitate transformation in the intricate domain of mastery. The focus is on making changes in learning that result in the highest levels of academic achievement for all students. The actions taken are intended to have a significant effect on helping all students reach that level of performance (Bellibaş et al., 2021; Kilag & Sasan, 2023; Kwan, 2020; Hallinger et al., 2020; Ma & Marion, 2021). Instructional leadership involves the management of educational institutions with the purpose of modifying the elements that contribute to the desired form of learning. This modification aims to make the learning process more beneficial, intellectually demanding, engaging, and supportive for those who are enthusiastic about witnessing the intellectual development of young individuals.

Curriculum Development and Implementation

The organisational structure facilitates the development of the curriculum. Instructional leaders facilitate the establishment of data-driven procedures to identify, monitor, and document the individual advancement of students towards learning objectives (Ansyari et al., 2020; Datnow et al., 2021). School-based assessment systems incorporate various flexible assessment options. Instructional leaders demonstrate a willingness to adapt and be held responsible for their actions. Each school and school system bears the responsibility of formulating a well-defined, valuable, and evidence-based curriculum planning procedure. In a school that has a highly effective planning process, educators willingly take responsibility and assume a leadership position by working together to ensure that all students meet the curriculum requirements. The purpose of curriculum accountability is to ensure that educators will uphold the individual learning and developmental needs of the students. The curriculum necessitates collaborative and ongoing planning, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation.

External data influences adjustments to the school's curriculum in response to improved student performance. The aforementioned data should not be utilised as a foundation for the classification of educational institutions (Wu et al., 2020; Ferriz-Valero et al., 2020). Effective instructional leaders are individuals who possess artistic skills, are capable of entertaining others, and serve as sources of inspiration. In contrast, conductors merely compel their staff to comply with instructions without fostering creativity or motivation. Leadership primarily involves providing direction, making decisions, and offering guidance to oneself and others in order to achieve a shared set of goals (Day et al., 2020; Leithwood et al., 2020).

When it comes to instructional leadership, the leader should prioritise having a clear and compelling vision. Assessing the curriculum is an integral aspect of formulating and designing the curriculum (Ribble & Park, 2022). The educational leader offers guidance and assistance in the organization's process of reviewing and developing the curriculum. Utilising student learning data effectively is a crucial aspect of designing opportunities for students to showcase their learning through different means. Instructional leaders employ a shared vision to establish objectives for students' learning and development that prioritise the desired outcomes of the school (Day et al., 2020). The educational objectives, evaluation and teaching methods, and teaching materials, including curriculum mandates, are determined at the school level. Schools should engage in collaboration with district administration and other schools to formulate policies that effectively distribute instructional resources. The collaboration between staff and parents is instrumental in formulating policies and establishing performance benchmarks for student evaluation (Mahoney et al., 2021; Creemers et al., 2022). Both internal and external individuals contribute to the decision-making process that influences the curriculum offered by the school.

Benefits and Impact of Instructional Leadership

An essential aspect of this leadership model is the acknowledgment of how individuals collaborate and engage with one another within the school. This approach prioritises the significance of cooperative relationships and cultivates a nurturing school culture (Kilag & Sasan, 2023). The concept of 'Professional Learning Community' has garnered considerable attention and is regarded as a pivotal factor in the advancement and progress of staff, leading to enhanced student outcomes. Facilitating opportunities for professional discourse and knowledge exchange is a fundamental element of this community, resulting in ongoing and long-lasting professional growth. The success of this iterative model of school improvement relies on the crucial involvement of instructional leaders. The leaders' engagement in cycles of improvement directs the fluidity of the system, with a focus on emphasising professional learning (Walker & Qian, 2022). The primary responsibility of the instructional leader is to establish a collective understanding of pedagogical work that positively impacts student learning and benefits all members of the school community. The principal's leadership is responsible for the consistent focus on teaching methods.

This section will analyse the influence of instructional leadership on the professional learning and development of staff. First and foremost, instructional leadership primarily centres around the professional development of teachers. This acknowledges the importance of prioritising the adult learning and development process in order to enhance student learning outcomes. It involves comprehending the connections between instructional activities in the classroom and the resulting learning outcomes for students. Additionally, it entails devising strategies to intervene if students are not making satisfactory progress (Kilag & Sasan, 2023; Kwan, 2020). Furthermore, a predicted result of this model is the impact and

control it has on teacher beliefs, knowledge, and skills, with the intention of altering their practice (Wilson et al., 2020). Instructional leaders have the responsibility of mitigating the stress caused by change and overseeing the professional growth and development of staff (Gümüş & Bellibaş, 2020). This will require ensuring that the practices and strategies for growth are in accordance with the current understanding and beliefs of the teachers.

