

External Hindrances to the Implementation of Instructional Leadership at Township Secondary Schools

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ABSTRACT

This empirical paper explores the external hindrances to implementing instructional leadership in township secondary schools. It comes with the background that secondary schools in township settings face external interferences that affect the effective implementation of instructional leadership. The paper employed a Critical emancipatory research approach to inquiry, a transformative paradigm, a qualitative approach, a participatory action research design and critical discourse for data analysis. Focus group discussions were conducted with the school management team, which comprised eight members, including the principal. The participants responded to the following research questions: What are the external hindrances in implementing effective instructional leadership, and how can these hindrances be eluded and dealt with? The findings of this paper show that external bodies such as the local communities, the Department of Education and teacher unions may hinder the smooth running of the school, thus negatively impacting the implementation of effective instructional leadership. Conversely, the findings reveal that non-interference by local communities in the affairs of schools, a reduction in the workload of educators, fewer compliance issues and demands by the Department of Education, and teacher unions having a positive attitude and allowing the management team to lead the school unhindered may contribute more to effective implementation of instructional leadership. Hence, the study recommends effective and transparent communication and open stakeholder engagement. Furthermore, it is recommended that schools establish a collaborative culture where principals, educators, and external bodies regularly engage in reflective practices and data-driven decision-making to enhance teaching and learning outcomes.

Keywords: Instructional leadership; critical emancipatory research; learner-centred teaching; transparent communication; open engagement.

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BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

In South Africa, the National Senior Certificate (NSC) is mainly used as a yardstick that many people use to rate the quality of a secondary school. Many schools in affluent areas in South Africa are doing well in the NSC examinations (Ngema, 2024). This is mainly attributed to the level of instructional leadership in those schools. However, this is mostly not the case in secondary schools in township settings. This paper comes with the background of secondary schools in township settings facing external interferences that affect effective implementation of instructional leadership, which should concentrate on the school's core business.

Zulu et al. (2019) on their study on leadership challenges and responses to complex township school life, they further found out that principals in some other instances employ several strategies in ignoring policy and causing tensions and conflicts between School governing Body (SGB) and Representative council of Learners (RCL) and between SGBs and teacher unions. In another study, Mofoka and Mokhampanyane (2024) argue that neighbourhood violence and the local community's dynamics are external factors that seriously hinder the school's ability to run smoothly and harm the application of good instructional leadership. Mofoka and Mokhampanyane further indicated that the successful implementation of instructional leadership, on the other hand, may be facilitated by elements like minimal local community interference, a lighter workload, compliance with Department of Basic Education regulations and standards, and an unhindered leadership role for the management team. Kilag et al. (2023), in their study on the relationship between instructional leadership and school effectiveness in the Philippines, discovered that principals' duties include prioritising instructional leadership that fosters good relationships that can provide ongoing educators' professional development that will lead to improved learning outcomes for the learners.

Another study worth mentioning was conducted by Letuma (2024), who suggested continuing training for school leaders as critical to enhance their ability to inspire admiration and trust among teachers, cultivate a sense of purpose,

encourage innovative problem-solving, and foster their and others' professional development in managing school disciplinary issues. However, little research has been done on the external factors threatening the implementation of instructional leadership in township secondary schools in the Western Cape province of South Africa. Therefore, this paper examines the external factors that threaten the implementation of instructional leadership in township secondary schools in the Western Cape province of South Africa. These factors negatively affect and impact the delivery of curriculum and lead to poor performance of learners in the National Senior Certificate (NSC), which is widely used as a measure of secondary school quality.

INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

Instructional leadership is “an educational leadership that focuses on the core responsibility of a school, namely teaching, and learning, by defining the school vision, mission and goals, managing the instructional programme and promoting the school climate” (Manaseh, 2016, p. 32). A school leadership that focuses on improving the quality of teaching and learning through staff meetings to discuss their work together to address challenges and reflect on their roles while taking ownership of students' learning is crucial, according to Van Der Bijl and Kruger (2016). Van Der Bijl and Kruger explain leadership as overseeing and managing school aspects that impact learners' success by handling all leadership responsibilities related to daily teaching and learning activities at a school. The primary dimension of school leadership involves shaping the school's mission and encompasses two functions: setting goals for the school and effectively communicating these objectives to all stakeholders. In this context, the school's leader needs to team up with the staff to make sure Learners make advancements by setting goals centred on Learner outcomes as discussed by Shava et al. (2021). This entails the educational leader translating their vision into a strategy that involves everyone and fosters a shared ownership mindset, ultimately fostering an environment for effective learning.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This research used Critical Emancipatory Research (CER) as its theoretical framework. CER, which originated from the Frankfurt School's critical theory, aims to challenge systems of oppression and empower the marginalised to recognise and overcome their subjugation. This approach, rooted in the work of thinkers like Jürgen Habermas, emphasizes social justice and critical thinking to address societal inequalities (Dube & Hlalele, 2018; Ndaba & Dube, 2021; Noel, 2016).

