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SUCCESSFUL INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP PRACTICES IN CHALLENGING CIRCUMSTANCES: A CASE STUDY OF ONE QWAQWA TOWNSHIP SECONDARY SCHOOL

By

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SUPERVISOR

PROFESSOR FELIX MARINGE

15 FEBRUARY 2016

DECLARATION BY CANDIDATE

I hereby declare that this research report is my own work and effort and that it has not been submitted anywhere else for any award. Where other sources of information have been used, they have been deservedly acknowledged.

Signature:……..

Date:……

DEDICATION

to

My two late parents, Mohatla and Paulinah Mofokeng

May their souls rest in peace. I know they would have been greatly proud of my progress in life,

and

My youngest niece, Kearabetswe Mofokeng, for teaching me how to live life fully

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It would not have been possible to write this master's work without the help and support of the kind people around me, to only some of whom it is possible to give a particular mention here.

First, I would like to thank my dear family, Kane, ausi Mphuma, 'Twin Sis' Sebolelo, Malesedi, Nhlanhla, Kearabetswe and Phiwe for giving me the all-important emotional 'home'. I would also like to thank our aunt Nkele for her support throughout my life journey. My deepest gratitude also goes to my supervisor, Professor Felix Maringe, whose contribution in this study can only be best described by the Sesotho literary giant Dr KPD Maphalla. Prof, your love, humour, softness and deep understanding of the field of Educational Leadership and Management have sharpened my intellect. I would also like to thank my lecturers and mentors from the University of the Free State who have prepared in me a soldier who can compete anywhere in the world. I would also like to express my hearty gratitude to my dear master's classmates for their love when times were hard. Thank you. My deepest gratitude also goes to Mme Shelagh Foster and abuti Lerato Bereng for their unwavering belief in my abilities. My sincere gratitude also goes to the principal, head of department and teachers for sharing with me their insights and time for this study.

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Dr Anthony Essien, Dr Audrey Msimanga, Prof Brahm Fleisch and Prof Jane Castle, your help in this study has not gone unnoticed. Dr. Marcus Ingram, Mme Dineo Ingram, Mme Lerato Makhele, Mrs Rene Pelser, Bishiop James Tshenkeng, my Mookodi and Shakhane secondary school teachers—a huge thank you.

For any errors and inadequacies that may arise in this work, the responsibility entirely rests on me.

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Table 1.1: Learner enrolment and Grade 12 pass rates from 2012 to 2014.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
FSPG	Free State Provincial Government
HoD	Head of Department
DoE	Department of Education
LFs	Learning Facilitators
FS	Free State
SACMEQ	Southern African Consortium for Monitoring Quality Education
IJR	Institute of Justice and Reconciliation
HSRC	Human Sciences Research Council
SADC	Southern African Development Community

ABSTRACT

This study sought to explore successful instructional leadership practices in challenging circumstances. One township secondary school located in QwaQwa, Free State province, was used as the case study. The purpose of this study was to understand how the school has managed to consistently produce meritorious academic performances over the years despite facing multiple deprivations such as poverty, high crime rates and dilapidated learning infrastructure, among others.

To better understand the instructional leadership approach, the study identified three key characteristics of successful instructional leaders and used them to form the basis for understanding whether the identified school principal applied them in responding to their learners' socio-economic challenges. This study was located within qualitative methodological approach with interpretivism as the research paradigm. The main data source was the in-depth interviews. The participants included the principal, head of department and two senior teachers.

The study found the following to be key to the school's consistent plausible academic performance: (a) the main focus of the school was on ensuring the availability and efficient use of the instructional materials (b) the school principal took professional development of his academic staff seriously (c) there was a strong focus on managing teaching and learning (d) goal setting was seen as a driver towards achieving the academic goals of the school and (e) the effective use of the school's allocated instructional time was of great importance.