Improvement Teaching and Learning Outcomes.

Furthermore, instructional leadership improves individual student performance, ensures that performance expectations are in line with student assessment requirements, establishes a coherent structure and order for the learning process, enables all students to meaningfully access learning materials, and implements a systematic evaluation process to monitor the progress of all students (Liu et al., 2021; Kwan, 2020; Kilag & Sasan, 2023). Instructional leaders in education introduce a novel philosophy that has the potential to transform our educational programs. Their primary objective is to foster collaboration and enhance the professional growth of staff members. This novel approach necessitates educators to employ educational research in order to address educational issues by determining a set of objectives. The formulation of objectives, however, falls within the purview of managers and leaders. To ensure the success of a school, it is crucial to assume responsibility and foster enthusiasm by assisting the staff in formulating and enhancing objectives. Additionally, it is important to cultivate a favourable educational environment by aiding the staff in creating research-based educational programs and achieving set goals, thus ensuring the maintenance of a high-quality school.

Instructional leadership enhances both the procedure and outcome of teaching (Kwan, 2020; Liu et al., 2021). This is achieved through assistance, cooperation, and input. Leadership for learning improvement necessarily includes the crucial aim of ensuring effective teaching in every classroom within a school. To accomplish this, instructional leaders must engage in close collaboration with teachers and offer continuous support and opportunities for professional development (Liu et al., 2021). This involves implementing instructional strategies that are supported by empirical evidence and closely monitoring the progress of students to ensure that they are all achieving their maximum capabilities. However, this principle has not always been ingrained in the leadership philosophy of schools, as leaders have struggled with the challenging responsibility of enhancing the performance of all teachers in their schools.

Instructional improvement is typically categorised based on subject matter or grade level. To transition from instructional management to instructional leadership necessitates two separate actions. Initially, the leader must comprehend the events occurring throughout the instructional process. The individual is responsible for establishing collaborations between the various subjects taught in the school and specialists who focus on specific grade levels. These collaborations should be in a format that can be easily implemented by the leader and should make use of the specialists' expertise (Walker & Qian, 2022). Furthermore, the leader must establish clear expectations for the implementation of new teaching methods and the enhancement of instruction among subject and grade-level specialists. It is crucial for the leader to remain committed to their vision of improved instruction, as stated by Bryant and Walker (2024).

Challenges and Strategies in Implementing Instructional Leadership

Literature presents a range of approaches to surmount these challenges, which are classified into distinct categories. Several approaches involve creating a shared vision for teaching, fostering a culture of teamwork among staff members, and using data-driven decision-making methods (Hostas, 2023). However, in actuality, the strategies are interconnected, and the approach is less sequential than described in the text. In order to tackle this complexity, it is imperative to develop a comprehensive approach that considers various factors, including the school's culture, the dedication and support of teachers, and the availability of ongoing professional development opportunities. The article authored by Bellibaş et al. (2022) explores a range of strategies that can be employed to enhance educational leadership. These strategies encompass networking, seeking support, acknowledging and appreciating the diverse skills of educators, establishing a shared vision of reflective instructional leadership, cultivating trust and relationships, effectively utilising learning communities, fostering a culture of collaboration, creating an enabling environment, engaging in reflection and collective learning, and recognising the significance of interprofessional.

Furthermore, recognising the significance of communication and transparency in decision-making processes is essential for achieving effective instructional leadership in educational institutions (Kilag et al., 2023). This article does not address the complex ethical and accountability issues that arise when attempting to translate a school leader's expressed commitment to implementing an instructionally critical leadership approach into actual practice. These topics will be the focus of additional investigation. These challenges may encompass limited resources, opposition to change, and competing priorities. Overall, it is expected that the article will enhance the current understanding of instructional leadership in schools and its relationship with other components and the larger organisational and environmental context.

While the instructional leadership praxis, as described in the educational objectives of South Africa and other nations, has many commendable aspects, it is important to acknowledge the challenges that arise when attempting to implement it at the organisational and operational levels (Mlambo & Khumalo, 2022). Several challenges arise, such as overcoming staff resistance, dealing with limited resources, and promoting a culture of collaboration and ongoing enhancement (Okolo et al., 2024). Prior research conducted in the same district and schools, but with a different group of school principals and teachers, identified various challenges in the trust relationships among the key individuals in the schools. These challenges caused genuine concerns among teachers and principals who wanted to fulfil their responsibilities within the time, space, and infrastructure necessary to improve the adoption and application of a practice that faced multiple obstacles. The absence of collaboration and communication among stakeholders specifically impeded the advancement of instructional leadership implementation (Gümüş et al., 2021). Consequently, the outcome was a state of perplexity and opposition among the staff members.

Overcoming Resistance and Building Buy-In.