It emerged from a group of men who witnessed the atrocities inflicted by humans on humans (Noel, 2016). It was tasked with transforming oppressive systems and ensuring that oppressed people could recognise their oppression, free themselves from it, and empower those who are marginalised (Dube & Hlalele, 2018; Ndaba & Dube, 2021; Noel, 2016). Therefore, the theory focuses on empowering the participants as it enables the participants to have a say in their situation, of which there has never been any platform that enables them be chairperson or be secretaries, even rotational positions within the group discussions, which are regarded as empowering participants. Since CER is focused on social justice and strengthens democratic values, its central tenets include advancing the agenda of equity, social justice, peace, freedom, and hope (Kincheloe et al., 2011). CER frees people from oppression, dominance, and helplessness (Mahlomaholo, 2009). The theory suggests that participants are given a chance to have a say in the challenges to making suggestions. Therefore, CER is relevant for this paper because it promotes social justice and inclusion of those participants who sometimes have never been involved in any discussions on issues affecting them, involving the affected people in a secondary school to identify and address threats to their school that harm the implementation of instructional leadership, thus impacting learner performance in the NSC (Ndaba & Dube, 2021).

With CER, there is an effort to rethink how instructional leadership is implemented and provide all those who have been impacted the ability to solve the problems associated with putting good instructional leadership into practice. The methodology that was used for the generation of data is discussed below.

METHODOLOGY

The study is situated within a transformative paradigm. The transformative paradigm is a methodology that promotes social justice by analysing social inequalities and power dynamics in society and bringing about significant changes by mitigating the disparities (Jackson et al., 2018; Omodan, 2022; Romm, 2018). It is achieving social justice and emancipation (Roldan & Kervin, 2019).

Using a transformative paradigm enabled the researchers to conduct focus group interviews where participants could express their views on the issue of hindrances that impeded their effective implementation of instructional leadership. This enabled participants to devise mechanisms to circumvent the hindrances to effectively implementing instructional leadership at their school.

Qualitative research was chosen as appropriate for this transformative paradigm. Qualitative research allows the researchers to capture the complexities and nuances of social phenomena and provide in-depth insights into people's experiences, perspectives, and behaviours (Merriam & Grenier, 2019; Tomaszewski et al., 2020; Nassaji, 2020). This was done through focus group interviews where those directly affected by the hindrances of implementing instructional leadership had an opportunity to share their perspectives and experiences, which were then documented (Carey & Asbury, 2016; Hung et al., 2024). Five meetings within the three months, during which the discussion was conducted as a focus group. The use of focus group interviews involved semi-structured discussions with eight participants. Purposive sampling was also used to choose the SMT members. The researchers adopted Participatory Action Research (PAR) as a design to approach the study. Data was analysed using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), a study of spoken and written language concerning its social context (Mekt et al., 2024; Eruera, 2010).

The research method also for participants to voice their concerns and contribute to the research process, ensuring that their perspectives are not overlooked or misrepresented (Puri, 2023). The study regards some participants as marginalised because they have been given a chance that they never had of making contributions to the issues that affect them.

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

In this first section, we will present findings that respond to the first question of the research, which is, what are the external hindrances to implementing effective instructional leadership? Data will be arranged according to the themes identified. Below are the themes from the discussion on the issues hindering the implementation of instructional leadership in secondary schools in townships. The first hindrance the participants raised was the local community's intrusion into the school's affairs.

Intrusion by the local community in the affairs of the school

Participants brought in the intrusion of the community in the school affairs as one of the first hindrances that they experience, and that they feel it hampers the effective implementation of instructional leadership. Participants even brought things that happened during COVID-19. This is what they had to say:

Deputy 1: *"When we divided learners into groups during the Covid-19 period, we were accused of not caring for them and wishing them to fail".*

In support of what the deputy said, this is what was said by the HOD2:

"We are treated with suspicion. When a learner does not do well and we suggest some interventions from the family to assist us, we are told that we are incompetent and do not belong in the community".