Key words: Leadership, instructional leadership, schools in challenging circumstances, teaching and learning, township schools

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CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

Introduction

Although there is no common agreement on the positive extent to which school leadership affects learners' academic performance (Leithwood, Harris and Hopkins, 2008), there is overwhelming research evidence which points out to the principals as being key in the academic performance of the school (Leithwood *et al.*, 2008). There have been a few large-scale qualitative and quantitative research studies looking at a review of studies which explored the impact of school leadership in the academic performance of the learners.

One such study was conducted by Hallinger and Heck (1996) and it reviewed educational leadership studies that were published between 1980 and 1998 (Leithwood *et al*., 2008). These scholars concluded that while the total direct and indirect consequences of school leadership on learner outcomes are small, they are educationally important (Leithwood *et al.,* 2008). Other studies which drew similar conclusions were done by Cheng (2002); Sillins and Mulford (2002); Wiley (2001). The study by McMahom (2001) strikingly revealed that the academic performance of the school was among other factors which drastically suffered a blow once the principal left the school. One can conclude from this research evidence that school principals remain important if the schools are to achieve their main goal of teaching and learning.

The best way principals will stay in touch with what is happening in the classrooms thus impact the learners' academic outcomes is if they are directly involved in the teaching and learning processes (Robinson, 2007). What I can rather argue about is the extent to which they are involved but their involvement is significant if the academic performance of their learners is to show positive outcomes. It is for this reason that this study was undertaken so that a clear understanding can be gained on how school principals in challenging circumstances involve themselves in the teaching and learning process and what are the effects thereof on the learner academic outcomes. Although there are multiple models of leadership, the one that is closely associated with the principal's involvement in the teaching and learning is that of instructional leadership (Bush and Glover, 2003; Bush, 2003).

Chief among other leadership approaches that can positively contribute towards the academic performance of the learners, Hopkins (2001) mentions instructional leadership as one of them. This approach emphasises the principal's involvement in the teaching and learning (Coleman and Earley, 2005)**.** It also needs principals to have close relationships with the teachers in order to know what is happening in the classrooms and how best can the teachers' pedagogic skills can be enhanced (Maringe and Vilakazi, 2015). What is concerning, however, is a lack of empirical studies which look at leadership practices in challenging circumstances (see Harris, 2002).

It is thus the purpose of this research to explore how theory and practice of instructional leadership can be developed to enhance its value for schools in challenging circumstances. This also includes how instructional leadership is understood to contribute towards the academic performance of the learners in these challenging

circumstances. The report also looks at the common instructional leadership practices that are enacted in these schools and the effects thereof on the learners' academic outcomes. To achieve this goal, this is how the study will unfold. First, I will touch briefly on the research topic by referring to the debates on the role that school leadership plays towards improving the academic performance of the learners. Thereafter, I give the general background that will cover the local and international contexts of the study.

Under the background, I introduce the reader to the research topic and state why this study is worth conducting. Secondly, I also introduce the reader to the statement of the problem, aims of the study and research questions linking them to successful instructional leadership practices in challenging circumstances. Furthermore, I briefly touch on the methodological approach on which the study is based. Moreover, I provide the justification for undertaking this study and also providing the significance thereof to its end-users. In addition, I touch on the anticipated contribution of the study in the knowledge economy. I also give the structure of the report. I conclude with the chapter overview.

Background

This report focuses on the role of principals as instructional leaders in challenging circumstances and it is based especially in a low socio-economic geographic location of secondary schooling in the South African province of the Free State (FS). It looks at a chosen principal's instructional leadership practices within the context of secondary schooling in the township community of QwaQwa region, which is in the eastern part of the mentioned province. In this section, I am going to do the unusual, to start with the

national context before I explore the local context. The reason is mainly that I want the local context to act as the antithesis of the national context.

