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The Principals' Instructional Leadership Practices in Well-performing and Underperforming Secondary Schools in One Township, in Ekurhuleni: A Case Study

Mosimango, Lebogang

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University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg

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The Principals' Instructional Leadership Practices in Well-performing and Underperforming Secondary Schools in One Township, in Ekurhuleni: A Case Study

By Lebogang Mosimango

2434238

A research report submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education in the Discipline of Educational Leadership, Management, and Policy

30 November 2023

Supervisor: Dr PE Mthembu

DECLARATION

I, **Lebogang Mosimango**, declare that this study on ***The Principals' Instructional Leadership Practices in Well-performing and Under-performing Secondary Schools in One Township in Ekurhuleni: A Case Study***, abides by the following rules:

i. The research report in this mini dissertation is my original work, except where otherwise indicated.

ii. This research report has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university.

iii. This research report does not contain persons' data, pictures, graphs, or other information unless expressly acknowledged as being sourced from others.

iv. This research report does not contain other person's writing unless expressly acknowledged as being sourced from other researchers. Where other written sources have been cited, then:

   a. Their words have been rewritten, but the general information attributed to them has been referenced.

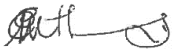
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Researcher's signature:  Date: 30 November 2023

Statement by the supervisor:

This research report is submitted with/~~without~~ my approval.

Supervisor' signature:  Date: 12 February 2024

DEDICATION

This research report is dedicated to my late grandmother, Matlakala Agnes Mosimango. She has been the pillar of my strength throughout the years. Her love, care, support, and teachings have helped me become a man. May her beautiful soul continue to rest in undisturbed peace. I will always love you, 'Konko'.

"The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?" Psalm 27 Verse 1.

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This academic voyage was undeniably challenging, and I genuinely believe it would not have been possible without the unwavering support of each of you. To all those mentioned above, I extend my heartfelt thanks. Your contributions have been essential to my academic success, and I sincerely appreciate your unwavering dedication.

ABSTRACT

In recent years, educational leadership has received its fair share of debate in different sectors and for several reasons. Teaching, learning and learner achievement results are at the core of education in schools. As a result, school principals have appeared to be at the centre of it all. When the Minister of Basic Education announces the National Senior Certificate results, the results are either celebrated or criticised based on how their schools have performed. Evidence from empirical studies suggests that a school principal concerned with learner performance ought to subscribe to an instructional leadership style. This study explored principals' instructional leadership practices in academically well-performing and underperforming schools.

The literature used in this study provides evidence that the instructional leadership concept is not new to leadership but has developed over the years. This leadership style is associated with school learner performance given that it defines the purpose of teaching and learning, sets comprehensive school realistic goals, advocates for supervision and evaluation of teaching and learning processes, and provides resources needed for teaching and learning to occur.

This study has adopted a qualitative approach via a case study research design. The study is located within the interpretive paradigm. Participants for this study were six secondary school principals in one township in Ekurhuleni district of South Africa. Furthermore, this study used face-to-face, semi-structured interviews as a data generation method. In addition, Webber's 1996 instructional leadership model was used as a theoretical framework for this study.

Findings revealed essential instructional leadership practices in academically good performing schools and that, although there were areas and elements of good instructional leadership practices in poor academically performing schools, there is room for improvement. These practices include, among others, developing a clear, realistic vision, creating an environment that allows teaching and learning, supervision and monitoring, and, most importantly, sharing teaching and learning resources. Another finding is that adequate instructional leadership practices are lacking in underperforming schools.

The research concludes that South African secondary schools require good leaders with goals for their schools and leaders who can direct their followers to achieve the desirable results. This implies that the Department of Basic Education is critical in capacitating school leaders who can contribute to the National Development Plan: Vision 2030.

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ANSSF	Amended National and Standards for School Funding
DBE	Department of Basic Education
DHs	Departmental Heads
GDE	Gauteng Department of Education
GHs	Grade Heads
GPA	Grade Point Average
HoD	Head of Department
NDP	National Development Plan
NSC	National Senior Certificate
RCL	Representative Council of Learners
SGB	School Governing Body
SMT	School Management Team
UMALUSI	Council for Quality Assurance in General and Further Education and Training.
WITS	University of Witwatersrand

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CHAPTER ONE

ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY

1.1. Introduction

This study focused on understanding the principals' instructional leadership practices in six (6) secondary schools in one township, Ekurhuleni District, South Africa. The notion of instructional leadership stems from the broader education leadership field. Instructional leadership leads and guides educators and stakeholders within a school or district to improve student performance through operative instructional practices. Therefore, Fowler and Walter (2020) conceptualise instructional leadership as "drawn from educational leadership to describe the role that a school principal plays in helping to create a culture of instruction and assessment in a school, placing student learning at a centre of the professional process". This includes crafting a vision for teaching and learning, providing professional development, monitoring and assessing student performance, and creating a positive and cooperative school culture that supports the school's educational goals.

Marishane (2016, p. 16) posits that "school leadership has recently received a fair share of attention". Similarly, Leithwood and Riel (2003) argue "that successful school leadership contributes to learner performance". Learner performance, especially the National Senior Certificate (NSC) results, has become a national interest for several reasons. For instance, the NSC results determine a school's ability to produce good-quality learners eligible for higher learning institutions. For individual educators, the NSC results measure a teacher's ability to implement the curriculum, general knowledge of the subject, and performance. For school management and leadership, the NSC results are used to determine whether the resources provided to the schools have been used optimally and identify areas for improvement in the following academic year. On the other hand, parents use NSC results to measure their contribution to and involvement in their children's education.

The analysis conducted by Taylor et al. (2013) revealed that South Africa continues to face challenges in student achievement, trailing behind other nations in this crucial aspect. Despite allocating a substantial budget to education, surpassing the expenditures of its African counterparts, the country has struggled to bridge the gap in academic performance. This troubling trend raises questions about the effectiveness and efficiency of educational policies and systems, prompting a deeper examination of factors contributing to this persistent lag in student outcomes. Addressing these challenges is imperative for South Africa to realise its educational aspirations and enhance its global competitiveness in the ever-evolving landscape of knowledge and skills.

In their work, Liu et al. (2020) emphasise the pivotal role of instructional leadership, highlighting its direct, mediated, and mutual impacts on the effectiveness and success of schools. The authors contend that instructional leadership is particularly influential concerning learner performance amidst various leadership styles. This observation underscores the significance of leadership practices that are closely aligned with and focused on the instructional aspects of education. By recognising the multifaceted effects of instructional leadership, educators and policymakers gain valuable insights into how leadership styles can significantly shape the outcomes and achievements within educational institutions.

Marishane (2016, p. 110) argues that a significant number of studies "place more emphasis on the functional role (what the school principal does) rather than the context or situation (i.e., school management environment) of the principal". This study sought to understand the principals' instructional leadership practices in well- and underperforming secondary township schools. As Marishane (2016) argued, this study argues that following this type of leadership, the principal sets the tone, and others follow in pursuit of high achievement standards for learners. To achieve organisational goals, the school principal must plan, organise, staff, direct, and control corporate resources (Bush, 2010).

School leaders have the executive function of implementing policies using their influence (Christie & Lingard, 2001). Various researchers, such as Fullan (2007), Hattie (2009) and Stronge (2018), agree that instructional leadership is critical for achieving effective teaching and learning, as well as improved learner performance. These researchers further attest that principals, as accounting officers, are pivotal in leading instruction in schools. This study sought to understand the principals' instructional leadership practices in well- and underperforming township secondary schools. This study is thus significant given that township schools in South Africa have, over time, been characterised as poorly performing. Furthermore, the sector plan for the South African Department of Basic Education (DBE) envisages school principals who must ensure teaching and learning by effectively implementing the national curriculum (Department of Basic Education, 2015a). This means that the DBE places significant importance on effective school leadership.

The principal must have insight into "…his or her role as a leader whose responsibility is to promote harmony, creativity, and a sound work ethic within the community and beyond" (Republic of South Africa, 2015, p. 15). In addition, The National Development Plan (NDP) envisages schooling as an education system with initiative-taking students and teachers by 2030. The NDP contends that school principals must provide administrative and curriculum leadership (Republic of South Africa, 2012). This means that the principal must ensure a conducive teaching and learning environment. The key player in this regard is the principal, and their role, as described in the NDP, captures the main elements of instructional leadership, as defined later in this report.

However, contrary to the above expectations, schools do not always perform well due to various factors, especially in the NSC results. In this regard, the Department of Education categorises schools as academically good-performing and academically underperforming. According to the Department of Education (2010), underperforming schools have significant numbers of learners who cannot meet the minimum performance requirements set out in the progression requirements. On the other hand, well-performing schools have learners with strong academic performance.

Circular 02 of 2015 elevates the importance of school performance in terms of results and foregrounds consequence management for schools performing below the set minimum requirements (Gauteng Department of Education, 2015). According to this Circular, any secondary school performing below 60% in the National Senior Certificate (NSC) results is considered underperforming. In section 58(b) of the South African Schools Act 84 of 1996, the Provincial Head of Department (HoD) must identify underperforming schools and issue a written notice to the relevant principals. A school principal identified as underperforming must develop an intervention plan in section 16A of the South African Schools Act 84 of 1996. Circular 02/2015 further states that the Provincial HoD must advise principals of the upcoming school visits for that particular year to identify root causes for underperformance and instruct them to submit academic performance improvement plans for their schools. As a result, no school principal would like their school to fall under section 58.

1.2. Statement of the problem

The challenge of school performance as determined by learner performance in the NSC has been a topic of interest in Gauteng, Ekurhuleni township secondary schools, especially now that South Africa is a democratic country. When the NSC results are announced and accepted to be credible by UMALUSI, a council that sets and monitors standards for general and further education and training in South Africa in terms of the National Qualifications Framework Act No 67 of 2008 [as amended] and the General and Further Education and Training Quality Assurance Act No 58 of 2001 [as amended], individuals, the community, educators and the principal' are celebrated.

Research conducted by Leithwood et al. (1998), claims that [recently] instructional leadership practices of the school principal have become the hallmark of effective schools. Crankshaw (2011), concludes that school principals play a vital role in student achievement. The findings by Crankshaw (2011) revealed a positive correlation between the teachers' beliefs that instructional leadership is a critical role of the superintendent and their willingness to work constructively with school principals. These studies and several others are pertinent to my research as they address instructional leadership and its link to learner performance.

While other researchers, such as Chikoko et al. (2013), have researched successful and well-performing schools in challenging contexts, this research study sought to explore the instructional leadership practices and their connection to learner performance in well- and poorly-performing schools in one township, in Ekurhuleni. This means that some schools perform well while others perform poorly. This study questions this gap, especially in the NSC results, from the perspective of the variance in instructional leadership practices, which may account for the differences in learner performance or student achievement in Ekurhuleni township schools. Chikoko et al. (2013) argue that knowledge of instructional leadership practices in challenging school contexts such as Ekurhuleni township secondary schools is necessary, as such knowledge can be used to transform dysfunctional schools into sites of good teaching and learning. For this reason, I aspired to investigate the influence of instructional leadership on learner performance, especially in challenging contexts, and the factors that account for good or underperformance in the Grade 12 NSC results.

1.3. Purpose of the study

Studies conducted in instructional leadership, such as that of Bhengu and Mkhize (2013), "sought to understand how principals who had recently joined the school managed to create conditions wherein improved learner outcomes could be achieved". Other studies, such as that of Chikoko et al. (2013), researched instructional leadership practices in deprived rural communities in well-performing schools. Similarly, Bhengu and Mkhize (2015) researched instructional leadership practices in rural area schools that received recognition for good performance. There seem to be limited studies conducted that look at leadership practices in township schools in both academically well and underperforming schools, especially from the same township, hence the need for this study. Any learner in any school can excel if supported and provided with the necessary tools to succeed. Good instructional leadership is at the centre of it all.

1.4. Objectives of the study

This study sought to:

- Ascertain principal instructional leadership practices in underperforming and well-performing township secondary schools.
- Understand the differences, if any, between principals' instructional leadership practices in well-performing and underperforming township secondary schools serving learners in the same community.
- To draw lessons from principals' day-today instructional leadership practices in well-performing and underperforming secondary schools in one township of Ekurhuleni.

1.5. Critical research questions

The study sought to address the following key research questions:

- What are the principals' instructional leadership practices in well-performing and underperforming secondary schools?
- What are the differences, if any, between principals' instructional leadership practices in well-performing and underperforming township secondary schools serving learners in the same community?
- What lessons can be drawn from the principals' day-today instructional leadership practices in the well-performing and underperforming secondary township schools in Ekurhuleni?

1.6. Significance of the study

Gumus, Bellbas and Pietsch (2022, p. 9), note that "much research has elucidated the role of a school principal as an instructional leader, while substantially less is known about the relationship between learner performance and the instructional leadership practices of school principals". In support of the above argument, Hallinger et al. (2020, p. 120), state that "knowledge of how instructional leaders manage curriculum in schools in South Africa is limited". Therefore, this study's significance is that it contains instructional leadership practices that may contribute to learner academic achievement in township schools. School leaders need to learn about high-quality instruction and actions to motivate and support their teachers so that schools can achieve their goals and mission.

In addition, school leaders can organise professional learning communities for their teachers and assist teachers in improving their classroom practices. With improved instruction, student achievement is likely to improve. Instructional leaders, especially those of underperforming schools, can take action that includes strategic planning, coaching, and professional development for teachers and other learning principles about the ideas and practices that promote students' academic achievement (Debevoise, 1984). This study further contributes to other studies on the connection between instructional leadership and learner performance in secondary schools. There is, however, still more room for further exploration in this regard.

1.7. Clarification of the key concepts

The sub-section below explains the key concepts in this study.

1.7.1. Leadership

In this research study, '*leadership*' means "influencing others' actions in achieving desirable ends" (Cuban, 2010, p. 11, as cited in Bush, 2011). Leadership develops "vision, sets future direction, motivates positive engagement in strategy or planning, and generates a culture of constructively challenging convention" (Bush, 2008, p. 23). This study adopts the definition as explained by Bush (2008).

1.7.2. Instructional leadership

In this research study, *instructional leadership* encompasses "those actions that a principal takes or delegates to others to promote growth in student learning" (Dwyer, 1986, p. 14, as cited in Botha, 2016).

1.7.3. Learner performance

This research adopts the definition of learner performance as described by the Association for Educational and Communication and Technology in 2004, which states that learning performance is the ability of a learner to apply newly acquired knowledge or skills. Learner performance is also understood per the National Senior Certificate pass requirements, which the Department of Basic Education uses to determine school performance.

In terms of these requirements, learners must pass one official language at the Home Language level at a minimum of 40%, two additional subjects at a minimum of 40%, and two other subjects at a minimum of 30% (Department of Basic Education, 2021).

1.7.4. Professional and personal motivation

After obtaining my undergraduate degree, I was enthusiastic and motivated to change young pupils' lives. I learned a lot of theories, methods, and personal philosophies at the university, which I wanted to use to touch the lives of young people. I was inspired to be the change that I wanted to see. Upon my arrival at [X] Secondary School, I was confronted with an unexpected reality: *Yizo Yizo*, the famous South African television series released in 1999 and ran until 2004, was recorded from there. This television series exposed problems faced by the pupils in South Africa's education system. According to Oppelt (1999, no page number),

> *"Newspapers all over the country carried letters from irate parents and community leaders blaming the programme for setting antisocial trends, reviewers raved about the realism, and the black teenagers nodded their heads that someone understood the dilemmas they faced each day both inside and outside their classrooms".*

The negative stigma created by that television programme has remained with the school to date, and society views learners who study at this school as rebels, and as a result, most of them behave as such. Subsequently, the vicious cycle of underperformance continued. I observed a change of leaders throughout the years, each suggesting their systems while the NSC Grade 12 results of the school fluctuated. A question then emerged: I wanted to understand what other leaders were doing in different schools that my school was not doing, yet serving learners from the same community subjected to similar socio-economic issues.

One of my career objectives is to develop relevant and competent skills while pursuing a career in the education fraternity. I want to enhance my knowledge by adopting a research methodology in class while teaching my specialised subject and learning more about the realities of the classroom, as this will allow me to contribute significantly to the field of education in the long term. As an aspiring future leader, I have observed that many children drop out of school for one reason or another. This then contributes to several societal problems such as crime, poverty, unemployment, and, in most cases, high dropout rates (Gumus et al., 2021).

Given the above, I seek to explore the principals' instructional leadership on learner performance in township secondary schools. I believe that any learner in any school can excel if supported and given the necessary tools to succeed and that good instructional leadership is at the centre. Good instructional leadership in schools could solve the problems mentioned above.

1.8. Overview of chapters

This study comprises five chapters, whose content is summarised in the section below:

Chapter One introduces the study and orients the reader to the research. In this chapter, key concepts, such as leadership, are explained. Leadership practices, which potentially impact good or poor academic learner performance, are also discussed.

Chapter Two presents a comprehensive literature review and the establishment of the theoretical framework guiding the research. The literature review explores instructional leadership practices and experiences through three distinct lenses: the South African context, the broader African context, and the international landscape. It delves into the existing body of knowledge to provide a comprehensive understanding of instructional leadership. Subsequently, the chapter outlines the chosen theoretical framework, namely Webber's 1996 instructional leadership model. This model elucidates the five fundamental dimensions of instructional leadership, each of which will be examined in depth to inform the research's analytical framework.