The second deputy also indicated that parents are not supportive in-state, have issues when they have to stay behind for extra classes, and raise issues of not supporting the school management. The deputy said:

"Parents brought negative issues if the school wants to keep their children after classes".

HOD4 shared the same sentiments, but in this case, the participant is raising the issue of the Department of Basic Education, and this is what the participant had to say:

HOD4: *"There is too much demand from the Department of Education. We take longer to comply than to teach. This is*

another intrusion and more administrative work."

Considering all the participants' responses, they feel like their community around the school is making it difficult for the school to be independent. Participants feel like their authority is constantly being tested. Even with more hours with learners after school, parents negatively affect that. Participants indicated the issues that took place during the 19th period. Participants even feel like the Department of Basic Education is imposing more work on top of what they have. This issue of workload is supported by Kaufmann et al. (2022), who reiterated that the unhappiness of the principal, based on the workload brought by the department, leads to educators being unhappy and can result in many resignations on the part of educators. It shows that working in an environment where there is nothing that the management can do without being questionable is a hindrance to any development that the management would want to introduce.

Lack of respect for the principal by the community

The second challenge that the participants raised was the lack of respect for the appointed principal of the school by some of the community members. A school with a good principal will have a favourable climate and serious learning because educators are motivated and dedicated (Grissom et al., 2021). In some instances, when a principal is not male or not much is known about them, they face a lot of resistance and blame. Chance (2023) asserts that women in leadership positions experience much adversity. The same happens in the community where the school is situated. This displays much mistrust and a lack of confidence in the community.

Principal: *"I was once confronted and told that my qualifications are questionable. "Asinazi nokunazi thina apha. Saninikwa. Asizange sibuzwe ukuba sinabo na thina apha ootitshala (We do not even know you. You were given to us. We were never even asked if we had our educators). These are the comments of the people we are supposed to serve.*

HOD 1 shared the same sentiments with the principal. This is what the HOD 1 had to say:

“I thought I was the only one who knew about this. I know the community we serve has no confidence in our principal just because she is a lady.”

HOD3: I do not understand our communities. Everything that the principal tries to implement here at school does not seem like the community accepts it because they claim she is a women”.

From the transcript of the discussion during the focus group. The participants believe that they face challenges in school tasks because the principal does not receive support from the community due to her gender. The school's management team demonstrated respect for the principal, regardless of gender, as reiterated by HD1 and HD3. None of them displayed a negative attitude towards the statements. This reflected an element of unity and collaboration as a team. This aligns with the theoretical framework because the participants recognised the value of being empowered and liberated from their circumstances.

How violence in the community negatively impacts the school

The third challenge that the participants raised was the violence within the school area. Participants showed that the violence does not end at the community, but it comes to school, and that affects everyone within the school. This is what they said:

HOD1: We are working in a violent area. Learners and educators are not safe and fear for their lives, which prohibits us from holding extra classes during the week and increases drop-out rates. Even introducing a new thing is under attack. We are unable to improve learners' performance.

In support of the first participants, this is what the other participant had to say:

HOD3: To top this, the school itself is not safe. They have decided to come in at night or during school holidays to break in and take whatever they need. We are obliged to lock everything, although we will need it the following day, and this becomes a problem and affects the delivery of the curriculum.

This is how the principal assesses the situation. This is what to say:

Principal: “Due to fear of violence, learners are not attending properly as they suppose. Learners feel unsafe when travelling from home to school. Furthermore, for me, this impact on the school is running as the focus is more on safety than improving results and nurturing the learners”.

Violence in the community harms the delivery of the curriculum. The participants addressed this matter vehemently. The area that bothered them most was holding extra classes for specific grades. That means, through the violence, the principal should redirect focus from being a leader to ensuring that learners and teachers are safe. Always think of the safety measures to be put in place rather than focus on how academic work is being improved. This issue of violence seems to be increasing, as administrative administration, emotional distress, and repeated exposure to violence can lead to less motivation.

Addressing the hindrances that impede instructional leadership at a school

In this section, researchers highlight the external hindrances that hinder the implementation of instructional leadership and present possible solutions as discussed by the participants when responding to the second question: How can these hindrances be eluded and dealt with?