The national context

Drop-out rates, grade repetition and struggle at higher learning institutions

The study by Branson, Hofmeyr and Lam (2014) reveals that almost 40 per cent of learners in South African secondary schools by 2010 had left the schooling system without even obtaining the 'matric' certificate. Jansen (2011) confirms the foregoing when he states that drop-out rates escalate as learners move up to higher grades, with 20 per cent of 18 year olds not in school and not finishing grade 12. Further, grade repetition is one of the pressing issues in the system, with about 51 per cent of learners in grades 10-12 repeating a grade (Jansen, 2011). These alarming rates continue beyond the schooling system, especially among learners from low income households, whereby the vast majority of young people who come out of the schooling system are considered incompetent and deficient of the necessary skills for the job market (Spaull, 2013).

Further, Ndebele, Badsha, Figaji, Gevers, Pityana and Scott (2013) reveal in their report commissioned by the CHE (Council on Higher Education) that only 29 per cent of the 2006 cohort managed to graduate within the regulation time across all universities in South Africa for three-year degree programs. In as far as four year degrees are concerned, only 36 per cent of students managed to graduate within the stipulated period. What is disturbing about these revealing statistics is that very small numbers of

black students, coloured, Indian and African, graduate in record time (Ndebele, *et. al.,* 2013).

South Africa's educational performances in the international context

South Africa's education system has been under the spotlight for its continued dismal academic performance in international standardised tests. To exacerbate things, the country's learners have consistently been outperformed by learners from countries such as Botswana, Tanzania, Kenya, Zimbabwe and Swaziland—countries that are by far economically deprived than South Africa. For example, the 2007 Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ) study reveals that South Africa ranks 10th out of 15 SACMEQ countries for reading and 8th out of 15 for mathematics performance (Hungi, Makuwa, Ross, Dolata, van Capelle, Paviot and Vellien, 2010). Alarmingly, the most recent World Economic Forum's Global Competitiveness Report (2015) ranks the quality of the country's basic education 120 out of 140 countries worldwide. This is despite claims by a myriad of education scholars that South Africa has relatively lower learner-teacher ratios and better access to educational resources (Spaull, 2011; Department of Education (DoE), 2011; van der Berg, 2007; Reddy, Prinsloo, Visser, Arends, Winnaarand and Rogers, 2012; Taylor, 2008; Jansen, 2011).

The local context of the study

This study focuses on a school principal in challenging circumstances of South African townships. Pernegger and Godehart (2007) give a detailed description of South African township communities. These, they state, are a result of discriminatory apartheid laws

in South Africa. In addition, they state that these areas were specifically designed for blacks (Indians, coloureds and Africans) (ibid). In as far as education of the black children was concerned, the government of the day ensured that blacks received a sub-standard education so that they can serve as the subordinates to their white counterparts— almost acting as sub-human beings (Maringe and Vilakazi, 2015). The symbolic action to ensure that white people and their children continued to unfairly reign supreme under the apartheid rule was to allocate abnormally high monetary resources to white schools while black ones received 20 times lower (Christie, 2010).

Unfortunately, most of the township and rural schools — as with many of their black people in the democratic South Africa — still have to grapple with the inherited legacies of the apartheid government. In these areas are schools that are two-fold. On one hand, there are those that are characterised by violence, high rates of crime and poverty (Burton, 2008). On the other hand, there are those that are fully functional and consistently perform well academically. To support the former, Xaba (2006) and Lubbe and Mampane (2008) purport that many learners in township schools live in fear of witnessing delinquency and often learn in unsafe academic environments. In accordance with the following are Bush and Heystek (2003)**;** Tihanyi and Du Toit (2005) as well as Hammett (2008) who posit that most schools in the townships witness violence and crime, poverty, often have uneducated and unemployed parents, have poor educational facilities and overcrowding in classes is normal. The other common feature of most of the township schools is a lack of educational facilities such as libraries, sports fields and sometimes learners are forced by the circumstances to share textbooks (Lemon, 2004).

The region in which this study was conducted, QwaQwa in the Free State province, is located 400 km east of the province and has about 308 330 people. It was established in the 1970s as a residential area for the Basotho tribes under the kingship of Morena Mopeli. This place is regarded as the economically poorest region in the province with the unemployment rate estimated to be way above 40 per cent; however, it is also known for its cultural richness and uniqueness. Also, it is surrounded by the Drakensberg Mountains which are one of the major tourist attraction sites in the region.