Multiple scholarly studies have demonstrated that effectively addressing resistance and gaining support are vital for the successful implementation of instructional leadership practices in schools. It is imperative for leaders to communicate proficiently with stakeholders and actively engage them in the decision-making process (Love et al., 2023; Díez-Palomar et al., 2020; Morales, 2021; Denton et al., 2020; Martzoukou, 2021; Muñoz et al., 2022; Bovill, 2020). This can foster a sense of ownership and dedication to the implemented changes. In addition, offering assistance and resources for enhancing professional growth can effectively tackle any doubts or uncertainty. Establishing trust and cultivating a favourable school culture are essential elements in overcoming resistance and gaining support in educational institutions. Effective communication, collaboration, and cultivating a culture of trust and transparency within the school community are the means by which this can be accomplished. To establish a collective vision and dedication to transformation, educational administrators must actively involve stakeholders in substantive discussions and effectively address any reservations or anxieties they may possess. Leaders can ensure widespread support and active participation in the implementation process by actively engaging teachers, parents, and students in the decision-making process.

Resistance from both the teaching staff and other learners in a school may increase, as indicated by several studies (Love et al., 2023; Díez-Palomar et al., 2020; Morales, 2021; Denton et al., 2020; Martzoukou, 2021; Muñoz et al., 2022; Bovill, 2020). The principal is in a difficult situation, as they are receiving negative feedback for actively promoting and implementing the expected standards of excellence. The principal is facing a difficult situation where they are receiving negative reactions due to their active support and implementation of the prescribed standards of excellence (Tlaiss & Al, 2022; David, 2020). Nevertheless, through proficiently conveying the advantages and reasoning behind their choices, they can initiate the process of overcoming opposition and gaining support from individuals with a vested interest. A significant number of educators experience a substantial level of apprehension and dissatisfaction due to their challenging work circumstances. They might exhibit resistance towards novel initiatives and strategies that are unfamiliar to them. The negative response is not a result of deliberate laziness or the lack of knowledge on the part of educators, but primarily due to the seemingly ineffective situation. The citation "Owens et al., 2020" refers to a publication by Owens and colleagues in the year 2020. The root cause of this issue may be attributed to a prolonged period of indulging in a lack of authority.

Black educational communities are advocating for schools to improve their effectiveness in teaching within the education system (Rich, 2021; Lopez & Jean-Marie, 2021; Dorn et al., 2021). The impetus for this shift is motivated by a longing for fairness and the incorporation of all individuals. Effective leadership is

necessary to ensure that all stakeholders are in agreement with the proposed changes. This may entail actively interacting with faculty members and securing their endorsement to establish a favourable and cooperative atmosphere for implementing new initiatives. Leaders can establish trust and obtain the support of their team members by skillfully conveying the vision and objectives of the instructional leadership plan (Conan Simpson, 2021). In addition, it may be necessary to address any concerns or doubts expressed by stakeholders and provide them with the requisite resources and support to effectively carry out the proposed modifications. Ultimately, instructional leaders can establish a culture of ongoing improvement and development within their school community by surmounting opposition and fostering support (Acton, 2022). Educational systems have emphasised the need for school leaders to demonstrate visible leadership by developing effective strategies. Although it is reasonable to anticipate educators to be receptive to the overall instruction, numerous school administrators are encountering varying degrees of opposition when it comes to its implementation, including the teachers themselves.

Conclusion

The role of instructional leadership is crucial for the progress and revitalization of schools, however, it has not been thoroughly examined or fully developed within the field of educational leadership. This oversight arises from a fundamental misconception of the nature of instructional leadership and its influence on student achievements. Efficient instructional leadership cultivates fruitful relationships, collaborative interactions, and thoughtful practices, which are crucial for high-quality education. Nevertheless, the absence of clearness restricts the capacity of school leaders to engage in substantial discussions and execute efficient strategies with their staff, thereby impeding student learning.

For one to guarantee high-quality student performance, it is essential to cultivate instructional leadership as an active and ongoing practice for improvement. The research should prioritise the identification of effective leadership qualities and strategies that have a positive influence on student learning. Effective instructional leadership is the most significant factor influencing student progress, surpassing all other factors. Educational innovation and meaningful change occur at the point where teacher leadership and student learning progress intersect. With the goal to enhance their instructional leadership, school leaders must possess a comprehensive understanding of the wider scope of their responsibilities, which encompasses power dynamics and the implications for social justice. It is crucial to prioritise transformational leadership, which effectively inspires and motivates staff, in order to cultivate a positive school culture. Instructional leaders can greatly enhance teaching and learning outcomes by prioritising collaboration, professional development, and a shared vision. This will ensure that all students are adequately prepared for future success.

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