

## **Abstract**

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Instructional leadership is a key area of school leadership, which directly speaks to the core purpose of schools, namely, teaching and learning. Educational leadership scholars acknowledge that most research focuses on educational policies: the - what ought -or is required - to be done in schools. Conversely, little is known on how those policies are implemented (Thurlow et al 2003). Thurlow et al's (2003) research exposed the need to investigate the implementation practices and emphasised that research into instructional leadership in Southern Africa was now imperative.

This research therefore explores the role of principalship in the management of teaching and learning in two rural secondary schools in the Hhohho region of Swaziland. Furthermore, this research focuses on distributed leadership because this has been recognised as a key facet of instructional leadership. Distributed leadership offers an alternative for running organisations (Spillane 2007). This is done by looking at the extent to which Heads of Departments (HoDs) are empowered, supported and involved in the improvement of learner academic achievement. Research from other countries, England in particular, has shown that where 'middle managers' (HoDs) were directly involved in activities directed at enhancing learner performance, there were remarkable results (Busher and Harris 1999). The research also draws on the large body of international literature in the leadership field.

The research is a qualitative study which uses two small scale case studies of secondary schools in the rural Hhohho region of Swaziland. The secondary schools

are purposefully sampled because they are in rural settings and have records of producing comparatively good learner academic results on standardised external examination at O' level. Participants of the study in each school are the principal, deputy principal, four heads of departments and four teachers. Questionnaires and follow-up probing interviews are used to elicit data from the participants.

In addressing the research question, evidence from the research findings show that the two secondary schools studied mainly focus on producing good academic results as measured by the external examination set by the Examination Council of Swaziland. Principals of both schools do this by ensuring that resources, both human and physical are targeted towards these. They do not concentrate on the wider aspects of teaching and learning; teachers are encouraged only to be external examination oriented in their teaching. My belief supported by international literature; is that the role of principalship should stretch beyond learner academic performance. This role, of the instructional leader, should encompass the quality of teaching and learning by encouraging teachers to reflect on their classroom practices order to improve these.