Chapter Three presents and discusses this study's research methodology and design. This chapter comprehensively explores the chosen sampling strategy and elucidates the methods employed for data generation. Furthermore, it scrutinises the critical aspects of trustworthiness, ethical considerations, and the encountered limitations that shaped the research process. Moving forward, chapter four comprehensively presents the findings from the semi-structured interviews conducted with the study participants. Finally, in chapter five, this research culminates with a conclusive summary that distils critical insights and lessons gleaned from the study, offering valuable takeaways for further exploration and understanding.

Chapter Four shifts focus to the core of the study, presenting and dissecting the findings generated from in-depth, face-to-face, semi-structured interviews conducted with six (6) school principals of secondary schools within Ekurhuleni District, Gauteng province. The chapter commences with an extensive profile of the research sites and those of the participating school principals. This contextual exposition intends to give the readers insights into the study's environment and pertinent variables. Subsequently, the chapter expounds upon the presentation and discussion of the study's findings.

Chapter Five concludes the instructional leadership roles of principals in academically underperforming and well-performing schools. Given the comparative nature of this study, it rigorously examines the distinctions in instructional leadership practices among principals in township secondary schools with varying academic performance yet situated within the same community. Furthermore, the chapter fulfils the study's objectives by uncovering principal instructional leadership practices in underperforming and well-performing schools and unravelling the day-to-day facets of instructional leadership within these contrasting academic environments.

1.9. Chapter summary

This chapter has orientated the reader to the study, provided the problem statement, discussed the significance of the study, shared the research objectives, and concluded with the critical research questions for the study. The next chapter discusses the literature review and theoretical framework adopted for this study.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Introduction

The previous chapter provided the context and introduction to the study. It highlighted the importance of school performance as determined by learner performance in the NSC outcomes, as it has been a topic of interest in the Ekurhuleni township schools, especially now that South Africa is a democratic country. This chapter reviews literature relevant to instructional leadership from national, regional and international perspectives. It concludes by discussing the theoretical framework followed in this study.

2.2. Conceptualising instructional leadership

The concept of instructional leadership is not new to leadership in education and has been comprehensively studied over the years, dating back to the 80s and 90s (Huong, 2020). Instructional leadership encompasses "those actions that a school leader takes, or delegates to others, to promote growth in student learning" (Debevoise, 1984, p. 14-15) and comprises the following tasks: defining the purpose of schooling, setting school wide-goals; providing the resources needed for learning to occur; supervising and evaluating teachers; coordinating staff development programmes and creating collegial relationships with and among teachers (Dimmock & Walker, 2000, p. 44).

Research suggests that many models and concepts exist to explain the concept of instructional leadership. For instance, Webber's (1996) model addressed the need for instructional leadership regardless of the school's organisational structure and concluded that even if an instructional leader was not packaged as a principal, such a leader was imperative. This study uses Webber's 1996 model as its theoretical framework, as explained further in the next chapter.

2.2.1. Instructional leadership in the South African context

Recent studies conducted across the globe have revealed that there is a clear link between the instructional position of principal leadership and school improvement (Shava et al., 2021). South Africa is not an exception.

A study by Shava et al. (2021) sought to understand how instructional leaders in six (6) different schools affect successful teaching and learning in their schools to change underperforming schools' sustainable improvement. This study revealed that principals were critical in improving school teaching. Their instructional leadership practices included closely monitoring the teaching and learning process daily, direct supervision of teachers by both the principal and School Management Team (SMT) and providing the necessary resources and support for teaching and learning, to mention just a few. Their findings have further illustrated a move from the traditional authoritarian type of instructional leadership towards a more collaborative and democratic approach, which proved successful in school improvement. This aligns with a study by Shava and Heystek (2019), in South Africa, which established that DHs and SMTs play a vital role in changing underperforming schools towards improved learning outcomes.

Furthermore, a recent study conducted by Naidoo (2019), explored the perceptions of teachers and SMT members regarding the leadership qualities exhibited by principals who acquired the professional qualification referred to as the Advanced Certificate in Education: School Leadership and Management (ACESLM). Naidoo (2019) argues that principals only become influential instructional leaders when they engage teachers with more culturally relevant teaching strategies and practices that improve student outcomes. Naidoo (2019) further argues there is no overarching principal preparation or certification programme to prepare principals to become influential instructional leaders. In summary, Naidoo's (2019) research study asserts that to be a successful instructional leader, one must undergo a training programme. The author strongly recommends that the DBE consider introducing a prerequisite qualification such as ACESLM.

Recently, the Gauteng Department of Education issued a memo to schools. The memo offered SMTs in public schools an opportunity to study for an Advanced Diploma in Leadership and Management to enhance their knowledge in leadership. The intention was to assist members of SMTs to develop into influential instructional leaders. For this research, the intention was also to analyse the link between the selected school principals' qualifications and how their schools perform. In this regard, a study conducted by Maponya (2020), in the Capricorn District examined five secondary schools from previously disadvantaged backgrounds with good Grade 12 results.

The research found that instructional leadership by the school principal positively correlates with improved learner academic achievement. The study's findings suggest that instructional leaders should enhance and support teaching and learning by providing required educational resources, focusing on improved learner academic achievement. Other studies have revealed that instructional leaders' motivation and positive influence play a key role in yielding positive results. In their research, Maponya (2020), argues the motivation of the principals in their study pushed their learners in the right direction.

There was further evidence to suggest that, with good instructional management of curriculum, teachers were likely to ensure that there was syllabi coverage with learners given quality assessment. Other findings pointed to creating a positive teaching and learning culture, providing learners with adequate support, attending to their individual needs, and, most importantly, involving all the relevant stakeholders in ensuring that learners' academic achievement is achieved. Furthermore, his research is situated in the positivistic paradigm using the structural equation model as a statistical methodology to investigate the structure of instructional leadership (Byrne, 2001, as cited in Grobler, 2013). Bush (2013), postulates that instructional leadership is amongst the most significant leadership models due to the ever-increasing recognition that it is one of the most important (or even the most important) activities for principals and other education sector leaders.

The South African Standard for School Leadership, as articulated by the Department of Basic Education in 2014, defines the fundamental role of a school principal (Department of Basic Education, 2015b). This role encompasses providing leadership and effective management across all domains within the school. It is intended to foster an environment that enables and actively supports the conditions necessary for high-quality teaching and learning experiences. By setting and maintaining these conducive conditions, principals play a pivotal role in promoting the highest achievable learner achievement standards.

In South Africa, school principals must oversee a wide range of responsibilities. They are expected to create a positive school culture, set clear educational goals, manage resources efficiently, and ensure teachers have the support and professional development they need.

For instance, this role becomes even more critical in a country with prevalent educational inequalities. Principals must implement strategies that address the unique challenges schools face in disadvantaged areas, thus promoting equity in education. Ultimately, their leadership contributes significantly to improving the quality of education and learners' academic achievements in South African schools.

2.2.2. Instructional leadership in the African context

In Zimbabwe, research conducted by Muresherwa and Jiter (2021), suggests that principals of the participating schools understand instructional leadership in a reincarnated and morphed sense. They understand instructional leadership as an expanded term to incorporate a focus on equity. Their findings revealed that instructional leadership in inclusive secondary schools is shaped by pressure to balance expectations from the school leadership context as filtered through the personal characteristics of the different school heads. Their findings have led to a recommendation that policymakers redefine inclusive education for instructional leaders and differentiate it from sensitive terms such as disability education. Their research has revealed a significant gap in the field of instructional leadership wherein researchers will concentrate on school heads' instructional leadership practices in non-religious secondary schools in Zimbabwe.

A research study by Toprakci et al. (2016), on instructional leadership practices in Malawian secondary schools revealed that parental support and cooperation are essential in successfully implementing the curriculum. They suggest that collaboration between the school personnel, parents, and other relevant stakeholders is crucial for the learners' academic achievement. They further found out that training on effective curriculum implementation is vital. Their research has proved that principals of the sampled schools who claimed to be at the forefront of curriculum implementation were successful. Furthermore, they found that sufficient learner and teacher support material delivery significantly ensures successful curriculum implementation.

Their study further discusses issues of the importance of learner assessment, dispersal leadership, which places much emphasis on the importance of sharing; the vital role of student recognition, social relations within the school as well as staff performance incentives within the schools, which assist in boosting the morale of educators, thus leading them to be motivated to deliver or being able to execute their duties as expected. In addition, Sibomana (2020), researched teachers' perceptions of the instructional leadership behaviours of secondary school principals in Rwanda. Their findings revealed that, as perceived by teachers, principals in Rwanda secondary schools primarily engage in instructional leadership behaviours. These behaviours include prioritising their everyday leadership activities. They set the direction of their schools by establishing school goals and, at the same time, inspiring teachers' commitment. They further argue, as evidence suggests, that principals of the sampled schools in Rwanda secondary schools seemed to understand their role regarding the teaching and learning processes.

However, one of the biggest challenges in Rwanda's secondary schools is insufficient teaching and learning resources, which affects teacher effectiveness. The other challenge, according to their study, is that school principals seem to put more effort into some instructional leadership behaviours and less into others; hence, the recommendation that schools in Rwanda be empowered in terms of the provision of resources and consistent training programmes to enable secondary school principals to provide the best instructional leadership practices in their respective schools.

Researchers such as Khoza (2012), Dlamini (2009), and Adebayo and Ngwenya (2015) have conducted a substantial amount of research on instructional leadership in Swaziland. This research aimed to capture the various facets of responsibility for teaching and learning in Swaziland. The intention was to examine the required competencies, sustain a teaching and learning culture, and manage optimal learning. On the other hand, research on instructional leadership in the South African context focused on the success of instructional leadership as it related to different school conditions ranging from affluent to constrained circumstances (Van der Merwe & Schenk, 2016).

Additionally, managing the instructional programme relates to coordinating the curriculum, supervising instruction, and monitoring assessments and pupil progress. One way of handling these high expectations was to ensure that the instructional programme in every classroom had the same elements and followed the guidelines of standards-based education but with competent teachers incorporating their skills and knowledge into the design (Van der Merwe & Schenk, 2016). The authors state that monitoring pupil progress could be realised through analysing and acting on pupils' achievement using formative and summative assessments and through direct knowledge of teaching practices, learning standards, and classroom dynamics.

2.2.3. Instructional leadership in the international context

The Vietnamese government is trying to develop effective school leadership in its school education policy to meet the enormous demand for secondary school education (Huong, 2020). Huong (2020), conducted a research study in Vietnam to investigate the influence of various factors on principals' instructional leadership in lower secondary education. The study revealed that internal and external factors affect instructional leadership. Among them is the degree of autonomy of the school for instructional activities. Managers' and teachers' awareness of their role in leading teaching activities and promoting educational engagement is crucial.

Furthermore, ninety-seven secondary public schools in North Vietnam revealed that for school principals to have a positive influence, they must subscribe to instructional leadership style as either leaders or managers. Principals must spend much of their time on general teaching, learning, and education matters. In their conclusion, Huong (2020), advocates for policy reform to accommodate a legal basis for high school autonomy, the management capacity of the principal and, more importantly, the motivation to form a working environment where-in all relevant stakeholders work together to improve the efficient results in the leadership of teaching activities.

In Malaysia, Hassan et al. (2022), conducted a study to explore effective instructional strategies practised by primary principals in performing their roles as instructional leaders. In the context of Malaysian public schools, the Ministry of Education (MOE) has outlined three ways of ensuring that school leaders as principals are effectively performing their duties as instructional leaders. To summarise these approaches, principals are encouraged to play an active role in the teachers' growth and development by planning, coordinating, and evaluating the teaching and learning processes. Secondly, the school leaders are given a task as agents of change to achieve MOE's educational vision and mission, which officially translates into all schools' goals and mission. Lastly, school leaders are encouraged to promote a positive school environment supporting teaching and learning processes (Ministry of Education, Malaysia, 2013, as cited in Hassan et al., 2022). Through the Malaysian Education Development Plan 2013-2025, conducted by the Ministry of Education (MOE), it was reported that students' performance has increased by 20% through instructional leadership (Hassan et al., 2022). In addition, they believe that good school performance often results from students' achievement and towering personally through the practice of instructional leadership. In conclusion, Hassin's et al. (2022), research follows Hallinger and Murphy's (1985) instructional leadership model.

Moreover, Bellibas et al. (2020), researched the influence of instructional and distributed leadership on instructional quality in Turkey. Their principal findings and analysis indicated that instructional leadership had positive but weak direct and indirect effects on teachers' instructional quality. This implied that instructional leadership has only a modest impact on the quality of instruction. These results provided evidence that the indirect effect of instructional leadership on instructional quality was through the subtle mediating influence of teacher collaboration among teachers and improved their perceptions of job satisfaction, contributing to improved instructional quality. Further arguments, as alluded to by Bellinas et al. (2020), suggest that instructional leadership enhances instructional quality by leading to an improved sense of job satisfaction among teachers.

2.2.4. Concluding thoughts on instructional leadership

The above section reviewed instructional leadership from national, regional and international perspectives. What seems to be shared in three perspectives is that researchers seem to follow an instructional leadership model in the research proceedings. The most common trait that seems to stand out among instructional leadership researchers is the agreement that instructional leadership leads to improved academic results. For this to be realised, education leaders ought to monitor the teaching and learning processes closely daily, design systems for effective teaching and learning, monitor students' progress and attendance, manage the instructional programmes in schools, and provide the necessary resources and support for effective teaching and learning, and creating an environment where teachers and learners may reach their full potential through motivation.

Leadership is a broad subject that is not only difficult to define but carries more difficulty in its relation to management. The central theme of this literature seems to point out that influential school leaders are not simply men or women who have a morally justifiable reason to achieve success. They embody the aspirations of the community; these various stakeholders in education (such as ministries of education, school governing bodies and parents alike) also possess the necessary managerial competence grounded in their ability to design work-plans. They further supervise the implementation of the work plan and curriculum and the subsequent provision of learning materials required to achieve the central objective of the school- the provision of high-quality education.

2.3. Theoretical framework

A theoretical framework can be defined as "a set of interrelated and coherent constructs, definitions, propositions, and explanations for an event by specifying connections among variables with the specific purpose of explaining and predicting phenomena" (McMillian & Schumacher, 2014, p. 12). Crankshaw (2011, p. 5), defines instructional leadership as "anything that leaders do to improve teaching and learning in their schools and districts". The conceptualisation of instructional leadership emanated from research on effective schools. It showed a robust, directive approach to leadership emphasising curriculum and instruction, which has become the leading model favourable among most school principals (Crankshaw, 2011).

Among these models are the two common in most research: Hallinger and Murphy's (1985) and Weber's (1996) models on instructional leadership. For this study, I drew on Weber's (1996) instructional leadership model as a theoretical framework to understand and theorise instructional leadership in the township context of Ekurhuleni. I investigated the instructional leadership practices of secondary school principals and their link to learner performance in township secondary schools, specifically the NSC outcomes. According to Weber (1996), five dimensions of the instructional leadership model will be discussed in the section below.

2.3.1. Defining the school's mission

Webber (1996) posits that defining school goals balances clear academic ideals with the community and internal needs. To address this aspect of the study, the participants were asked to share their ideas and perspectives about their schools' missions. Their responses were later used to inform the understanding of one of the valuable lessons learnt from this study, how leaders understood and communicated the missions of their schools, which was amongst the lessons that stood out.

2.3.2. Managing curriculum and instruction

Furthermore, Webber (1996) argues that the strategies for bringing the goals to reality depend on allocating staff and organising curriculum to maximum effect. In addition, Ghavifekr (2021, p. 18) further reiterates that "the school principal must make available the instructional resources and support in the use of instructional best practices-modelling and provide support in the using data to drive instruction". To address this aspect, participants were probed to share the strategies and practices they implement to ensure that teaching and learning occur.

2.3.3. Promoting a positive learning environment

Webber's (1996) theory attests that the notion of school climate is complex and challenging to define and describe; no doubt, it is a fundamental factor contributing to teacher and learner motivation to hold high expectations of themselves and their performance.

Ghavifekr (2021), further states that the instructional leader promotes a positive learning environment by communicating goals, establishing expectations, and creating an orderly environment. The study participants were required to share their thoughts on promoting a positive learning environment, and their relationships with the staff, community, the School Governing Body (SGB) and learners were tested.

2.3.4. Observing and improving instruction

Webber (1996) argues that it is essential for an instructional leader to understand the critical effect of time for achieving set academic goals. In this regard, an instructional leader observes and improves instruction through classroom observation and development opportunities (Ghavifekr, 2021). On this aspect, principals were asked to share their day-to-day activities; this was deliberately done to assess principals' ability to observe and be alert to their surroundings.

2.3.5. Assessing the instructional programmes

An instructional leader's primary task is occasionally assessing and revising school instructional programmes (Webber, 1996). In this regard, an instructional leader contributes to planning, designing, administering, and analysing the activities to evaluate the effectiveness of curriculum implementation processes (Ghavifekr, 2021). Lastly, participants were asked to respond to questions such as how they plan for the kind of teachers they would place in Grade 12. In this regard, the participants were further asked how they strategically placed learners who study critical subjects, their intervention strategies and what they did when matters did not go as expected.