Successful schools in townships and the role of leadership

Although there is this voluminous scholarship on underperformance in township schools, including QwaQwa, there is little scholarship on how other schools still perform well academically despite trying circumstances that they operate under. In the words of Maringe, Masinire and Nkambule (2015), it is more difficult to lead schools that are in challenging circumstances than lead in those with less challenging ones. However, there is literature which states that a distinguishing feature of many successful schools is the presence in them of successful leadership practices.

It is, therefore, the purpose of this report to look at the role that instructional leadership, with a particular focus on excelling schools in challenging circumstances, plays to facilitate the academic performance of learners. This study is important for the reason that gaining better insights into how instructional leadership is understood by principals and teachers whose schools, despite being plagued by challenging circumstances, still excel academically. This will offer their struggling counterparts with better insights about how best they can also overcome their current conditions.

Statement of the problem

The study that was conducted by Taylor (2008) makes for an interesting revelation about the state of South African schools that are socio-economically disenfranchised. This study found that about 80 per cent of South African schools, predominantly based in the townships and rural settings and serving children from poor economic backgrounds, predominantly black, were dysfunctional. Similarly, the study that was commissioned by the Institute of Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) written by Taylor (2006) confirms the latter staggering statistics. Interestingly, these reports are consistent with other studies that focused on the academic achievement of schools in challenging circumstances. For instance, van der Berg (2007); Bush (2007); Fleisch (2008); Taylor, Fleisch and Shindler, (2008); Taylor (2008); Jansen (2011); Spaull (2011); DoE (2011); Spaull, (2013) observe that in effect South Africa has two basic education systems whose academic achievements differ considerably. On one hand, there are schools that serve the wealthiest learners, catering almost 20-25 per cent of learners, and on one hand, there are those that cater learners from low income brackets, comprising almost 75- 80 per cent.

The latter category performs dismally academically while the former does comparatively well, both in national and international standardised tests. To further illustrate the appalling state of the country's poorest schools, Hungi, Makuwa, Ross, Dolata, van Capelle, Paviot and Vellien (2010) reveal that in the 2007 SACMEQ the 25 per cent of the country's socio-economically disadvantaged learners were ranked 14th out of 15 countries for reading**.** Predominantly, academically underperforming South African

schools are found in the townships and rural areas (Maringe, Masinare and Nkambule, 2015).

Still, despite the socio-economic conditions that continue to bedevil many of our township secondary schools, using the national and provincial academic performance benchmarks, there are those that manage to produce above average Grade 12 pass rates. In South Africa, the Grade 12 examination, also known as matric, signals the termination of 12 twelve years or so of schooling. In the study by Christie and Lingard (2001) there are schools, although small in number, in some of South Africa's socio-economically poorest communities that provide the highest possible standard of education. They call these schools 'resilient'. Although it may be assumed, what is not clear is whether the school leadership, with the principal at the forefront, has anything to do with the consistent and commendable academic performance of these schools. While currently there is voluminous interest in schools facing challenging circumstances (Mbokazi, 2013), there are few research studies that have solely focused on leadership practices in challenging circumstances (Ngobo and Tikly, 2010) and their impact on the academic performance on learners. This study, thus, strived to explore the achievements of these schools in challenging circumstances, specifically focusing on the role of instructional leadership in contributing towards the academic performance of these schools.

Aims:

Given the above stated problem, this study, therefore, sought to:

- Explore ways by which the theory and practice of instructional leadership can be developed to enhance the learner academic outcomes
- Identify successful instructional leadership practices in the challenging circumstances of one township secondary school in the Free State province of South Africa and the contribution thereof on the learner academic outcomes
- Explore how instructional leadership is understood and conceptualised by the principal and teachers in the identified school in challenging circumstances.

Research Questions

The aims of this study were translated into the following questions:

Main question:

- How might the theory and practice of instructional leadership in schools facing multiple deprivations be developed to enhance its value to learners?

