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An exploratory study of instructional leadership practices within data driven schools: a case study of two Gauteng schools

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ABSTRACT

This is an exploratory study for understanding instructional leadership practices of school leaders enmeshed in data-based decision-making towards the implementation of effective teaching and learning. In view of low student academic achievements by South African students, the study examined the extent to which instructional leaders intensified school improvement efforts through Data-Driven Decision Making (DDM) to support instruction. This study is a qualitative, interpretive, case study conceptualised from Hallinger's (2003) Instructional Leadership Framework, Reeves' (2004) Antecedents of Effective Data Use Conceptual Framework and Framework for Data Driven Instruction by Light, Wexler and Heinze (2004). The theoretical frameworks served as conceptual and analytical lenses for gaining deeper insights into the shared leadership approaches of data informed Principals and the School Management Teams (SMTs) in schools. The study further investigated teachers' data use capabilities and support. The study used the grounded theory methodology for confirming established theoretical constructs around data driven instructional leadership practices of school leaders rather than for conceptual development. Five participants were sampled for this study; two Principals, two Heads of Department (HODs) and one Senior Education Specialist referred to as the District Official. The two case study schools were selected because they were among the most recognisable users of educational data in the District of Ekurhuleni North. The selection of the District Official, Principals and HODs considered diversity of management levels and experience in leading student academic improvement efforts from entirely various levels of the instructional system. Findings in this study, showed that principals and School Management Teams (SMTs) exhibited leadership traits that promoted a culture of data use to support teaching and learning. However, teachers' effective data use was affected by lack of access to data management tools and consistent development and support. Further studies need to explore a wide variety of schools from different contexts (township, farm or rural and town schools) and school levels (primary and secondary schools). Additionally, different types of research participants (principals, HODs, teachers, policy makers, national, provincials, district officials, students, and parents) must be considered as the people who are expected to lead schools' efforts to increase student performance.

Keywords: Data-driven decision making, Instructional Leadership, School Management Teams, Student academic performance