2.4. Chapter summary

This chapter discussed the literature review from three perspectives on instructional leadership and then provided concluding thoughts on the literature review. The chapter further discussed the theoretical framework and its relevance to the study. The next chapter discusses the research methodology and design undertaken for this study.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1. Introduction

The previous chapter conceptualised the concept of instructional leadership. It then provided a comprehensive literature review from three perspectives: the South African, the African, and the international perspective. In addition, the previous chapter discussed the theoretical framework used in this research. This chapter focuses on the research design and methodology used in this research study. Research paradigms are a set of common beliefs and agreements scientists share on how problems can be understood and addressed. The author further states that research paradigms are general viewpoints or ideologies (Perera, 2018).

3.2. Paradigm

There is a general agreement from several methodologists that there are different research paradigms, namely positivism, post-positivism, interpretivism or social constructivism, emancipatory or critical/advocacy, pragmatism, and postmodernism. Given the various research paradigms, the study uses the interpretive paradigm (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Denzin & Lincoln, 2015; Nieuwenhuis, 2007).

McMillian and Schumacher (2014, p. 14) contend that "interpretive/constructivist researchers use systematic procedures but maintain that there are multiple socially constructed realities". They further argue that rather than trying to be objective, the researcher's professional judgments and perspectives are considered in the interpretation of data. For example, as I conducted this study, it was less challenging to understand some of the explanations during the interviews since I am also in the teaching profession. In addition, as I analysed data, I could relate some perspectives and make connections to my teaching environment. It is further argued that there is less emphasis on numbers and more emphasis on values and context. The study has engaged the relevant educational stakeholders (principals) essential to the research to understand the connection between learner performance and instructional leadership practices.

3.3. Research design

A research design "is a plan for intervention for generating data" (McMillian & Schumacher 2014, p. 38). The research design includes when, from whom, and under what conditions the data will be generated (McMillian & Schumacher, 2014). Bertram and Christiansen (2014) define a research design as a plan regarding how a researcher will systematically generate and analyse the data to respond to the key research questions of a study. For this study, I used a multi-case study, with the case being the school principal, who was understood to be in the driving seat of a school.

Ebneyamini and Moghadam (2018) state that a case study illuminates a set of decisions, why they were taken, how they were implemented and with what results. Thus, in this study, each principal's instructional leadership practices were explored, along with the reasoning behind those practices, how they were implemented and what effect, if any, these had on their responsibility concerning achieving the desirable academic learner performance results. These 'how' and 'why' questions assisted me in making prominent links between the principals' instructional leadership practices and learner performance, especially in the NSC results.

A case study is an in-depth empirical inquiry that studies a specific phenomenon within a real-life context. The phenomenon in this study was the principal's instructional leadership practices. Case studies fall into the interpretivist paradigm, emphasising an understanding of a phenomenon, namely, the school leaders' instructional leadership practices and their connection to academic learner performance (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). Adopting a case study research design allowed me to draw into the perspectives of secondary school principals' instructional leadership practices. These instructional leadership practices, the phenomenon explored in this study, could be practically orientated (Ebneyamini & Moghadam, 2018).

With this planned and systematic approach, I generated data from six secondary school principals using semi-structured interviews. The rationale for using the case study approach was to provide a mechanism to understand the instructional leadership practices in academically poor and good-performing schools.

Specifically, this case study was instrumental, as it aimed to explore the principals' instructional leadership practices and their connection to learner performance in schools. Merriam (2009) contends that a case study should be bounded; hence, this study was bounded to six principals in the secondary schools in a specific township.

3.4. Research methodology

There are three broad research approaches in social sciences: quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods. This study adopted the qualitative research methodology. According to McMillian and Schumacher (2014, p. 31), qualitative research methodology "involves collecting a variety of empirical tools such as case studies, personal experiences, introspections, life stories, interviews, and artefacts". Accordingly, qualitative researchers display various interconnected interpretive practices, always striving to understand the subject better. For them, each practice makes the world visible in a different way. I sought to understand and compare the daily experience of instructional school leaders in academically performing and underperforming schools.

However, this approach, like others, had its limitations. This study relied upon oral semi-structured interviews, which had merits and demerits. To navigate the demerits of using interviews as a data generation method, I elicited elaboration and created space for further explanation. In some instances, I clarified questions in IsiZulu and Sesotho to make the participants understand clearly. Where possible, I adjusted questions to the variation in individual responses. I talked less and listened more while ensuring that I provided explanations or shifts in the interview focus for informants to adapt their thoughts along new areas. In addition, I spread the demographic questions throughout the interview.

In contrast, the complex, controversial, and challenging questions were reserved for the middle or later periods in the interview, when the informant's interest had been aroused. By so doing, I was most likely to obtain more detailed information if the respondent had initially not given enough information. I did that to obtain as much information as possible, and one interview went on for almost two hours.

Through interviews, this study attempted to obtain enough information to learn how school principals in selected schools ran their day-to-day activities and whether their leadership practices directly or indirectly influenced learner performance and NSC results in Grade 12. One needs to note, in addition, that a statistical report on Grade 12 NSC results for the past five years (2017-2021) was used, as explained later in this report.

3.5. Research sampling strategy

Nieuwenhuis (2007, p. 15) describes sampling "as a process used to select a portion of the study population". Scholars use different ways to obtain information in qualitative research, including individuals, groups, reports, documents, reports, and sites. Irrespective of the form of the data, purposeful sampling was used. In contrast to probabilistic, qualitative sampling is "selecting information-rich cases for study in-depth" (Parton, 2002, p. 242, as cited in McMillian & Schumacher, 2014) when one wants to understand something about those cases without needing or desiring to generalise all such cases.

This research used purposive sampling, which focuses on specific characteristics of a population that is of interest, for instance, the six Ekurhuleni township schools selected using the high and low Grade 12 performance NSC outcomes as per the NSC School Performance Reports for a period of five years (2017-2021). However, Creswell (2009) claims that purposive sampling relies so much on the judgment of the researcher, which then leads to the researcher being biased. I was objective when analysing data because I selected schools based on their performances, as evident in the report mentioned above. It will, however, give me a broad idea and understanding of the practices that can be used to draw believable conclusions and help me answer his research question.

This study sampled six schools, comprising three well-academically performing schools and three poor-performing schools, regarding the NSC results (2017-2021). All these schools were given pseudonyms. Furthermore, they are all situated in Ekurhuleni and cater to learners who are subjected to the same socio-economic issues. In addition, these schools are categorised as quintile three schools. My research participants were the school principals of six Ekurhuleni township secondary schools.

A criterion that was followed was that each school principal should have been with the school for a minimum of four plus years so that they could give insightful information relevant to this research.

3.6. Data generation methods

As stated above, qualitative research involves the use and collection of a variety of empirical tools. These include case studies, personal experiences, introspections, life stories, interviews, artefacts, cultural texts, [reports]. Accordingly, qualitative researchers display a wide range of "interconnected interpretive practices, always striving to understand better the subject matter" (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014, p. 31). This study generated data using the semi-structured face-to-face interview method.

According to Creswell (2009), researchers using this approach outline their topics in advance; their interview questions are flexible, but usually, a given set of questions is covered, and the researcher decides the sequence and wording during the interview. All interviews lasted for plus or minus two hours and thirty minutes. According to Creswell and Poth (2016, p. 10), an interview "involves a conversation, an interaction between people"; it is believed to have the ability of knowledge construction. A conversation between the interviewer and an interviewee (participant in my case) may create a space where participants can present their understandings, views, and experiences related to the phenomenon of the study.

However, this approach, like others, and as already mentioned above, acknowledges that there were limitations, which are explained later. Bertram and Christian (2014) argue that an interview is not simply a data generation exercise. Still, it is also a social, interpersonal encounter, and as a result, power relations can influence the interview. Therefore, when conducting the research, I was present during the interview with the participants and could ask more questions to get more information in cases where the participants had not initially given sufficient information. Through interviews, this study attempted to get the voices of the six (6) principals in the sampled schools.

The second planned method that was to be used to generate data was document reviews. Unfortunately, only two schools allowed me to peruse their documents and not take them away with me for review, despite presenting my ethical clearance certificate and thoroughly explaining my work and ethical obligations. McMillian and Schumacher (2014) argue that official documents are abundant in organisations and take many forms. These include, among others, memos, minutes of meetings, working papers, and drafts. They further protested that internal documents could show the official chain of command and provide clues about leadership styles and values in the organisation. I reviewed school visions in schools with pass cards, registers, and learner codes of conduct and traced their link to how the school's principal manages and leads their schools; unfortunately, the schools' SGBs refused to permit me to take those documents for further review and analysis. Staff minutes, for example, would have given me access to information about what is being discussed during meetings of the two categories of schools being studied. I was aware of the sensitivity and confidentiality of the information in the documents he wished to review. Hence, schools refused to provide permission for this.

3.7. Data analysis

Qualitative data analysis is "an inductive process of organising data into categories and identifying patterns and relationships among categories" (McMillian & Schumacher, 2014, p. 395). The study used Giorgi et al.'s (1975), phenomenological steps. I began by listening to each recording in cases where I was permitted to record and read each transcript to get an overall sense of the whole in situations where permission to record was not given. Secondly, I re-listened to the recordings and re-read the transcripts to make sense of the answers provided to me by the participants. Thirdly, I eliminated redundancies in the units of meaning and began to relate the remaining units to one another, which led to emerging themes (Cresswell, 2014). Fourthly, I transformed the participants' language into the language of science as I transcribed by changing the language into English where necessary. I ensured it was readable and understandable while not losing or inserting my meanings. Lastly, I synthesised the insights of the information transcribed and related it to instructional leadership style.

3.8. Issues of trustworthiness

In quantitative research, trustworthiness issues are referred to as validity and reliability. Trustworthiness is "the degree to which the researcher can have confidence in his/her sources as well as the methods used to gather data" (Stewart & Hitchcock, 2020, p. 12). It is of utmost importance in qualitative research (Nieuwenhuis, 2007). In response to the above, Guba and Lincon (1985) proposed a criterion to respond to four basic questions. Below, I discuss each technique and how it was addressed in this research.

3.8.1. Credibility

For credibility, I used audio-record devices to record interviews to identify the actual reality of the interviews and avoid gaps in generated data. Using audio-recording devices enhances the accuracy and quality of the interview (Christiansen, 2014). In one interview where I was not allowed to audio-record the interview, I scrabbled as many notes as possible. I then shared my audio and notes with the participants to ensure they reflected on what transpired. Once approved, I committed to sharing the complete research report with the Gauteng Department of Education (GDE) and the participants.

3.8.2. Transferability

To address the issue of transferability, I have ensured that my study has sufficient details and information to allow the reader to determine the accuracy of my conclusions (Cope, 2014; Lincon & Cuba, 1985; Rule & John, 2011). To further enhance transferability, I presented full descriptions to enable others to form their conclusions based on the evidence provided and to judge the degree to which findings were transferable in similar contexts (Merriam, 2009), which meant that the data I collected was rich, thick, and valuable.

3.8.3. Dependability

In addition, the research report process was reported in detail, thus enabling other researchers to reproduce the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Shenton, 2004). This was done to allow those following the study to determine whether the research procedures were followed as planned and to enable areas of improvement should the need arise.

3.8.4. Confirmability

For confirmability, I ensured that the research findings were the result of the experiences and ideas of the participants. I shared my notes and transcripts with my participants to ensure they represented what was captured during the data generation stage (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Shenton, 2004).

3.9. Ethics in research

Before conducting this study, my application for ethical clearance was approved by the Ethics committee at the University of Witwatersrand (WITS). I then applied for permission to conduct research at the GDE, which was approved. Furthermore, I asked for permission from participants to participate in my research study voluntarily.

Bertram and Christiansen (2014) point out that consent means that participants agree to participate in the research study. All the participants signed the consent forms. I then gave my participants a full explanation of my research and assured them that their names or schools would not appear anywhere in the study report. Pseudonyms were used for anonymity to ensure that the participants and their schools could not be identified.

3.10. Limitations to the study

This study intended "to develop an understanding of the participants and their relationship to the phenomenon" (Merriam, 2009, p. 45). It could be highlighted that getting hold of principals was extremely difficult. These are busy individuals. In other instances, I had to conduct interviews in the comfort of their homes. For some, I had to go to them at school on Saturdays during extra classes. I was informed that others had retired when we agreed to conduct the interviews. As a result, I had to seek their colleagues' contact details and conduct interviews in the comfort of their homes. My supervisor granted permission. In addition, some participants were reluctant to get into more information with their responses. In this regard, I used probing questions to try and obtain in-depth responses. However, I still felt I could have obtained more if this had not been for the time constraints imposed by the requirements regarding the limited time to conduct the study.

One participant did not agree to be audio-recorded, making it extremely difficult for me to listen and write notes simultaneously. All these challenges delayed the data generation process. It is also important to note and report that despite providing evidence that the GDE had provided me with permission to conduct research in the identified schools and that while conducting research, I was guided by ethics and revealed my ethical clearance certificate, SGB members could not permit me and or consent to review school documents as I had initially planned in the proposal. Most of them claimed such documents contained sensitive information which could not be shared with anyone other than the authorised district officials. I could have sourced more details from those documents. One principal from the poorest academically performing school refused to be interviewed after I explained my research topic and purpose. As a result, I had to opt for another one not initially part of the plan.

3.11. Delimitations

Firstly, this study was delimited to six secondary school principals from well-performing and underperforming schools in one township in Ekurhuleni. While these principals' experiences and thoughts may not be generalised to other principals, their accounts might give insights and lessons valuable to other principals.

3.12. Chapter summary

This chapter introduced the reader to the research and design methodology, which included the research design and methodology used in this research. In addition, the research sampling strategy was also discussed. The data generation methods and data generation followed this. Furthermore, this chapter discussed trustworthiness issues and how these were addressed. Ethics concerning the study were then shared with the reader, and lastly, the chapter considered the study's limitations. The next chapter presents and discusses the data and findings of the study.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Introduction

The preceding chapter sets out the design for the research and the methods used to generate data for the study. This chapter reports and discusses the findings from data generated in the field using face-to-face semi-structured interviews with six school principals in six secondary schools in one township of Ekurhuleni district in Gauteng province. First, I presented a detailed profile of the research sites and the participants. Being mindful of the sites and participants allows the reader to understand the study's context and other relevant factors. The presentation and discussion of findings then followed. To protect the participants' identities, pseudonyms were used to present and discuss the findings. Five themes that I have identified are also discussed. The themes that emerged while analysing data included the following: Principals' understanding of leadership, the relationship between school leadership and learner performance, instructional leadership practices that contribute positively to learner performance, and instructional leadership strategies to improve teaching and learning. The findings that are set out and discussed are responses to the following critical questions:

1. What are the principals' instructional leadership practices in underperforming and well-performing secondary schools?
2. What is the difference between principals' instructional leadership practices in well-performing and underperforming township secondary schools serving learners in the same community?
3. What lessons can be learnt from instructional leadership practices of principals in the well and underperforming secondary township schools of Ekurhuleni?

4.2. Profiling of the participants

The six sampled secondary schools were in the district of the region of Ekurhuleni in the province of Gauteng. Details regarding research participants are presented in Table 4-1 below:

Name of the participant	Gender	Name of the school	Number of years as a school principal	School enrolment	Number of teaching and non-teaching staff	NSC Average % from 2017-2021
Vero	Female	USB 1	26	905	50	57.02
Malcolm X	Male	USB 2	29	2 500	98	90.8
Drogba	Male	USB 3	4	1 568	64	69.74
Benjamin	Male	USB 4	6	905	50	66.7
Rose	Female	USB 5	5	1 652	62	80.84
Zola	Male	USB 6	20	1 486	60	75.3

Table 4-1: Participants' demographic details

As observed from the above Table, fundamental details of the participants and secondary schools as sites from one township in Ekurhuleni under pseudonyms USB 1 to USB 5 have been presented. All these schools fall under quintile three. According to the Amended National Norms and Standards for School Funding (ANNSSF) (Department of Basic Education, 2011), quintile three schools are no-fee paying, and thus do not charge fees. Furthermore, these six schools were strategically selected using the high and low-Grade 12 performance NSC outcomes per the NSC School Performance Reports for 2017-2021 (Department of Basic Education, 2017; 2018; 2019; 2020; 2021). The Table further shows the number of learners enrolled in each school, ranging from 905 to 2,500. Two of these schools share a similar number of learners, staff, and non-teaching staff; the number of teaching and non-teaching staff each school principal manages ranges from 50 to 98. It further reveals that only two of the six (6) principals were females and that each principal's experience was between 4 to 29 years. The last column shows the average percentages of the sampled schools for 2017-2021, ranging from 50.02% (lowest of them all to 90.8% [highest]).

4.3. Connecting units leading to emerging themes

Below, I provide an example of the coding process used in this qualitative data analysis to arrive at the themes in the form of a table. Additionally, I present data generated from the interviews with the principals of the sampled schools from both the good and poor academically performing schools. Under each emerging theme and further elaboration, I commenced with the views of principals from academically well-performing schools, followed by the views and experiences of the principals from academically poor-performing schools.

An example of the coding process is presented in Table 4-2 below.