Involving the community and parents constructively in the affairs of the school

The participating team went on to address how they can circumvent the community's negativity towards the school and address their intrusion in the affairs of the school. They had to remember that some parents aim to be included in school affairs (Danielsen & Bendixsen, 2019). It was, therefore, incumbent upon them to make sure that they did not scare the parents away but let them be involved in a meaningful way in the affairs of their children's education. These are what the participants deliberated on regarding the community involvement:

Principal: I believe improving school decision-making would be beneficial. Our governing body should be more involved in everything we do.

Another participant added:

HOD1: *That would be a good move, colleague. We do the same thing to disruptive learners. Let us involve our school governing body more often in dealing with community issues without their involvement. We give them responsibilities, and they change. Such people need attention, and they change as soon as they are recognised. Involve parents in the school's trips on the excursion. That would make parents participate in the importance of education and their learners".*

In support of the inclusion of the community, this is what HOD2 had to say:

"I agree with you, Ma'am. We could invite them and co-opt them onto our SGB so that they can learn how things are supposed to be done and why they are done. Moreover, let us make our SGB active like other schools have done. Let us work with them, not against them. I would suggest that you involve them rather than doing everything on your own."

HOD4 is sharing the same sentiments of the inclusion of parents by saying this:

"The next thing we should do is to invite them to be part of the security for the learners when they attend extra classes. I am sure they will be able to see that we are doing everything we can to improve their children's academic performance. They can help keep order while we tackle the curriculum matters of the learners."

The principal had to say this in acknowledgement of the other participants regarding the inclusion of the community members:

"I am so impressed with all these ideas. They are sound ideas, and I have never thought of them. This shows that if we work as a team, we can overcome this intrusion by parents into our school."

The participants have shown that full participation and effective inclusion of the SGB in everything the principal does will improve things. The HODs made the principal aware of the critical role that the SGB would play in the effectiveness of the instructional leadership, as they would play their part. The Hods showed

equality as suggested by the theory in this study, that even those who were not making the final decision are making a part in improving the hindrances they faced. The school should aim to include community members and collaborate with them on issues that matter to the learners. It is a fact that when parents are engaged and involved with their children, learners perform better. This is because parents show concern for the academic success of their children and the school as well. This is also on the community, as it will have educated inhabitants. The school needs to understand that some parents want to be included and know what is happening in the school, rather than just being informed about children (Danielsen & Bendixsen, 2019). The school governing bodies play a critical role as they will help the school when addressing the community, and it will be easier for the governing body to give a helping hand to the school principal and the management team.

The position and mandate of a principal in a school

The understanding of the situation and the role that the principal has to play was being made clear here. Furthermore, they suggested unity amongst themselves and support for the principal. That is how the participants discussed:

other solution that the participants should take into consideration is the role of the principal within the school. A school will always have a manager or someone who is tasked with taking the lead in all the school activities. The gender of the person appointed to take the lead is immaterial and should not intimidate anyone in the community. A female principal needs to be supported to be resilient, have strength, and withstand persecution by the community (Mantler et al., 2024). The participating team assured the principal that they would assist her in overcoming the negative perception that the community has about her being a principal.

Deputy 1: *"I think our support to the principal and working as a team would enable us to overcome the challenges we are encountering because parents can see that we are not supporting our principal. Furthermore, let them be involved in decisions, but the principal does the operational ones."*

HOD1 in support of working together as a team, that is what he had to say:

“We are categorically saying that we will support you, principal. Most importantly, we must communicate with our parents and let them understand how things are done at school. Parents need to understand the principal role. We must be part of our communities, making them understand they are role players in every organisation.

The participants believe that making their community the principal is critical for the school's betterment and everyone's success. Educating the community on the things that the principal has to do. They further indicated that working together as a team will make the community respect them. The support is critical in the school environment (Diekmann, 2019). The principal and the school should create a space to openly discuss the effect of this adversity on the learners' progress and find ways to mitigate this adversity with the help of other educators and community members. This requires open communication. Mantler et al. (2024) also suggest that these principals should seek career counselling and adopt a positive and hopeful mindset that will make them resolute in decision-making and have a resilient mentality when faced with doubt.

Dealing with violence that hinders the smooth running of the school

The participants believe that the school needs to develop mechanisms to assist educators, enabling them to handle and cope with the violence in the community. They also need to address this issue and inform the community about how it affects student achievement. The participants discussed potential solutions to the problem of violence and how they can turn this hindrance into an advantage. This is what they have to say:

HOD3: The parents need to be invited and asked for their suggestions on eliminating violence in our areas, as learners are constantly in fear”.