CODES	**PARTICIPANTS' RESPONSES**	**THEME**
1. Strategic placement of Grade 12 educators.	1."*…We use those with experience, especially in challenging subjects, gamble there and there in subjects such as Life Orientation to work with novice educators*…"	***4.3.4. Instructional Leadership strategies put in place to improve teaching and learning.***
2. School ways of dealing with absenteeism.	2. **"…***First of all, we make sure that we discourage late coming through the control of registers for educators and learners. Secondly, we have weekly syllabus checks and monitoring. I will share the documents we use with you. We also have a tool that is kept by each classroom's rap [LRC], which monitors the teachers.*"	
3. Key issues to consider for improving performance in key subjects.	3. "*Placing good teachers who know what they are doing. Providing the teachers with the necessary resources they need. Encouraging learners to practice, practice and practice then assessing them and providing them with feedback time and again...*"	
4. Intervention strategies used to improve teaching and learning in critical subjects.	4 "*… Our school twinned with [X] Secondary School. We noticed that they are doing better than us, especially in gateway subjects, so we swap around teachers [who are good] in certain topics. During SSIP sessions,*	

	educators from [X secondary school] come to teach at [Y Secondary School], and educators from [X] go to[Y] Secondary school".	

Table 4-2: Example of the coding process

In arriving at themes, transcriptions assisted me in linking ideas similar to each other to make sense of what they could mean using the coding process. Coding, according to Cresswell (2019), can be defined as the labelling and organising of data to identify to identify themes and patterns. Its primary purpose is to provide structure to free-form data so that it can be examined systematically.

4.3.1. Principals' perspectives and understanding of leadership

Below, I discuss the participants' perspectives and understandings and share their thoughts. When sharing their understandings of leadership attributes, participants had similar/diverse views. Participants from the well-performing schools shared similar sentiments. Malcom X said:

> *My personal belief is that a person who wants to lead is a person who learns from others... You also become a great leader through reading. When you have information and confidence in yourself as a leader, it is very easy to influence people.*

Similarly, Mr. Zola seemed to share the same sentiments and further added to say:

> *I believe that leadership is an acquired skill…Born leaders are a bonus, but leaders must be created. They must be influenced; I believe that shaping people's mentality towards being great leaders is what should happen, taking someone from nowhere and making something out of them.*

In addition, this is what Mrs Rose said:

> *I think you need to have both [Be a born leader and a made leader]. You can be a born leader, but you can study to be a leader. When you are a leader and do not study, you cannot lead what you do not know. Leaders should learn [know] so that they lead what they know.*

The above quotes from the participants of the academically good performing schools seem to suggest that for one to be a great leader, an environment should be created to allow them to become great leaders. The quotes revealed that great leaders learn from others and gain knowledge by capacitating themselves, boosting their confidence. Interestingly, drawing from the above quotes, principals' views of academically good performing schools is the belief that their environments play an important role in helping them be good leaders. They seem to be aware of this perception, irrespective of whether they believe they were born as leaders or made to become leaders. This could also mean some of them may not have been effective instructional leaders but were often enabled by their school environments and cultures.

From the perspective of academically poor performing schools, Mr Drogba also seemed to agree with the sentiments of his three counterparts when he said:

> *When it comes to me, I had to learn leadership qualities; fortunate enough, I grew up in a church environment where I went through leadership stages, such as being a youth leader to higher youth leadership positions.*

It appeared that Mr. Drogba's experiences with leadership are what Mr Zola described in the above quote. He seems to have been fortunate enough to have gone through stages of leadership that shaped the kind of leader he sought to be. However, as per the data generated, participants from the academically poor-performing schools seemed to have been either reluctant or had limited knowledge about leadership.

For example, Mr Benjamin said:

> *I believe that leaders can be both people who were born for it and who were made.*

Unfortunately, attempts to get him into the depths of his understanding of leadership failed. Even though she was a principal for an academically poorly performing school, Mrs Vero seemed to be aware of the importance of her surroundings when she said:

> *I believe people are shaped by their surroundings. You can be born a leader, but if your surroundings do not allow you to unleash your potential, you can do nothing about it. You can also develop yourself to become a great leader through what you see from those around you. Certain people inspired us to become teachers because of how they handled themselves.*

In the above quote, it can be deduced that Mrs Vero understood the importance of her school environment. This implies that she understood that her school environment did not allow her to, as she puts it, "…unleash her potential...". However, Mrs Vero was careful not to criticise her school leadership publicly but pointed to the significance of a positive school environment for the performance of learners and teachers.

To further delve into principals' views about leadership without mentioning any type or leadership style to address the abovementioned theme, I asked them about the kind of leaders they perceived themselves as. In this regard, Mr Zola said:

> *I strongly believe that I was made by the environment and the situations I came across. Had I been born into a wealthy family, maybe I would be disrespectful, but the environment shaped me… [He further added that] … Leadership is influenced by the environment. I am a leader who is open to the fact that when looking at someone, I look at them as a fellow human being as I am also one; there is nothing that makes us different.*

Mr Zola, from an academically good performing, does not take credit for good instructional leadership practices, leading to his school performing well. He gives credit to his environment. On the other hand, from an academically well-performing school, Mrs Rose enjoyed the benefits of a positive school environment despite her non-directive leadership style, saying:

> *I perceive myself as a leader that follows; I am not autocratic. I do not only lead, but I also follow. Recently, I have given one of the D. Hs the responsibility to lead the Internal Whole School Evaluation (I.W.S.E).*
> *I will be hearing everything from him, and I will follow what he suggests throughout.*

> *I do not make a decision; I always involve my deputies. When there is important new information, I always call a meeting to discuss it with my colleagues. I believe in working as a team, leading the staff, and leading them to lead me simultaneously.*

The above extract suggests that Mrs Rose may not have been an effective instructional leader but had been fortunate to work with a team of dedicated and motivated individuals. In support of Mrs Rose's position, Mr Malcom X said:

> *I am a leader [who] believes that other people have potential. Once you believe in people, those people will also believe in and uplift you. If you show that you are serious about what you are doing and a hard worker, people will recognise that, and then you will become their leader. A leader must have a growth mindset, meaning that every situation that comes your way, whether it is positive or negative, is a chance to learn. Every situation I experienced became a learning opportunity for me, and that is the kind of leader I am – a leader who learns from situations.*

The above quote suggests that Mr Malcom X believed in a positive school environment where one sees good in others and believes in them and where effort is adequately reciprocated. He further said that if school principals and teachers considered their work seriously and were hardworking, they would become good leaders, which concurs and aligns with what Mr Drogba said when describing a leader, he perceived himself to be, saying:

> *I am a hands-on principal; I trust people until they destroy my trust. I trust people with certain duties, but I give them deadlines, and if you cannot meet the deadline continuously, my trust in you depreciates. I am very proactive; I give people the benefit of the doubt. I want things to get done so that we can all benefit and win at the end of the day.*

The above extract reveals that even though Mr Drogba's school did not produce the desired academically good results, his leadership approach could improve his school's performance if implemented. In this regard, however, principals from academically poorly performing schools had different views about the leaders that they perceived themselves to be, with Mrs Vero saying:

> *I think I allow people to be; I wouldn't say I like noise; I want to believe I work with professionals, and people should know why they came here. I hate following people around and telling teachers to go to class. We are adults; we know why we are here.*

According to the above extract, Mrs Vero expected her subordinates to act and do right "*because they are professionals…because* [they] *are adults*". However, this approach or leadership style did not work for her and may have been the reason for her school's poor academic performance.

In this regard, Mr Benjamin mentioned two leadership styles he used to lead his school, saying:

> *Well, I can say, as far as I know, I am in between. Sometimes, I become a democratic leader, and sometimes, I become an autocratic leader in a very polite way. For instance, when decisions have to be made, such as learners leaving after writing exams, I become autocratic...*

From the above, it could be noted that Mr Benjamin confined or limited himself to certain leadership styles. Given his school's poor academic performance, his poor instructional leadership, as Botha (2006) argues, may have contributed to the situation in his school.
Overall, the above discussion sought to capture the principals' thoughts and or perspectives on leadership. Interesting ideas were shared between principals from academically good-performing and academically poor-performing schools. What seemed to stand out was the importance of a positive school environment. This could be deduced from how some of the principals reaped the benefits of their positive school environment, which hid a catalogue of their weaknesses and made them appear as good instructional leaders when it comes to the academic performance of their institutions.

Other principals, however, seemed to be reaping the benefits of combining their positive school environments with their effective instructional leadership styles, which was evident in the good performance of their schools in the NSC examinations. On the other hand, from the data generated, it was apparent that some academically poorly performing schools had principals who understood good instructional leaders but were often disappointed by their unfavourable school environments. In addition, findings also revealed that the toxic combination of undesirable school environments and poor instructional leadership approaches could explain poor academic underperformance in some schools.

4.3.2. Principals' instructional leadership practices of well versus underperforming schools

According to Kaso et al. (2019), a positive correlation exists between learner performance and instructional school leadership. Kaso et al. (2019) contend that a principal who gets the balance right between these variables often sets the tone for success for their schools. The participants were asked how they would describe the relationship between leadership and learner performance in their schools based on NSC examinations to address this theme. Responses from the principals of the academically good performing schools are analysed below, and this is what Mr Malcolm X said:

> *I had a very excellent working relationship with all these people, but there were times when some of them tried to sabotage what I was trying to do; for instance, there was a situation where the SGB broke into the school to steal…*

The above extract suggests that a good relationship between the SGB and the principal may contribute to a school's academic performance. However, what is interesting to note is how this participant dealt with the matter. He added:

> *My approach to dealing with the issue was to make sure that I empower and capacitate them so that they become people with a different mindset and paid for because most of them came with little or no education…*

Instead of expending energy on the conflict and feeling sorry for himself and his institution, the principal looked for the causes of the problem and found ways to build the capacity of the SGB. In line with Mr Malcolm's sentiments, Mrs Rose said:

> *I also have a good relationship with the SGB, but not long ago, I had a dispute with the chairperson, which was caused by a recruitment issue, but that was the only incident I have ever had with the SGB…*

Drawing from the above, it could be argued that a principal's good working relationship with their SGB could contribute to positive learner performance.
This finding is significant because, according to the South African Schools Act 84 of 1996, sections 20 and 21, the SGB must support the principal, educators, and other school staff in performing their professional duties. It could then be argued that the SGBs which support SMTs in performing their professional responsibilities may contribute to positive learner achievement.

These are the views of principals from academically poorly performing schools. Mrs Vero puts it clearly when she said:

> *As mentioned earlier, negative leadership sabotage, lack of monitoring, not working as a team, and many other things lead to negative results. We may take the young people we teach as children, but they see. They can differentiate a dedicated teacher from a teacher who does not care.*
> *That is why some classes are known to be troublesome, but certain teachers can still get the desired results and discipline while others struggle. Good leadership is likely to get learners willing to make it, while poor leadership is likely to yield poor results.*

Mr Drogba shared similar sentiments when he said:

> *[Good] Leadership leads to better learner outcomes in the end. If your leadership is mediocre at the principalship level, learners will copy what you do: "Monkey see, monkey do". ...If they are supposed to be in class and you do not tell them, it affects them academically. If your leadership is weak, when you ask learners to attend during weekends, they might not come, affecting them negatively. If you do exhibitions and they do not show up, that will affect them academically. Leadership and learner outcomes cannot be divorced; if coupled, they will yield good results...*

There seemed to be harmony between principals leading academically well-performing schools and those leading academically poor-performing schools. Mr Drogba quotes an example of a school known for its good performance until its principal retired. In this regard, he said:

> *For example, take [School X]; for the past 15 years or more, I have had one principal who is my mentor. For the past ten years, the school has not obtained anything less than 99% and 98%, but when the principal retired a year ago, the Grade 12 results dropped.*
>
> *In June this year, they obtained only 67%, and I think the problem might be with the new leadership. I believe the retired principal was a strong candidate who held on and ensured that things were happening in the school. However, when he left, people became complacent, which affected the learners' outcomes.*

Drawing from the above quote, it could be argued that there is a link between good instructional leadership and learner performance; hence, Mr Drogba elevated the dropping results in Grade 12 since the retirement of this principal as an example of the importance of good instructional leadership.

To further expand on this theme, I asked participants to describe their working relationship with their SMT members, teachers, learners, the SGB, and parents in general. Surprisingly, two of the three principals from the academically poor performing schools said nothing about their relationship with their SGBs. Instead, they described their relationship with the SMT and learners, which is what Mrs Vero said:

> *When I rate myself according to different categories, on a scale of 10, I give myself 10 out of 10 regarding my relationship with my learners. I have grown to understand even their issues; I will make it a point to buy school shoes for a learner when I notice that they do not have them, irrespective of the fact that they have parents. I also have a good relationship with the SMT, but there are quarrels now and then.*

> A good relationship with professional and academically driven learners and contributing to developing a positive attitude towards their schoolwork is critical for a school's academic performance (see, for instance, Maringe & Moletsane, 2015). This argument could explain why the results of Mrs. Vero's school had been improving over the years. Furthermore, Mr Drogba also talked about the relationship he shares with his colleagues, and this is what he said:
>
> *I would say the relationship is good, but from what others may see, they might have a different view because when I am at work, I am at work. I may be friendly, but at work, I have to be professional. My relationship with them is strictly work-based; I do not make friends in the workplace.*

Noticeably, drawing from the above quotes, both participants were careful enough not to say anything or talk about something. However, Mr Benjamin, from an academically poor performing school, went straight to the point and said:

> *[USB 5] Secondary School does not have such [the SGB is dysfunctional]; there are minimal differences between me and the SMT. When it comes to teachers, I think they are respectful. Learners are respectful.*

In addition, to get more information about the relationship shared by the participants with people they are leading and or affected by their leadership, I asked them about the number of times they hold parental meetings. This question was asked to assess the depth of the relationship the participants shared with the parents of their learners.

In this regard, this is what Mr Malcolm X said:

> *We had situations when we had emergencies and extraordinary meetings. Generally, we had four meetings with the parents in a year. The SGB calls two, and the other two by the staff. The first meeting is held in February, where I call all the parents to speak about issues such as the vision we have for that particular year, everything they should expect, and what we expect from them as parents. The second meeting is in April, where teachers sit with parents to discuss the individual results of learners.*

Mrs Rose shared a similar sentiment when he said:

> *We hold meetings every term for all grades, but for Grade 12, we keep them throughout.*

Mr Zola, also from an academically well-performing school, went in more profound and explained the reason his school moved from 32% to 93%. Mr Zola had this to say in this regard:

> *In terms of parents' meetings…when we started from 32% to 93%, we used to have general parents' meetings, phase meetings, grade meetings, class meetings, and one-on-one meetings. But in one-on-one meetings, I am the one who heads them, not the educators; I address them. In one-on-one meetings, I address factors as to which classes have the most learners who can give the school distinctions; I coach the educator and ask who the learners are dismally and who are my worry. Then, I meet them personally to identify their problems, which motivates them. They may come up with excuses that are where I come in and where I am coming from, trying to remove those excuses. Making change is my passion, and it fulfils me.*

Drawing upon the evidence presented in the previous excerpts, a compelling argument emerges that suggests a positive correlation between the academic performance of schools and their relationships with parents and guardians of their students.

Academically successful schools have established robust and consistent communication channels with parents and guardians. Many of these institutions concur on a significant interaction frequency, which adheres to a specific policy, albeit unmentioned. However, it is essential to acknowledge the remarkable dedication of Mr. Zola, who takes these interactions to a commendable level by conducting a wide array of meetings, including general meetings, phase meetings, grade meetings, class meetings, and one-on-one sessions. This level of engagement highlights the exceptional commitment of academically successful schools to involving parents in the educational process.

In stark contrast, most participants from academically underperforming schools seemed to hold a different perspective, as they appear to engage in far fewer interactions with parents when compared to their counterparts in high-performing institutions. This discrepancy raises pertinent questions about the potential impact of these differing parental involvement levels on the schools' overall academic performance. It suggests that these academically struggling schools might be missing out on valuable opportunities to harness the support and cooperation of parents and guardians, which could, in turn, hinder their students' academic progress.

This is what Mrs Vero said regarding the above subject:

> *We are supposed to hold meetings four times a year, but at our school, it happens once a year unless there are cases to be solved, then we call in parents. However, we keep in touch with them via WhatsApp groups in different grades. I think we have not woken up to the reality that things have returned to normal since COVID-19.*

To add to that, Mr Benjamin had the following to say:

> *Honestly, as per policy, we need to have parental meetings four times a year. But, our school only holds parental meetings once a year. The reason is the dysfunctional SGB. Our learners' parents are negligent to their children. They take our school as a dumping area. They are not involved in the education of their children.*

For example, I recently called Grade 12 parents, but very few were there. The SSIP attendance is abysmal and has not improved. Parents do not care. The SGB of our school only come when there is something from them to benefit.

Drawing from the extracts above, a discernible awareness emerges among the two principals regarding their inadequacies in maintaining a sufficient frequency of parental meetings. Mrs Vero's proactive use of social media platforms to stay connected with parents underscores her acknowledgement of the issue and her effort to address it. In contrast, Mr Benjamin attributes the school's shortcomings to parents' perceived lack of support. These observations illuminate a significant dimension of the challenges these educational leaders face in fostering effective relationships with parents, which can potentially impact the academic performance of their respective institutions.

Analysing the participants' responses offers valuable insights into the relationship between instructional leadership and school academic performance. As defined by Hui and Singh (2020), instructional leadership pertains to a leadership approach wherein an instructional leader influences the actions of various stakeholders, including the SMT, parents, SGB members, educators, and learners, to achieve desired educational outcomes. The data indicates a clear association between implementing instructional leadership and positive academic performance in schools, which aligns with the concept that effective instructional leadership has the potential to drive improved educational outcomes.

Conversely, the inverse holds for academically underperforming schools, where evidence suggests poor relationships with educators, learners, SMT members, and SGB coupled with inadequate parental involvement. These factors could provide a plausible explanation for the subpar academic performance exhibited in the sampled schools. Armstrong (2020) aptly notes that parents are considered equal education partners. The widespread consensus is that the educational endeavour's success hinges significantly upon parents' cooperation and active involvement. In essence, their engagement is a critical component in the educational ecosystem, and its absence can contribute to a decline in academic achievements.

In this regard, the above findings underscore the paramount role of instructional leadership in driving academic success within educational institutions. It also highlights the potential consequences of inadequate parental involvement and strained relationships with various stakeholders within academically struggling schools. The findings of this analysis align with the view that a successful educational partnership requires the active participation of parents, a concept firmly supported by the literature (Armstrong, 2020). As such, educational leaders must recognise the value of parental engagement and strive to cultivate effective instructional leadership to achieve their schools' academic objectives.

4.3.3. Leadership practices that contribute positively to learner performance

According to Bush et al. (2010), instructional leadership plays a pivotal role in developing a school's vision, establishing future directions, motivating positive engagement in strategic planning, and cultivating a culture that encourages constructive challenges to conventional norms. Similarly, Marishane (2016) emphasises that leaders who embrace the instructional leadership style serve as role models, setting the tone for others to follow in pursuit of high student achievement standards.

Zengele (2013) underscores the significance of management tasks undertaken by principals in achieving educational goals, particularly in the context of quality teaching and learning. These facets are undeniably central to the overall academic performance of students. Additionally, Zengele (2013) argues that the planning process, when led by instructional leaders, involves organising strategic planning sessions for the school staff. During these sessions, the vision and mission statements are formulated, the school environment is assessed, and the school's organisational goals are defined and shared collectively among all stakeholders.

In light of Zengele's (2013) insights, the participants in this study were asked to share their respective school's visions.

In this regard, this is what Mr. Malcolm X had to say:

> *My vision was to give a black child an opportunity to shine, create breadwinners, fight against poverty, and be able to compete with white schools. Fortunately, that vision came true because we could compete with white schools in all aspects. I am not talking about academics only; we competed with them even in sports, the cleanliness of the school, and extramural activities. The school attracted one of the most successful, well-resourced private schools in Benoni, and they partnered with us.*

Mr. Malcolm X's statement embodies a profound and comprehensive vision of leadership practices that significantly contribute to learner performance. The opening part of the statement, "*My vision was to give a black child an opportunity to shine*", underscores the importance of equity and inclusivity in leadership practices. Effective leadership in education aims to provide equal opportunities for all students, regardless of their background, allowing them to reach their full potential. The mention of "*create breadwinners*" highlights a focus on the practical aspect of education. Leadership practices here emphasise developing skills and knowledge that can lead to gainful employment, contributing to students' economic well-being.

Mr Malcolm X's "*Fight against poverty*" statement suggests a broader societal impact. Leadership practices extend beyond the classroom and involve initiatives that address the root causes of poverty, recognising that education plays a crucial role in breaking the cycle of poverty. The desire to "*compete with white schools*" in all aspects, not just academics, reflects a commitment to academic excellence. Leadership practices in this context involve setting high standards, providing resources, and fostering a culture of achievement. It also emphasises that competition can be a motivator for improved performance.

The statement's emphasis on competing in sports, school cleanliness, and extramural activities underscores the importance of holistic education. Leadership practices should encompass a well-rounded approach to student development, considering academic, physical, moral, and social aspects.

The final part of Mr Malcolm X's statement, referring to a partnership with a thriving private school, underlines the significance of collaboration in leadership practices. In this regard, Mr Malcolm X's statement suggests an understanding that establishing specific partnerships can provide valuable resources, expertise, and opportunities for students, enhancing the overall educational experience that schools in socioeconomically deprived contexts do not have. Mr Zola, on the other hand, did not refer much to the vision of his school but instead asked me to read it, although it was on the wall of his office. The vision of the school read as follows:

> *We are a professional and motivated team of staff that provides, in partnership with parents, quality education so that learners recognise and reach their fullest potential within a caring and secure learning environment that for the different levels of the learners' abilities and equips them for the world of work and life.*

The fact that the school's vision is prominently displayed on the office wall signifies a commitment to transparency and accessibility. It is a visual reminder for everyone who enters Mr. Zola's office, including staff, students, and visitors, of the school's mission and goals. The statement emphasises the quality of the staff, highlighting their professionalism and motivation. This reflects an emphasis on the quality of educators, which is a crucial factor in providing a high standard of education.

In addition, the vision of Mr Zola's school recognises the importance of collaboration with parents. This partnership indicates that the school values involvement from families in the educational process, which is often associated with improved learner performance and outcomes. However, the fact that Mr Zola does not refer to the vision of his school begs the question of whether he is holding it as a reminder for everyone he leads or if it is just a show to those who come to his school.

Mr Benjamin, from an academically lower-performing school, had this to say:

> *I want to change the perception that the school cannot produce [good quality results] in Grade 12. Hence, I also teach. I am yet to realise my vision. However, I do believe that the school has great professionals who have the potential to produce results without strong force [being authoritative]*.

Mr Benjamin says that where things are not going well, school principals must lead by example, show the way, and get their hands dirty. Mr Benjamin's reference to the need to change how his school is perceived implies that he understands that schools that are perceived as underperforming may struggle to attract students and parents, which could, in turn, lead to declining enrolment and ultimate closure. He understands that changing this perception of improvement and excellence can help his school become more viable and grow into a reputable institution.

Regarding the vision of the school, this is what Mrs Vero said:

> *Our vision aligns with that of the GDE, which is to provide quality education and competency and observe a high standard of teaching and learning.*

The analysis of the participants' responses reveals intriguing insights into the leadership and vision aspects of principals in academically successful and underperforming schools. Notably, school principals with strong academic performance appear to possess well-defined and compelling visions, which have yielded favourable outcomes. In contrast, Mrs Vero and Mr Benjamin, principals of academically underperforming schools, present distinct characteristics in their approach to vision and leadership.

The contrast in leadership styles between academically successful and underperforming schools is particularly evident when considering the clarity and customisation of school visions.

Principals in successful schools have established clear and customised visions, demonstrating an alignment between the school's objectives and the GDE expectations. This alignment, however, might fall short of the deeper, shared commitment among staff members that is often a hallmark of successful vision implementation. Mrs. Vero's school appears to possess a vision document lacking the interactive, participatory element needed to inspire and engage the staff in pursuing common goals. Similarly, Mr Benjamin's school's vision to change the community's perception of poor academic results, focusing on NSC results, reflects a vision that seemed to be his own rather than a collective vision shared by the school staff. This collective gap is compounded by the absence of tangible documentation or a transparent communication channel to substantiate his claims, leading to a potential disconnect between the articulated vision and its practical implementation within the school.

These observations underscore the critical role that a well-communicated, customised, and inclusive vision plays in the leadership and success of educational institutions. It suggests that schools with more effective academic performance tend to have a vision that is clearly defined and collaboratively embraced by all stakeholders, including staff and the community. In contrast, when school visions lack these attributes, they may struggle to inspire collective effort and commitment, possibly contributing to academic underperformance.

In this regard, the analysis of the participants' responses highlights the significance of school leadership, vision, and the need for effective communication and alignment of goals among all stakeholders. Successful schools often excel in these areas, while underperforming schools may face challenges in developing and sharing a vision that resonates with the entire school community. This finding underscores the importance of visionary leadership and fostering a shared sense of purpose among all participants to drive academic success within educational institutions.

To further address this theme, I asked participants to share their day-to-day activities, and this is what Mr Malcom X said:

> *I believe that a principal must have a routine. In the morning, when I come in, I first check with the night watchmen and ask about any incidents that may have occurred during the night.*
>
> *Then, after that, we have a briefing session where we talk about the programme of the week, and after that, we do the admin work (check emails, people who came in late and who were (absent). After the briefing session, I normally do not go straight to my office. I take a walk and go outside the schoolyard to check on the learners who came late. I continue with my walk by going to every classroom and checking up on learners and teachers by greeting them and asking how they are doing.*

Unfortunately, not all the participants responded to the expected question. For instance, Mr Drogba had this to say:

> *I hold a managerial position; I teach English to three classes, 1 in Grade 12 and 2 in Grade 11. My speciality, as well as curriculum, and I also do exam preparation for all our Grade 12 learners and across, and I brief them about the dos and Don'ts of the exam on a termly basis. I make a point that every term, during tests or final exams, all our learners take an oath to get used to the rules of the exams.*

In analysing the responses provided, it becomes evident that Mr Malcolm X exhibited a keen awareness of his role as an instructional leader. Furthermore, the study prompted participants to share insights regarding leadership practices that positively impacted learner achievement. Notably, Mrs. Vero's perspective on this matter below offers valuable insights:

> *Teamwork, implementing and monitoring strategies, keeping parents informed of what is happening in the school, motivating educators by providing them with necessary resources, disciplining unruly learners, warding learners who perform, bringing in people from outside, even those who once studied at our school.*

In this regard, Mr Benjamin said:

> *Consistency. We can get the desired results if we are consistent in our decisions. Harmony as well. Getting along with each other.*

Mr Malcom X and Mr Benjamin were aware of practices that could yield better results and improve learner performance in their schools. Mr Malcolm X used an analogy wherein he said he has a culture of telling the Grade 8s that they are like potatoes upon their arrival. This is how Mr Malcolm put it:

> *When the learners enrol for the first time in Grade 8 during induction, I welcome them to their territory and let them know what is expected.*

> *When they come to secondary school for the first time, they are usually scared, and that is when, as an educator, you must take advantage to mould them into something you desire. Hence, I call all the learners in Grade 8 potatoes.*

Mr Malcolm X explained that potatoes are versatile ingredients that can be used in a wide range of dishes and treats. When he likened learners to potatoes, he emphasised their versatility, which he said meant that they are adaptable, able to learn and excel in various subjects or activities. He further explained that potatoes, when planted, grow into new potatoes, which he understood to refer to the fact that learners have the potential for growth and development, to learn and develop their knowledge and abilities over time. He also pointed out that potatoes can thrive in various environmental conditions, which meant that learners are resilient and capable of adapting to different educational settings and challenges.

The fact that he tells this to Grade 8 suggests that he wanted to induct them into the culture and thinking of the school early and provide them with a framework for thinking about their school life. The above extracts from participants' responses underline the pivotal role a well-defined vision and mission statement can play in driving school academic success. As Ogrinc et al. (2019) have put it, an inspirational vision encompasses creating an environment that enables followers to excel, which is achieved through induction, training, development, and empowerment. As cited in Steyn and Niekerk (2013), the renowned leadership theorist Warren Bennis posits that leadership involves the capacity to formulate a compelling vision, translate it into actionable steps, and sustain its pursuit. This means that a vision cannot achieve itself; it requires strong leadership to persuade people to take actions that will make it a reality. This aligns with the argument that academic underperformance often correlates with ineffective communication and execution of the vision, a recurring issue observed in low-performing schools, where vision statements sometimes shift from collective "*we*" to individualistic "*my*" pronouns or are entirely forgotten and thrown into obscurity.

In this regard, Steyn and Niekerk (2013) point out that maintaining the vibrancy of the vision among all stakeholders can be a significant challenge for school leaders, but it is crucial to sustaining interest in achieving the vision. This challenge was evident in academically struggling schools, where principals and their SMTs struggled to keep the members of their school communities engaged in realising the vision. This finding underscores the importance of leaders seizing every opportunity to inspire followers and ensure a shared commitment to the vision's pursuit.

Furthermore, it is evident from the analysis that instructional leadership practices, as discussed in the literature review, play a significant role in positively influencing learner performance. As exemplified by Mr. Malcolm X's emphasis on maintaining a clear daily routine and active involvement in various aspects of school life, these practices can profoundly impact academic outcomes. Mrs Vero's insights, as highlighted in the preceding quote, provide further confirmation of the importance of these instructional leadership attributes. This study underscores the interconnectedness of visionary leadership and effective instructional practices as vital elements in achieving academic excellence in schools.

4.3.4. Instructional leadership strategies put in place to improve teaching and learning

According to King (2002, p. 62), instructional leadership may be defined as "anything that leaders do to improve teaching and learning in their direct school". Furthermore, the National Development Plan: Vision 2030 envisages school principals who will effectively provide administrative and curriculum leadership. This model has become the principals' preferred choice (Crankshaw, 2011). As a result, school principals who hope to achieve the desired academic Grade 12 NSC results must implement specific strategies and plans to lead their schools to success. In this regard, the participants were asked about the strategies they had implemented to improve teaching and learning in their schools.

This is what Mr Malcolm X said:

> *There must be monitoring and supervision of work, but not in an old-fashioned way…*

Furthermore, Mr Drogba, from a poor academic performing school, had this to say:

> *We have implemented a new strategy in which all SMT members work as a team, not in individual groups. The second strategy was the sharing of new ideas and how to overcome challenges together as a team. Our results moved from 67% in term one to 93% in June, and if we continue with the same strategies, I believe we will be above 95% by the fourth term. We also implemented a strategy wherein we encouraged our PL1 educators to bring in new ideas to share with the rest of the staff so that they also feel part of the school's decision-making processes; after all, they are at the forefront of the teaching and learning processes.*

This is what Mrs Vero said:

> *First, we ensure that we discourage late coming through the control of registers for educators and learners. Secondly, we have weekly syllabus checks and monitoring; I will share the document we use. We also have a tool each class representative keeps, which monitors the teachers. It states that if a teacher came late or left early in class. Sometimes, teachers do go to class but do nothing constructive. Every Friday, the class representatives submit to me. Parents and everyone are aware, so the learners are not intimidated. We try, time and again; whenever I am free, I do take rounds to check. I hate policing people, but yes, I do it.*

Drawing from the above quotes, it seemed interesting that most participants from poor and good academically performing schools agreed that monitoring and supervising progress was essential and not only putting it in a strategy. For instance, the participants reported discouraging late coming by controlling attendance and period registers. Other strategies reported by the participants included monitoring teachers' class attendance through the Representative Councils of Learners (RCL), effective communication and working together as a team.

This way, staff at these schools worked as a team, shared ideas, and solved problems. Other participants have reported that all their staff members were included in important decisions. In this regard, Mr Benjamin seemed to understand what he needed to do but did not do it. This could explain why his school was underperforming. His words below reflect and support this observation:

> *Honestly, we lack monitoring as a school. I was supposed to be monitoring my two deputies. [However, I do not]. It is even worse because we share the same subject [Maths]. So, they do not perform their duties and also do not produce good results, yet I expect them to monitor the Head of Departments [DHs]. For example, let me speak about things we were supposed to be doing to improve results.*

Since arriving at [USB 4] Secondary School, I do not remember attending a Maths subject meeting or even receiving an invitation and maybe being unable to participate. Go to other schools; you will find Master Files for all subjects in the principal's office. But at [USB 4] Secondary School, they are not there.

We also have a problem of favouritism; favouring the Maths department by my deputies over other departments has caused a problem and demotivated other Departmental Heads. We should fix monitoring at our school. [USB 4] Secondary School wants to maintain the enrolment; as a result, we take anything thrown at us. We attract troublesome, unruly learners.

In the analysis of Mr Benjamin's statement, it is apparent that various factors can contribute to poor academic results in certain schools. These factors revolve around organisational deficiencies and administrative issues that hinder effective educational practices. One significant factor that Mr. Benjamin identified is the lack of monitoring of plans and strategies. This lack of oversight can result in a lack of accountability, making it difficult to assess the effectiveness of educational initiatives. The school cannot adapt and improve when plans and strategies are not monitored and adjusted as necessary.

Furthermore, Mr. Benjamin pointed out the failure to follow basic procedures for functional operations within the school. This can encompass various aspects, including curriculum implementation, administrative tasks, and student support services. According to Mr Benjamin, neglecting these fundamental procedures can hinder the smooth operation of the school and impact learner performance. The issue of not holding departmental meetings is another significant concern. These meetings are essential for coordinating efforts, sharing best practices, and ensuring alignment with educational goals. Without regular departmental meetings, communication and collaboration among educators may suffer, potentially leading to a fragmented approach to teaching.

Mr Benjamin also highlighted the problem of favouritism, which can result in the unfair distribution of resources, potentially leading to conflict or demotivation among staff. When resources are not allocated based on merit or need, it can undermine the morale and commitment of educators and staff members, ultimately affecting learner performance. A critical issue raised by the principal is his lack of awareness regarding the activities in other departments within the school. This lack of cross-departmental communication and coordination can create inefficiencies and gaps in the educational process, potentially hindering learner progress.