In support of the idea of communicating with all the stakeholders was being raised by the Deputy 2. This is what he said:

“We need to start here at our school, call a special learner meeting, and address this. We should be able to amend our Code of Conduct, accommodate this unruliness of some

learners, and let everybody know the consequences of bad behaviour. I also think having a say in what they think is important.

HOD4 said:

“The Code of Conduct is supposed to be drawn by the SGB”. The break-ins can be lessened if we ask for the cooperation of parents in looking at the interests of the school. I suggest the involvement of our SGB in these issues of violence; they cannot be elected, and the principal and the few just do everything. Let us allow them to be part of us.”

The problem of violence that seems to be affecting the delivery of teaching and learning needs to be addressed seriously, and action should be taken to resolve it. Community engagement and the SGB will help make things run smoothly within the school. The community should be encouraged to support the initiatives to combat crime within their area and make their school governable. Allowing the learners to give some solution on the violence and educators it is in line with the theory that is being employed in this study the involvement of those who are not always given chance to give their view on the hindrances of their learning the principal is not focus of academic now resolving the external issues even though they impact negative on the instruction leadership on the direct school matters. This aligns with CER, the theoretical framework for this study, as educators were involved in identifying and addressing the hindrances to their ability to implement effective instructional leadership.

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

The study revealed constant migration because the school is in an informal settlement, and the population is increasing daily. This becomes a breeding ground for violence that negatively impacts the school. Educators and learners are not safe. The district officials are not able to fully support the school due to the fear of being hijacked and mugged. During school holidays, the school falls victim to burglars, which affects everyday teaching and learning. This behaviour is also observed in some of the learners, who display this kind of behaviour at school by intimidating other learners and some educators. They become very disrespectful. This

intimidation causes some educators not to take any action against these learners not to take any action against these learners. This seriously affects everyday teaching and learning, leading some good educators to want to work outside this area, where peace of mind exists.

The study found that formulating a strategy to involve parents productively in the school's affairs is paramount. According to the principal, parents who like poking their noses into the affairs of the school are only seeking attention and should be involved productively. They also felt that these disruptive parents could be co-opted by the SGB and be available during the day. These were the ideas that the participating team thought of to circumvent the school's parents' negative, harmful intrusion into the school's affairs. Suppose these parents are positively involved in the school. In that case, they can be valuable to the school, and it will be able to pursue its mission of instructional leadership.

The study revealed that the participants will work collaboratively with the principal and support her in implementing instructional leadership at the school. They decided to educate the community about the appointment of a principal and the role they play as the representative of the Head of Education. Whatever the principal announces is in line with the requirements of the Head of Education in the province. Learners must be registered before the end of the first term of the preceding year, as mandated by the Head of Education. The principal is implementing her initiatives and adhering to the department's requirements. Parents need to know that, according to the Bill of Rights, no person should be discriminated against based on gender. If a person meets all the requirements to be appointed as principal, they should be appointed. The participating members agreed that teamwork and collaboration are important for successfully implementing effective instructional leadership.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings of the study reveal that (i) the local community tended to intrude in the affairs of the school, more importantly, in a very negative way; (ii) the community does not approve of a principal of a secondary school being a lady; and (iii) violence in the community sometimes spills over to the school and harms the day-to-day running of the school. The principal and the

SMT should address the threats disturbing the normal, typical, regular school day running. All stakeholders should be involved in the resolution of these matters, and this should also include the district office. With proper channels of communication and openness, the matters can be averted. When all these matters have been addressed, proper teaching and learning should take place, and learners will have access to their school at any time without fear. The community should be invited through their representatives and encouraged to work with the school management to assist educators in making teaching and learning possible, sometimes by being called to motivate learners. They should be brought on board, and proper communication channels must be opened. The principal will call a meeting and address all the issues about the school with all other school stakeholders. The principal must facilitate collaboration between the school and the wider community, thus allowing educators to develop professionally. This can lead to improved learning outcomes. The study recommends that the department ascertain the school's capability to handle the workload and develop mechanisms to assist where they can. The community should be informed about the school's endeavours, what they lack, and how their involvement should be. As a result, the study suggests encouraging open participation and efficient, transparent communication among all parties involved in the school.

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