However, Mr Drogba's response stood out when he said:

> *Make resources available because the gateway subjects have become a national crisis, especially in public and former model C schools. Fortunately, our government has tried to provide public schools with smart boards, data, and online resources. Unfortunately, the same community that needs to protect these resources steals them.*

Mrs Vero shared similar sentiments when she said:

> *Placing good teachers who know what they are doing. Providing those teachers with the necessary resources they need. Encouraging learners to practice, practice, and then assessing them and providing them with feedback repeatedly.*

The above two participants agreed that resources play an essential role and that the government has tried to make these available. They choose capable learners and encourage them to practice these subjects. While on the topic of capable learners, I asked participants how they select the kind of learners who study these critical subjects.

This is what Mr Malcom X said:

> *If I have good teachers who excel in their subjects in Grades 8 and 9 and the learner still struggles to pass them in Grades 10, then that learner is discouraged from studying those subjects. We check the history and pattern from Grades 8 and 9; the learner and parent are advised on which subjects to choose.*

In addition, Mr Zola said:

> *The school does not choose or choose between learners. We give that responsibility to the parents and learners. A meeting is held for all the learners in Grade 9 with their parents, where we explain the different streams, we have and they have to choose from. We also advise them to check the results on different subjects to determine the strengths and capabilities of the learner.*

Moreover, Mr Drogba had the following to say:

> *We specifically look at the learner performance from Grade 9. Learners are given a subject choice form, and they choose based on what their parents think is best for them (we call it the wish list). We then advise them to choose a subject based on their performance (we call this reality). We hold specific meetings for subject choices in Grade 9.*

This is what Mrs Vero had to say:

> *We let them choose their subjects in Grade 10 as their parents want. After term one, most would notice if the subject is for them, and then they change. It is policy, so there is nothing we can do. As teachers, we can only advise.*

Mrs. Vero's insights shed light on the complexities surrounding the selection of subjects and learner performance in academically challenged schools. The approach taken by schools can significantly impact the success rates of students in challenging subjects, and various strategies are employed in this regard. One significant point raised by Mrs Vero is the practice of letting learners choose their subjects. While this approach promotes learner autonomy, it can have unintended consequences, particularly in academically struggling schools. Learners may opt for challenging subjects, even if they excel in other areas, leading to a higher failure rate. This suggests a more tailored approach to subject selection may be needed to optimise academic outcomes.

In contrast, some schools take a more proactive approach by evaluating the pattern of learners' performance. If learners consistently underperform, they are redirected to other subjects more aligned with their capabilities. This approach acknowledges the importance of guiding learners toward subjects in which they are likely to succeed, reducing the risk of failure. Additionally, the Grade 9 performance was held as a critical juncture for some schools. At this stage, schools engage with parents to guide subject selection. They emphasise the learners' capabilities and offer advice on the most suitable subjects. This personalised approach ensures learners make informed choices aligned with their strengths and aspirations.

The deployment of teachers in Grade 12 was another critical factor discussed by the participants. Schools often dedicate all their energies to the support and performance of Grade 12. The participants regarded the strategic placement of teachers in this grade as an essential aspect of the schools' efforts to ensure that learners receive the necessary support and guidance to succeed in their final year of schooling. However, this practice may be problematic in many ways. For instance, an exclusive focus on Grade 12 may lead to neglecting learners' educational needs and development in lower grades. Given that education is a cumulative process, neglecting the foundational years can result in knowledge gaps, unpreparedness and stress when they reach higher grades.

Mrs Rose said:

> *We select educators who produce good results and those who are dedicated and do not mind attending on Saturdays and Sundays. When there is a teacher who is teaching Grade 12, and they are due for retirement, before they leave, we have an educator from Grade 11 so that they can start teaching Grade 12 while being mentored by the retiring teacher.*

Interesting to note from the above quote is that the principal observes those educators who are dedicated and who are determined to go beyond their call of duty. These are educators who are placed in Grade 12. In Mr Malcom X's school, this is what happens:

> *Once we agreed that the teacher would teach Grade 12, I checked their first term results, and if they were low as it was harsh, I would remove them. I checked the learners' results and the average …There was an educator who was new to the profession with no experience and wanted to teach Grade 12s. I took a risk and allowed him to do so, but initially, he had to work with an experienced educator. Even today, he has always gotten 100% passes in Life Sciences.*

Mr Malcolm X understood the importance of good learner performance, especially in Grade 12 NSC results. He harshly removes such an educator in Grade 12 if that is not achieved. In Mr Drogba's school, this is what happens:

> *We place them based on performance. We work on what we call a five-year strategy performance. When you are allocated, you need to show us the results. The teacher should be willing to teach in Grade 12, and we, as the SMT, see potential and results.*

What seemed to come out from the responses of the participants was that academically good-performing schools worked with experienced educators. However, it is essential to note that all the participants emphasised the importance of Grade 12 results. In this regard, the participants pointed out that, for this to happen, teachers should be willing to go the extra mile and show dedication and determination. Mr Malcolm X explained that he moved teachers who did not perform. However, the problem with Mr Malcolm X's strategy is that its response to the following question results in a painful reality for learners: Which learners deserve to be taught by an incompetent teacher?

Questions on absenteeism also contribute to academic learner performance. Mr Malcolm X had this to say:

> *It has been a challenge and has affected the school's results. I dealt with the issue of fetching the learners at home. I used a strategy to scare other learners from the same area because they knew your car would be parked outside your home if you were absent. When a child is said to be sick and in the hospital, I will send a teacher to follow up. We send a letter home if the learner is absent for certain days. I used the same strategy with the teachers; if they were absent, I would fetch them.*

In addition, Mrs Rose had this to say about the issue of absenteeism:

> *That is one issue that we deal with spot on. We call the parent when a learner is absent for more than two days. In cases where the learner gave us the wrong numbers, and we cannot reach the parent, we send letters. We look for a learner who lives nearby so that they can give the letter to the parent. If the learner was absent due to sickness, they must provide a doctor's note. I am in charge of overlooking absenteeism in Grade 12 learners, especially during SIP attendance. If they do not attend, I call the parent, and they must report why the learner was absent. This strategy works because we always have 90-something per cent for attendance.*

I usually tell parents during our meetings that when a learner is absent, I expect them to explain and report the reasons, which also works for me because the parents monitor them.

From the above quotes, participants considered absenteeism seriously as they followed up when a learner was absent from school. Strategies for doing this varied from fetching learners from their homes, making follow-ups through the teachers, writing letters to parents, calling parents, and monitoring and tracking habitually absent learners.

From academically poor-performing schools, Mr Drogba had this to say:

With learners, it depends. On certain days when it is raining, we become flexible because most learners come from informal settlements, and most walk to school. However, learners' attendance is 98% on a typical day because we take registers twice daily, in the morning and after the break, to avoid learners bunking classes. We also have period registers [for each subject period].

Mr Drogba's assertion that his school employs a strategy of taking attendance registers twice a day was linked to the observed improvement in the school's academic results at the time of the research. As corroborated by research findings, this approach appears to be effective in reducing absenteeism in the sampled schools. Ensuring learner punctuality and consistent attendance is a crucial responsibility for school principals. Such practices are vital to provide educators with a standardised framework for documenting, managing, and tracking learner attendance. These procedures are essential elements of learner attendance policies within schools. Notably, these policies are not merely guidelines but possess legal enforceability, established through regulations and adoption by the GDE, as noted by Coetzee (2012).

Furthermore, Mr Benjamin, from one of the low-performing sampled schools, said:

> *This is another issue that is a challenge. Signing the registration period is not practical; it is only on paper. In a typical school environment, learners report to their classes, and the subject teacher marks the register, while those not in class are considered absent. Absenteeism is very high at our school, especially in Grade 10[And we do not make any follow-ups]*.

Mr Benjamin's acknowledgement of his lack of oversight in monitoring and delegating responsibility for addressing absenteeism raises a significant concern regarding absenteeism rates within his schools. This issue can be linked to poor academic performance. Furthermore, it is essential to consider the constitutional framework in education. Section 29 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa unequivocally guarantees the right to education for all learners (Republic of South Africa, 1996a). However, as Coetzee (2012) highlighted, equal access to education does not automatically ensure the fulfilment of learners' right to education. A critical aspect of realising this right is the presence of learners and effective teaching. When students are absent from school, they are deprived of the educational opportunities afforded to them by the Constitution.

This absenteeism can result from various factors, including challenges such as disengagement, personal circumstances, or the failure of the educational system to address specific needs. Therefore, Mr. Benjamin's admission of a lack of effective monitoring and delegation in addressing absenteeism within his schools signifies a potential leadership shortcoming.

When asked about intervention strategies used to improve teaching and learning this is what Mrs Vero said:

> *We usually encourage them to attend morning and afternoon classes, but they do not, and this is something we must work on as a school.*

In this regard, Mr Drogba said:

> *This is a tough one because even though we try to go outside to seek assistance [it remains a challenge]. Our school twinned with [School X] Secondary. We noticed that they were doing better than us, especially in gateway subjects, so we swapped around teachers [who are good] in specific topics. During SIP sessions, educators from [School X] come to teach at [USB 3] Secondary School and educators from [USB 3] Secondary School go to [School X].*

From the above quotes, some participants shared different strategies. Participants often encouraged morning and afternoon extra classes, while others grouped learners according to their June results. However, it is essential to remember that grouping learners according to their performance can have both useful and problematic dimensions. For instance, grouping learners according to their performance can allow teachers to tailor instruction to the specific needs of their learners, with high-performing learners challenged with more advanced materials. In contrast, struggling learners receive targeted support and remediation. However, grouping learners according to their performance can lead to labelling, where learners in lower-performing groups may develop negative self-perceptions, leading to stigmatisation, reduced self-esteem, declining performance and eventual dropout. Thus, schools adopting this strategy must be aware of these dimensions and have mechanisms to ensure learners are not further disadvantaged by interventions.

Participants also reported exchanging teachers with a nearby school to teach topics they are good at. In this regard, a participant from a low-performing school, Mr Benjamin, said:

> *If we look at the two departments in our school, English and Mathematics, the English department works as a team, but we cannot say the same about the Mathematics Department. English Department can exchange educators for different topics in different grades without the other teacher feeling inferior. Maths department, there is always competition. [they do not work together as a team].*

To conclude this question, we do not have intervention strategies in other departments except for languages in our school.

Drawing from the above quote, in the above-sampled school, there are no intervention strategies in place to address shortfalls in subjects that do not do well, and this could be another reason why there is quite a gap in learner outcomes between this school and other schools which are academically performing well.

3.1.1.1. The characteristics of learners in the sampled schools

I understand that at the core of his research are good academic performance results and factors that lead to poor academic performance results. Principals' thoughts, from the academically good performing schools, on the kind of learners their schools had were tested. Mr Malcom X said:

I have a mixed bag of learners who good learners later influence. Some are highly motivated, and some have low self-esteem (not motivated about their schoolwork). Still, the highly motivated learners end up motivating the ones who are not motivated. That explains why I always get 90-something per cent every year.

Mr Malcom X confirmed that not all the learners in his school performed well and that he used motivated learners to influence others to want to do well. It could be argued that one of Mr Malcolm's leadership attributes is to use people to influence others to want to do well. Mr Zola shared the same sentiments and brought in an element of comparison between his school and others. This is what he said:

…Compared to other learners from other schools, our learners are much more disciplined and respectful…

In contrast to the above quotes, thoughts from the principals of the poor-performing schools differed. The principals of these schools claimed to be attracting ill-disciplined and unruly learners.

However, although this may be true, it may not be that they draw them; it may be that this is a symptom of the frustration caused by deficient teaching in these schools.

This was what Mr Benjamin said in this regard:

> *We attract troublesome, unruly learners. Most learners at our school did not start their Grade 8 with us. They are learners chased from other schools because they were not performing well.*

Mrs Vero seemed to agree with Mr Benjamin about the kind of learners their schools share and how that affects their school performance. She further added and said:

> *…the majority of learners we have are really difficult to work with, and at times, they discourage our educators.*

Another factor contributing to poor performance was the type of learners the school attracts. The culture of sampled poor-performing schools attracts a majority of unruly and ill-disciplined learners who make it difficult for educators to do their work. This has proven to have dire academic results.

Given that corporal punishment is illegal, I wanted to know how the sampled schools addressed discipline issues. Recently, a memorandum was sent to schools to remind principals and educators of Section 10 (1) of the South African Schools Act 84 (1996), which states that no person may administer corporal punishment to a learner, and any person who administers corporal punishment is guilty of an offence and liable to a sentence which could be imposed for assault (Republic of South Africa, 1996b). I noticed that most principals from good academic performing schools were reluctant to share their disciplinary strategies, which seemed questionable. However, one principal, Mr Malcolm X, said:

> *I will be honest with you: as much as I discouraged corporal punishment possible to the teachers because it is illegal according to the laws of the country if the child is wayward, I become very harsh [practice corporal punishment] …*

It was noted with great concern that the above-quoted participant takes matters of discipline very seriously to the extent that he breaks the law and compromises his job, given the access to technology that learners have these days. On the other hand, participants from poor-performing schools asserted that they use the learner code of conduct and disciplinary procedures.

This was how Mr Drogba put it:

> *We use the learner code of conduct, which has different scenarios or misconducts, one or two depending on the seriousness of the offence.*
> *The school can solve any offence that falls under misconduct through disciplinary measures. Any offence that falls under misconduct two is considered serious; therefore, we involve parents, and a decision is taken.*
> *We do not make use of corporal punishment. We are not here to destroy learners but to mould and build them to be better people.*

Mr Drogba admitted to following the learner code of conduct and applying the law depending on the seriousness of the offence to discipline learners. Still, he straightforwardly refused any use of corporal punishment in his school. Furthermore, Mr Benjamin mentioned nothing about applying the law or any disciplinary procedures at school. Instead, he shared his school's punishment methods. This was what he said:

> *We often punish them for misbehaving and late coming by making them clean the classrooms, windows, and toilets. When the situation is beyond our control, we call parents to be involved. Some learners use drugs, and in such cases, I usually involve the cops.*

The above quote reveals Mr Benjamin's struggles concerning learner discipline. He further shared that he made use of police officials to assist him with matters that were beyond his control. According to him, such occurrences disturbed the teaching and learning environment. Learners end up on things that do not matter and forget the main reasons why they came to a learning institution.

To further tackle issues of discipline, I referred to research which Lane conducted (2003) pointing to the relationship between high school students' extra-curricular activity participation and grade point average, attendance, and discipline in which they concluded that learners who did not participate in extra-curricular had a less Grade Point Average (GPA) score, number of days absent and disciplinary referrals by their teachers compared to those who did. Below are the views from principals of academically performing schools regarding extra-curricular activities:

Mr Zola said:

> *We have a principal's cup in Grade 8, soccer, netball, female soccer, rugby, and cricket, but it didn't get much support. We also have chess. They have helped by producing national award receivers for us. They also contribute by having them recognise their talents and skills.*

When discussing his school's vision, Mr Malcolm X mentioned that his dream was to make his school one of the best by competing with well-resourced schools. This included extra-curricular activities. This is what he said:

> *I am not talking about academics only; we competed with them even in sports, the cleanliness of the school, and extramural activities.*

Drawing from the above quotes, it could be confirmed that participants of the sampled good academically performing schools agreed that extra-curricular activities contributed to the improvement of learner discipline and encouraged learners to have other reasons to look forward to attending school than academics.

Participants from academically poorly performing schools shared the same sentiments, pointing to the challenge of resources. For example, this is what Mr Benjamin had to say:

> *…As an English educator, you know that "All work without play makes John a dull boy". These extra-mural activities motivate learners to want to come to school as there is something other than academics.*

The above quote reveals that the participant suggests that their involvement in extra-curricular activities has helped minimise issues of ill-discipline in his school.

He further added and said:

> *Our choir group came second in the recent district choir competition. At least something good is happening at our school.*

The above-quoted phrase laments that despite all other challenges, chief amongst them being poor performance in his school, there is hope as far as discipline is concerned, and this has the potential to lead the school into a better position. Furthermore, Mr Drogba shared the same voice as Mr Benjamin and added that involvement in extra-curricular activities changes learners' perceptions and attitudes. This is how he put it:

> *And contribute to positive learner outcomes and attitudes towards life in general.*

From the above, it could be concluded that when it came to extra-curricular activities, participants of the sampled schools, both good and poor academically performing, agreed that being involved in extra-curricular activities contributes positively to learner motivation, academic performance, and a general change of behaviour and attitudes of learners towards school. Others also mentioned that involvement in extra-curricular activities assists them further in minimising disciplinary problems.

4.4. Summary of the key themes in the study

The themes identified include the principals' understanding of leadership; this was done to determine their general ideas about leadership and what it means to them. The second theme was Principals' instructional leadership practices of well versus underperforming schools, which was undertaken to examine the connection between principals' practices that lead to either good or poor learner performance in their respective schools. The third theme identified was "The leadership practices that contribute positively to learner performance", which was undertaken to assess those practices that other schools can learn from that contribute towards positive learner achievement. The second last theme was "The leadership strategies put in place to improve teaching and learning". This was undertaken to share principals' methods and strategies to ensure effective teaching and learning in their schools. The last theme was the characteristics of learners in sampled schools.

I sought to understand how instructional leaders mould and encourage their learners to understand the culture and vision of their respective schools, thereby allowing for a smooth teaching and learning process.

4.5. Concluding thoughts on the themes

The findings reveal various strategies sampled schools employ to enhance teaching and learning. The evidence underscores the importance of monitoring and supervision, particularly the meticulous checking of registers for both teachers and learners. These practices are seen as pivotal factors contributing to improved learner outcomes and the academic success of some schools. Another crucial aspect that emerged is the equitable distribution of school resources, attributed to effective school leadership. Additionally, the placement of educators in critical subjects was deemed imperative. Successful schools combine experience and performance assessment to determine the most suitable teacher placements.

This research study highlights the importance of school leaders who have a comprehensive understanding of their schools, emphasising the need for them to be well-informed about the activities within their schools. Intervention strategies, especially in academically challenging subjects, are seen as significant and warrant continuous monitoring to ensure they effectively support learner performance. Some schools even share human resources to optimise the abilities of their teachers.

Discipline emerged as a notable theme, with different disciplinary methods discussed. The common practice in most schools, particularly successful ones, involves implementing a learner code of conduct. However, poorly performing schools often struggle with disciplinary procedures due to inadequate follow-ups and limited support from SGBs. This deficiency can negatively impact learner outcomes and sometimes lead to legal involvement to address unruly behaviour.

The findings of this study support the research by Lane (2003), who suggests a connection between students' participation in extra-curricular activities and their grade point average, attendance, and discipline. Principals from well-performing and poorly-performing schools concurred that engaging in extra-curricular activities helped mitigate discipline issues. This engagement often took the form of various sporting activities in high-achieving schools. In contrast, even poorly performing schools noted improved learner behaviour and attitudes towards schoolwork due to extra-curricular involvement.

4.6. Chapter summary

This chapter introduced the reader to the data and discussion thereof. It began by providing a profile table on the participants. Moreover, the chapter engaged the reader on four themes that emerged as data was being analysed. It ended by sharing the concluding thoughts on the themes that emerged. The next chapter presents the summary of the study, its implications and conclusions.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY OF THE STUDY, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

5.1. Introduction

Chapter Four presented the study's findings derived from data generated through semi-structured interviews. This chapter aims to conclude the instructional leadership roles of principals in poorly performing and well-performing schools regarding academic achievement. Given the comparative nature of this study, it examined the differences in instructional leadership practices among principals in township secondary schools that serve students in the same community but vary in their academic performance.

Additionally, the study sought to understand principal instructional leadership practices in underperforming and well-performing township secondary schools. Finally, it aimed to draw lessons from instructional leadership practices in academically challenged and successful schools. This study assumes that school principals play a central role in shaping student academic performance. This chapter commences by providing conclusions on the three objectives of the study. This is followed by a discussion on the implications of this research for further studies, and it concludes by providing a comprehensive summary of the study.

5.2. Conclusion on the objectives of the study

The objectives of the study were to ascertain principals' instructional leadership practices in underperforming and well-performing township secondary schools. The research has provided evidence by tapping into principals' thoughts about leadership and their perspectives on leadership. This research sought to understand the differences, if any, between principals' instructional leadership practices in well-performing and underperforming township secondary schools serving learners in the same community. This was done by quoting principals' views from performing and underperforming schools.

5.2.1. Principals' instructional leadership practices that lead to or could lead to (for underperforming schools) the desired academic learner performance

5.2.1.1. Sound culture of teaching and learning

A school characterised by a robust culture of teaching and learning exhibits specific key attributes, including a positive climate, effective instructional leadership, a shared sense of purpose, strong home-school relations, resource availability, high professional standards among teachers, discipline and order (both among staff and learners), harmonious relationships among all stakeholders, and well-maintained buildings and facilities (Liu et al., 2020). The study proves that most of the sampled academically successful schools appeared to possess these characteristics above and even more.

For instance, during the interviews with principals, it became evident that many emphasised the significance of implementing strategies and ensuring their diligent execution through rigorous supervision and monitoring. Some principals generously allowed me to review the tools they had developed for this purpose, such as pass-out and learner-outside cards. However, surprisingly, two principals from academically poor performing schools openly acknowledged that their lack of monitoring and supervision, coupled with an excessive degree of trust in their subordinates, may make their schools fall short of achieving their desired outcomes.

5.2.1.2. Monitoring of attendance registers

In addition to extracting valuable insights from academically successful schools, the study uncovered commendable practices from academically underperforming schools. Notably, one noteworthy practice pertains to how they manage attendance records. In one particular school, registers are meticulously maintained throughout the school day, with multiple checks conducted in the morning to record the presence of students, latecomers, and subsequently for each class period, and another check conducted after lunch. While this may appear to be a demanding and intricate procedure, it effectively ensures that students are consistently present in their classrooms during active teaching and learning sessions. This practice highlights the essential principle that it should not merely be about students showing up for school or teachers arriving for work.

Instead, it underscores the significance of closely monitoring the movement of individuals within the school to guarantee that the teaching and learning processes occur as expected, thus promoting a conducive educational environment.

5.2.1.3. Encouraging teamwork

Another vital lesson from the study is fostering teamwork among educational leaders. This became evident when one principal, a Mathematics teacher, disclosed that he had not received any invitations to participate in a departmental meeting for an extended period. This revelation raised questions about how information is disseminated within that particular department in the school. Furthermore, it raised concerns about the Department Head's awareness of the developments within their subject area, particularly considering that Mathematics has a high rate of underperformance.

In response, it is suggested that school principals could implement measures to promote greater collaboration and communication among Department Heads. For instance, they could request all Department Heads to submit their departmental plans and insist on receiving minutes of the meetings following the dates indicated in the plans. This proactive approach can help ensure that departmental leaders are actively engaged, well-informed, and committed to improving the performance of their respective subjects.

5.2.1.4. Equal distribution of resources

Equally vital in the context of instructional school leadership is the fair and equitable distribution of resources. However, as the study findings indicate, many principals have limited influence or control over the allocation of resources, and those who manage this effectively enjoy more collaborative and productive relationships with their SGBs.

The study shed light on a common challenge many principals face - a lack of autonomy over resource allocation, which can be frustrating. Principals must address this issue by empowering their SGB members. One successful principal took proactive steps in this direction by encouraging SGB members to undertake short courses. This initiative is especially significant since SGB members often include parents, some of whom may not have received formal education. This lack of formal education can hinder effective financial management and overall school administration.

Drawing from the shared frustrations of principals across both academically successful and underperforming schools, it is recommended that the GDE consider implementing mandatory training programmes for SGB members. These programmes would capacitate SGB members, equipping them with the knowledge and skills necessary to effectively fulfil their duties and responsibilities, ultimately contributing to more efficient school management and resource allocation.

5.2.1.5. Awareness of their surroundings

The study also provided further evidence highlighting the significance of principals being actively aware of the ongoings in their schools, which is considered a noteworthy best practice. One principal, in particular, shared their approach, emphasising the importance of having a daily routine. They disclosed that they consistently arrive at the school premises before anyone else, commencing their routine with a daily conversation with the night guard. This routine extends to interactions with the feeding scheme staff and general workers and a thorough check of each classroom.

The principal argued that consistent visibility throughout the school instils confidence in educators and learners. This confidence stems from the shared understanding that they are all part of a unified mission: to bring out the best in each other. Additionally, the principal contended that by maintaining a managerial presence and being keenly aware of the school environment, they could promptly identify and address any irregularities or unwanted occurrences. In essence, their proactive approach ensures that nothing goes unnoticed or unaddressed, contributing to the smooth and effective operation of the school.

5.2.1.6. Careful selection of educators for critical subjects

Furthermore, the study revealed that, given the primary objective of most schools to achieve strong academic results, careful consideration is given to how teachers are assigned to specific subjects, particularly in Grade 12. Carl (2012) emphasises the importance of well-prepared teachers as curriculum developers and implementers, given the complexity of the educational system they are expected to execute.

Consequently, many principals underscored the significance of assessing educators' performance in other grades before assigning them to Grade 12. If an educator fails to meet performance expectations, one principal shared that they are prepared to make the unpopular decision of removing such an educator from Grade 12.

In some schools, a balanced approach is adopted, mixing novice educators with experienced ones, as placing novice teachers exclusively in Grade 12 had previously resulted in unfavourable outcomes for the school's NSC performance. A similar approach is applied to learners, particularly in challenging or critical subjects that can significantly influence the results of the NSC Grade 12 examinations.

During Grade 9, most school principals advise parents to select subjects that align with their child's academic performance. Intervention strategies are implemented if a student fails to perform well in the first term of Grade 10. If the learner's performance still does not improve, they are counselled to consider changing their course of study. This approach aims to optimise students' academic outcomes and ensure they are well-prepared for the challenges of Grade 12.

5.2.1.7. Monitoring learner attendance

Furthermore, the findings from the study underscore the significance of learner attendance in pursuing academic excellence. Principals emphasised that poor learner attendance can directly lead to subpar academic results. In response to this concern, some principals have implemented proactive measures to address the issue of non-attendance. They engage in ongoing communication with parents, utilising telephone calls and written letters to convey the importance of regular attendance.

One principal even goes the extra mile, personally visiting the homes of consistently absent learners. This hands-on approach conveys that absenteeism without a valid reason is taken seriously. The principal's commitment is that he occasionally visits two or three households, reinforcing his willingness to go to great lengths to ensure learner attendance. When all else fails, he diligently follows the necessary procedures to address the issue, including the possibility of removing the non-attending learner from the school.

For this principal, non-attendance is considered a serious offence that can potentially hinder the realisation of their vision for achieving excellent academic results.

Drawing from the insights of Shaked (2020), who underscores the pivotal role of principals in monitoring learner progress within classrooms and across different grades, it is recommended that other principals should consider implementing rigorous measures to monitor learner attendance in their respective schools. Collaborating closely with parents to achieve this goal can be a valuable strategy to ensure that learners are present and engaged in their education, ultimately contributing to improved academic outcomes.

5.2.1.8. Involvement in different sporting codes

The final lesson from the study underscores the consensus among school principals regarding the positive impact of involvement in various sporting codes and extracurricular activities on academic learner performance and, notably, learner discipline. As previously mentioned, prior research has indicated that students engaged in sports tend to perform better academically than those who do not participate in sporting activities.

For schools facing challenges with learner discipline, it was observed that engagement in extramural activities provides students with a sense of purpose, particularly for those who may be struggling academically. Principals emphasised that participating in such activities, both directly as participants and indirectly as supporters, serves to instil a sense of commitment and belonging among learners. This sense of purpose and connection, in turn, leads to a reduction in disciplinary problems. As one principal illustrated, even in academically underperforming schools, notable achievements exist, such as a school choir achieving second place in a district choir competition.

Regardless of the academic context, these successes contribute positively to the school's overall environment and potentially yield improved academic outcomes. Lastly, this research also attempted to draw lessons from principals' instructional leadership practices of well-performing and underperforming secondary schools in one township of Ekurhuleni, and this is extensively discussed below:

5.2.2. Summary and critical lessons drawn from the finding

5.2.2.1. Principals' understanding of leadership

Hallinger et al. (2020), highlight the extensive empirical research conducted over the past 35 years in educational leadership. Educational leadership encompasses various approaches, with instructional leadership being a central and impactful aspect directly influencing school performance. As educational reforms continue to shape schools' landscape, instructional leadership garners increased attention and scrutiny. Schools serve as organised, formalised settings for learning and teaching. Principals play a critical role in fostering an environment conducive to effective teaching and learning. During the interviews with principals, it became evident that many emphasised the profound connection between leadership and the school environment. They stressed the importance of creating an environment built on trust, where educators can confidently fulfil their roles as instructors and seek assistance when needed. Trust, as demonstrated by Steyn and Niekerk (2013), is a foundational element that fosters a sense of significance and value among followers.

Additionally, the significance of personal development for effective leadership emerged. Principals acknowledged the importance of continuous self-improvement through education and professional growth. This self-empowerment creates an environment in which they can more effectively influence others, aligning with the description of instructional leadership provided by Bush et al. (2010).

The idea of influential leadership was consistently reflected in the interviews, with many principals seeking to create an environment where they can influence leaders who, in turn, influence others. Some principals noted the fortune of leading a group of educators who are leaders themselves, which simplified their leadership role. A thought-provoking question arises about whether these principals are true instructional leaders or if they are benefiting from an environment that facilitates their work. One principal's approach to moulding Grade 8 learners, referring to them as "potatoes" and emphasising the transformative potential within, illustrates the power of shaping a school's culture, particularly one focused on learning. The backgrounds and upbringings of principals also play a significant role in their leadership styles. These life experiences have shaped their leadership philosophies.

For instance, a principal who grew up in a challenging environment learned valuable survival skills and credits a church leader for mentoring him into the leader he is today. A common thread among high-performing schools is the years of dedication and hard work that contributed to their success. One principal mentioned that it took approximately 27 years of unwavering effort to elevate the school to its status as one of the country's top township schools. This dedication is further recognised by the DBE, which appointed this principal as a mentor to other secondary school leaders in his area.

In conclusion, Steyn and Niekerk (2013), point out the deficiency of adequate leadership in underperforming schools. The evidence shows that effective instructional leadership and a conducive work environment differentiate between well-performing and underperforming schools. This underscores the critical role of instructional leadership for principals aiming to enhance academic performance in their schools. However, it is essential to recognise that achieving this goal requires patience and a strategic approach, as it often takes years to reach greater heights in education.

5.2.2.2. Vision communication

As exemplified by Bush (2011), instructional leadership scholars emphasise that effective leadership plays a pivotal role in developing a vision, setting future directions, motivating positive engagement in strategic planning, and cultivating a culture that challenges the status quo constructively. Within this framework, inspirational vision encompasses creating an environment where followers can excel through training, development, and empowerment, as Steyn and Niekerk (2013), noted. One significant lesson that emerged from the sampled schools is that most of them had well-crafted visions that revolved around the core mission of education, namely, teaching and learning.

However, what set academically high-performing schools apart from their underperforming counterparts was the principal's ability to communicate and instil this vision within the staff effectively. This often entailed a shift from personal pronouns like "*My vision*" to more inclusive language such as "*Our vision*". This shift signifies that all school efforts, actions, and contributions are aligned toward realising the shared vision. In communicating their visions, school principals should involve all stakeholders, ensuring that every organisation member clearly understands the collective direction.

This alignment of efforts and resources fosters a sense of unity and cohesion, making the organisation function as a well-coordinated entity.

A crucial observation is that successful academically performing schools excel in communicating their visions to their staff, and they tailor these visions to the specific circumstances of their schools. These visions are ambitious yet grounded in reality. For instance, one principal expressed a vision for their school to compete with model C schools in all aspects despite being located in a township. This demonstrates the power of aiming high and rallying the support of staff and students, ultimately transforming the school into one of the top academic performers in the township.

In contrast, one poor academic-performing school seemed to lack a clear and compelling vision. The participant mentioned that their school's vision was "*in alignment with that of the GDE*", suggesting that it may be a document displayed for all but lacks meaning and resonance among the staff and students. This situation implies a lack of direction and shared purpose within the school. Effective leadership is further associated with persuading followers through effective communication of the vision, instilling a sense of commitment to achieving it (Ikram et al., 2021).

To summarise, as advocated by renowned leadership theorist Warren Bennis (as cited in Crainer & Dearlove, 2008), leadership revolves around a leader's capacity to create a compelling vision, translate it into actionable steps, and sustain it. However, this can only be achieved when school principals are realistic and truthful. Van Niekerk (2003) asserts that a realistic perspective can be obtained by analysing environmental opportunities and threats, coupled with self-evaluation or external evaluation of the school's performance. It is recommended that school principals undertake such evaluations to enhance their schools' academic performance.

5.3. Implications of the study for further research

The National Development Plan's (NDP) 2030 vision for education and training strongly emphasises providing high-quality education for all children. In recent years, there has been mounting pressure on school leaders from both the political sphere and the expectations of individual learners.

As a result, the role of principals has become significantly more complex, demanding, and less transparent over the past decade, as noted by Vela (2005, p. 2). This evolving landscape has led to a fundamental transformation, such as schools and the concept of learning, compelling principals to redirect their efforts towards achieving strong academic performance.

The central argument developed in this study revolves around identifying specific elements or characteristics of instructional leadership practices in academically successful township secondary schools and recognising that poor-performing schools often lack or have limited instructional leadership practices conducive to achieving positive academic outcomes. It is asserted that a deficit in these practices hinders the realisation of the NDP's 2030 education plan.

This dynamic shift has prompted a surge in empirical studies emphasising the importance of developing principals to meet the growing demand for favourable learner outcomes. Schools that perform below the expected standards each year face many challenges, including preparing reports, accounting for their performance, implementing intervention strategies, enduring numerous visits from education officials, and more. Consequently, no school principal wishes to be counted among the underperformers. Fullan's study (2020) underscores the need for more dynamic and interactive forms of educational leadership to address issues related to poor school performance in the 21st century.

This prevailing context underscores the necessity for further research studies to delve into the role of the DBE in equipping and capacitating school principals to lead high-performing schools effectively. Such research is crucial in ensuring that principals are well-prepared to navigate the challenges of educational leadership in the modern educational landscape.

5.4. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study delved into the realm of instructional leadership practices of secondary school principals, with a focus on both academically underperforming and well-performing schools. Examining these practices is paramount, as it sheds light on the pivotal role that principals play in shaping the educational landscape of their respective institutions.

Furthermore, the research took a comparative approach, juxtaposing the instructional leadership practices of principals in academically sound and struggling schools within the same Ekurhuleni community. This comparative analysis identified critical distinctions and lessons that could be harnessed to enhance student performance in all schools. Lastly, the study delved into lessons that could be learnt from the instructional leadership practices underpinning positive learner outcomes in well-performing and poorly-performing schools. As Steyn and Niekerk (2013) aptly suggest, South African education is at a juncture where influential instructional leaders who possess a clear vision for their schools and the ability to steer them towards their educational goals are needed. In this regard, the findings of this study underscore the indispensable role of instructional leadership in shaping the academic destiny of schools. Drawing insights from successful and struggling schools has enriched our understanding of the practices that can drive positive learner outcomes.

The implication is clear: cultivating influential instructional leaders is a prerequisite for advancing the South African educational landscape. With dedicated, visionary leadership, South African schools can chart a course towards academic excellence and a brighter future for their learners.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Research Proposal Review Outcome

UNIVERSITY OF THE JOHANNESBURG | FACULTY OF HUMANITIES

10 May 2022

Dr. Pinkie Mthembu
Wits University
Wits School of Education
Parktown
2193

Dear Dr. Mthembu

Student Name: Lebogang Mosimango
Student Number: 2434238

I am enclosing Lebogang's reader's reports for his MEd proposal. The Graduate Studies Committee of the Faculty of Humanities, acting on behalf of the Senate recommended that the research proposal pass subject to minor revisions to the satisfaction of the supervisor. The EGSC further commented the following:

> ***It is recommended that the supervisor guides the student in making the minor revisions necessary to strengthen the MEd proposal. When this is accomplished to the satisfaction of the supervisor, the MEd proposal can pass.***

Revisions must be addressed to your satisfaction.

Kindly liaise with the student regarding the content of the reader's report.

Kind regards

Faith Herbert

Faith Herbert
Senior Faculty Officer
Faculty of Humanities Education

Appendix B: GDE Permission Letter

GAUTENG PROVINCE
Department: Education
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

8/4/4/1/2

GDE RESEARCH APPROVAL LETTER

Date:	06 July 2022
Validity of Research Approval:	08 February 2022– 30 September 2022 2022/ 279
Name of Researcher:	Mosimango L
Address of Researcher:	7319 Daisy Street Mayfield Ext 8 Daveyton
Telephone Number:	*0739164570*
Email address:	*lebomosimango@gmail.com*
Research Topic:	The Principals' Instructional Leadership Practices In well-performing and underperforming secondary schools in one township in Ekurhuleni. A Comparative study.
Type of qualification	Master of Educational Degree
Number and type of schools:	6 Sendary Schools
District/s/HO	Ekurhuleni North, Gauteng East

Re: Approval in Respect of Request to Conduct Research

This letter serves to indicate that approval is hereby granted to the above-mentioned researcher to proceed with research in respect of the study indicated above. The onus rests with the researcher to negotiate appropriate and relevant time schedules with the school/s and/or offices involved to conduct the research. A separate copy of this letter must be presented to both the School (both Principal and SGB) and the District/Head Office Senior Manager confirming that permission has been granted for the research to be conducted.

06/07/2022

The following conditions apply to GDE research. The researcher may proceed with the above study subject to the conditions listed below are met. Approval may be withdrawn should any of the conditions listed below be flouted:

Office of the Director: Education Research and Knowledge Management
7th Floor, 17 Simmonds Street, Johannesburg, 2001
Tel: (0[illegible]) 355 0488
Email: Faith.Tshabalala@gauteng.gov.za
Website: www.education.gpg.gov.za

Appendix C: Ethical Clearance Certificate

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND JOHANNESBURG | WSoE Wits School of Education

SCHOOL OF EDUCATION ETHICS COMMITTEE

CONSTITUTED UNDER THE UNIVERSITY HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (NONMEDICAL)

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE	**PROTOCOL NUMBER:** 2022ECE032M
PROJECT TITLE	The Principals' Instructional Leadership Practices in well-performing and underperforming secondary schools in one township in Ekurhuleni: A Comparative Study
INVESTIGATOR	Mosimango Lebogang
SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT OF INVESTIGATOR	**WSOE**
DATE CONSIDERED	22 July 2022
DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE	Approved unconditionally
RISK LEVEL	No Risk
EXPIRY DATE	Date of submission of the Research Report
ISSUE DATE OF CERTIFICATE	**CHAIRPERSON** Dr Batseba Mofolo- Mbokane

cc: Dr P. Mthembu

DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR

To be completed in duplicate and **ONE COPY** returned to the Chairperson of the School/Department ethics committee.

I fully understand the conditions under which I am are authorized to carry out the abovementioned research and I guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure to be contemplated from the research procedure as approved I/we undertake to resubmit the protocol to the Committee.

Signature **31/ 07 / 2022** **Date**

Appendix D: Information Participation Sheet



Participant Information Sheet

Dear Sir / Madam

My name is Lebogang Mosimango. I am a Masters student in Education at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. My supervisor is Dr P.Mthembu I am conducting a research study about Instructional Leadership in Secondary Schools. The study title is "The Principals' Instructional Leadership Practices in well-performing and under-performing secondary schools in one township in Ekurhuleni. A Comparative study."

I am inviting you to take part in an interview. If you decide to take part, your participation in this research study will last about 30 to 40 minutes. The interview will take place at your school after school hours.

With your permission, I would like to record the interview. This data will be stored in a strong password protected cloud for three years and be deleted after five. Only the researcher (Lebogang Mosimango) and the relevant Wits school of education officials will have access to the data.

The interview will be confidential and anonymous. When I share the results of the research study, I will not include your name or anything else that could identify you. With your permission, other researchers may use the data collected from this research study, but your name and any personal information will not be used or passed on. Data collected will be used to compare instructional leadership practices in secondary schools.

If you decide to take part in the research study, it should be because you want to volunteer. You do not have to take part. You can stop being in the study at any time. You do not have to answer any questions if you do not want to. You will not get any direct benefits if you choose to join the research study. You will not lose any services, benefits or rights you would normally have if you decide not to join. Taking part in the research study will not cost you anything. You will not be paid for being in this research study.

The risks for this research study are no more than what happens in everyday life.
This research study will be written up as a research report. If you would like to receive a summary of this report, I will be happy to send it to you.

If you have any questions during or afterwards about this research study, feel free to contact me or my supervisor on the details listed below. If you have any concerns or complaints about the ethical procedures of this research study, you are welcome to contact the University Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical), telephone +27(0) 11 717 1408, email hrecnon-medical@wits.ac.za.

Yours sincerely,
Lebogang Mosimango

Researcher:
Lebogang Mosimango, 2434238@students.wits.ac.za

Supervisor:
Dr Pinkie Mthembu, pinkie.mthembu@wits.ac.za

Appendix E: Participants' Consent Form



Consent Form

Tittle of the research:

The Principals' Instructional Leadership Practices in well-performing and underperforming secondary schools in one township in Ekurhuleni. A Comparative study.

Name of the researcher:

Lebogang Mosimango

I, _____ (Name of the participant) agree to participate in the following project.

I agree to the following: (Please circle the relevant options below)

The research study was explained to me. I understand what this study is about.	YES	NO
I understand that I can volunteer to take part in the study	YES	NO
I agree that the interview may be audio recorded.	YES	NO
I agree that direct quotations from my interview may be used may be used by the researcher in their research report.	YES	NO
I agree that my participation will remain anonymous (my name will not be used by the researcher in their research report.	YES	NO
I agree that other researchers may use the information I provide in my interview (depending on their ethics clearance being obtained) but my name and any personal information may not be used or passed on.	YES	NO

_____(Signature)

_____(Name of the Participant)

_____(Date)

_____(Signature)

_____(Name of the researcher seeking consent)

_____(Date)

Appendix F: SGB Participation Sheet

Participant Information Sheet

(SGB)

Dear Sir / Madam

My name is Lebogang Mosimango. I am a Masters student in Education at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. My supervisor is Dr P.Mthembu I am conducting a research study about Instructional Leadership in Secondary Schools. The study title is "The Principals' Instructional Leadership Practices in well-performing and under-performing Secondary Schools in one Township in Ekurhuleni. A Comparative Study."

In order for me to obtain relevant information to my studies, I will need to use certain important school documents. I am inviting you to indirectly take part in my research by permitting me to use the School Governing Body (SGB) minutes of meetings for reviews. If you decide to take part, your participation in this research study will be silent. The review process will take place at your school after school hours. Data generated from the documents reviews will be stored in a strong password protected cloud for three years and be deleted after five. Only the researcher (Lebogang Mosimango) and the relevant Wits school of education official/s will have access to the data.

The document review process will be confidential and anonymous. When I share the results of the research study, I will not include your name or anything else that could identify you. With your permission, other researchers may use the data collected from this research study, but your name and any personal information will not be used or passed on. Data generated will be used to compare instructional leadership practices in secondary schools. If you decide to take part (by granting permission) in the research study, it should be because you want to volunteer. You do not have to take part. You can stop the documents being reviewed at any time in the study. You will not get any direct benefits if you choose to join the research study. You will not lose any services, benefits or rights you would normally have if you decide not to grant permission. Taking part in the research study will not cost you anything. You will not be paid for being in this research study. The risks for this research study are no more than what happens in everyday life. This research study will be written up as a research report. If you would like to receive a summary of this report, I will be happy to send it to you. If you have any questions during or afterwards about this research study, feel free to contact me or my supervisor on the details listed below. If you have any concerns or complaints about the ethical procedures of this research study, you are welcome to contact the University Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical), telephone +27(0) 11 717 1408, email hrecnon-medical@wits.ac.za.

Yours sincerely, Lebogang Mosimango

Researcher: Lebogang Mosimango, 2434238@students.wits.ac.za

Supervisor: Dr Pinkie Mthembu, pinkie.mthembu@wits.ac.z

Appendix G: SGB Consent Form



Consent Form

(SGB)

Title of the research:

The Principals' Instructional Leadership Practices in Well-performing and Underperforming Secondary Schools in one Township in Ekurhuleni. A Comparative Study.

Name of the researcher:

Lebogang Mosimango

I, _____ (Name of the participant) agree to participate in the following project. I agree to the following:

(Please circle the relevant options below):

The research study was explained to me.	**Yes**	**No**
I understand what this study is about.	**Yes**	**No**
I understand that I can volunteer to take part in the study.	**Yes**	**No**
I agree that the documents requested may be reviewed.	**Yes**	**No**

I agree that copies of the original documents may be used by the researcher in their research report.

Yes **No**

I agree that my participation will remain anonymous (my name will not be used by the researcher in their research report.

I agree that other researchers may use the information obtained from the documents (depending on their ethics clearance being obtained) but my name and any personal information may not be used or passed on.

_____(Signature)

_____(Name of the Participant)

_____(Date)

_____(Signature)

_____(Name of the researcher seeking consent)

_____(Date

Appendix H: Interview Questions [Face to face]

1. I want to get to know you a little. Can you tell me about yourself?
2. For how long have you been the principal at this school?
3. May you share a brief history of this school?
4. How many learners, teachers and non-teaching staff do you have at this school?
5. What is your school's vision?
6. What are some of your achievements since you became the principal at this school?
7. Kindly describe some of the most challenging times you have faced since you became the principal at this school.
8. Briefly describe your working relationship with the SMT, teachers, learners, SGB and parents in general.
9. How often do you hold parental meetings? Why?
10. What are some of the day-to-day activities at this school?
11. Do you regard school leadership as key to improving learner performance? Please elaborate.
12. Do you think leaders are born or made?
13. What kind of a leader do you perceive yourself to be?
14. How would you describe the relationship between leadership and learner performance/ achievement in Grade 12 outcomes?
15. What leadership practices do you believe contribute positively to grade 12 learner performance?
16. What leadership practices do you believe contribute negatively to grade 12 learner performance?
17. What strategies does the school put in place to improve teaching and learning in the classroom?
18. How would you describe the kind of learners your school has?
19. On average (%), how often are learners absent in different grades, and how does the school deal with absenteeism?
20. What is the key to improving learner performance, especially in gateway subjects?
21. Kindly share the subject packages that your school offers.
22. How do you select learners who study subjects known to be challenging, such as Mathematics, Accounting, and Physical Sciences?
23. How do you strategically place/select Grade 12 educators?
24. What is the link between Grade 12 and Grade 8 results?
25. Given that corporal punishment is illegal, how do you address learner indiscipline challenges in your school?
26. How would you describe the relationship between teachers and learners at your school?
27. What kind of support do you receive from parents and the SGB?
28. Kindly share some intervention strategies for different subjects and in various grades for learners who do not perform well.
29. Which extra and co-curricular activities does the school engage in?
30. In your own opinion. What do you think makes your school stand out from others?
31. Why do schools serving learners from the same community not perform more or less the same in terms of Grade 12 learner results?

32. If there was something you could change about your school, what would it be? If none, why?
33. What should be done to improve Grade 12 outcomes in your school?
34. Where do you see this school five years from today?
35. What kind of teachers and school management team do you wish to work with?
36. What kind of learners do you wish to have at your school?
37. Who are the key role players in learner achievement in the school? Why?
38. Kindly share the relationship the school has with the community with me.
39. What support do principals get from the district office and provincial department [GDE] to improve learner achievement?
40. What do you think should be done to improve our country's education standard?

Appendix I: Language Editor Certificate

Ntwintwi

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Date: 31 October 2023

CERTIFICATE OF LANGUAGE EDITING

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

This is to certify that the thesis bearing the provisional title ***The Principals' Instructional Leadership Practices in Well-performing and Under-performing Secondary Schools in One Township in Ekurhuleni: A Case Study***, to be submitted by **Lebogang Mosimango** has been edited for language correctness and spelling, consistency, coherence, and completeness of the list of references and cited authors, by Ntwintwi Proofreading and Editing Solutions. Neither the research content and substance nor the author's intentions were altered during the editing process.

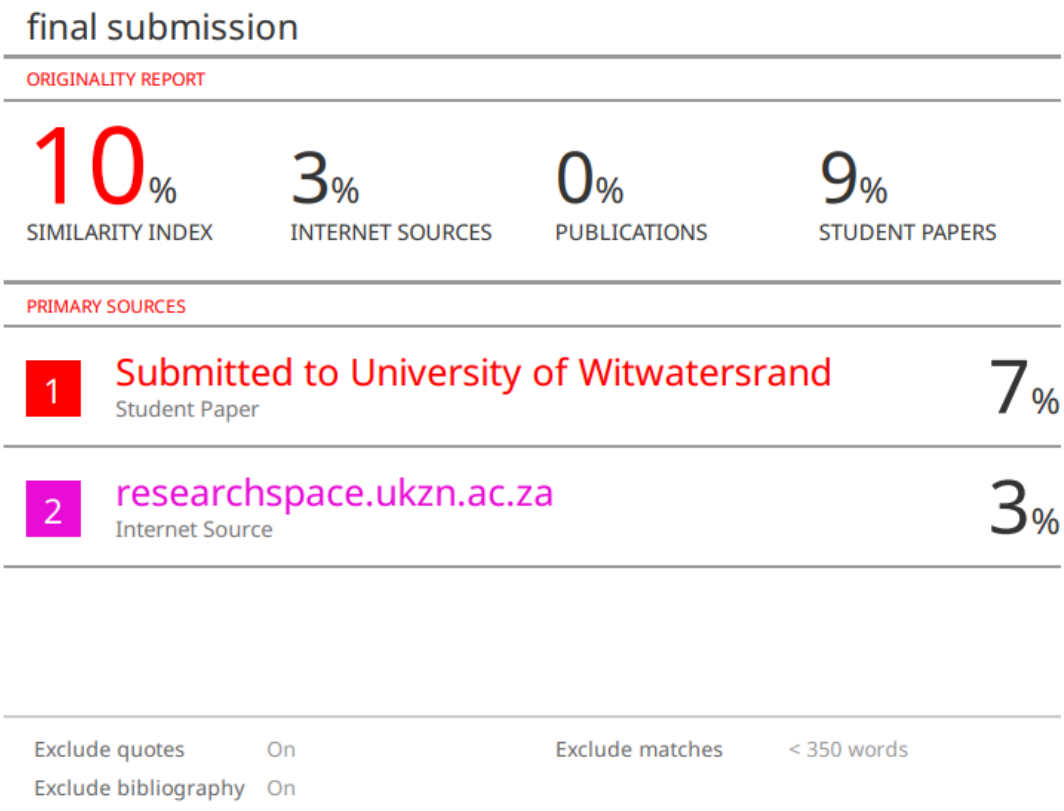
Ntwintwi guarantees the quality of the English language in this thesis, provided our editor's changes are accepted, and our editor checks further changes made to the thesis.

Yours sincerely,



JABULANI NGCOBO
NTWINTWI PROOFREADING AND EDITING SOLUTIONS

Appendix J: Plagiarism Report



final submission

ORIGINALITY REPORT

10%	3%	0%	9%
SIMILARITY INDEX	INTERNET SOURCES	PUBLICATIONS	STUDENT PAPERS

PRIMARY SOURCES

1	Submitted to University of Witwatersrand Student Paper	7%
2	researchspace.ukzn.ac.za Internet Source	3%

Exclude quotes	On	Exclude matches	< 350 words
Exclude bibliography	On		

Appendix K: Transcriptions and Recordings

Sent directly to the supervisor