Sub-questions:

- What instructional leadership strategies are commonly practiced in these schools and with what effects?
- In what ways are instructional leadership practices perceived to enhance learner outcomes in these schools?

1. How might the theory and practice of instructional leadership in schools facing multiple deprivations be developed to enhance the value to learners?

Theory of instructional leadership already exists but it is often generic, disregarding the context. Therefore, this question seeks to find out how instructional leadership theory can be developed in order to enhance the academic outcomes of learners faced by challenging circumstances.

2. What instructional leadership strategies are commonly practiced in these schools and with what effects?

   This question presumes that there are certain instructional leadership strategies that contribute to learner academic performance in one way or the other. The hope is that this question will help to develop the framework that can be used in other schools facing challenging circumstances.

3. In what ways are instructional leadership practices perceived to enhance learner outcomes in these schools?

   Unlike the previous question, this question assumes that there are certain instructional leadership practices that, if practiced well, will enhance the learner academic performance.

Justification of the study

Recently, there have been a few studies in South Africa which focused on the role of school leadership in managing teaching and learning. However, there is still research evidence which points at the inadequacy of conceptually rich educational leadership studies in South Africa (Hoadley, Christie and Ward, 2009; Bush, Joubert, Kiggundu, Van Rooyen. 2010). What we also miss are research studies which look at school leadership in challenging circumstances. There are two most recent research studies

which have looked at the role of school leadership - principals at the centre of it all - in challenging circumstances. The first was done by Ramatseba (2012) and the second was done by Mbokazi (2013). The latter was the first major study of its kind to look at township secondary schools (Mbokazi, 2013). Although these two studies have focused on successful leadership practices in challenging circumstances, no study in South Africa in recent times, if any, has focused on successful instructional leadership practices in challenging circumstances of secondary schooling. This study, then, hopes to contribute to the on-going discourses on the role that instructional leadership plays to contribute to the academic performance of learners. The differentiating feature about this study is that it specifically looks at successful instructional leadership practices in challenging circumstances.

Significance of the study

This study is aimed at school principals, heads of department, teachers who work in challenging circumstances, national, provincial and local educational officials as well as the academics who want to understand how principals as instructional leaders negotiate their spaces in challenging circumstances. The hope is this study will inform these stakeholders about existing successful practices of instructional leadership that can be adopted by other schools in challenging circumstances. Moreover, the significance of this study is to tell the good stories about our township schools because often society gets to hear about them when there is something wrong going on like teachers bunking classes or their well-documented poor academic performance. It is time we spoke of those that continue to be the beacon of hope.

Overview of the methodological approach

This study is going to use qualitative research approach. It was sensible to adopt this research approach for this study as the data was to be sought from people and how they understood instructional leadership and its role in improving the learner academic outcomes in their challenging circumstances. To substantiate the latter, McMillan and Schumacher (2010) claim that qualitative research approach studies the phenomenon in its natural setting. More on this approach will be expanded in chapter three.

Anticipated contribution

This is what the study hopes to achieve:

- To contribute to the body of knowledge of instructional leadership practices in challenging circumstances
- To demonstrate that even in challenging circumstances, there are schools that still thrive
- To share researched evidence with other schools that are plagued by challenging circumstances on what other schools in similar circumstances do to overcome their challenges.

Motivation for the study

This study was motivated primarily by the scholarship that continuously places the township schools in the bad light (see Maringe and Moletsane, 2015). It is this kind of scholarship that pretends as though nothing great ever happens in the schools facing

multiple challenges. While I acknowledge the existence of challenges that negatively affect the academic performance of many of our learners, surely we can take the positives out of these negatives. This study, therefore, aims to foster change in perception about the township schooling. It will achieve this by telling the successful story of a township school.

Structure of the Research Report

This research report comprises of five chapters. The following is the structure of the report:

Chapter 1 is an introductory chapter that contains the statement of the problem, aims of the study and research questions. In addition, I provide a general background that covers the national context of the study. Furthermore, I briefly touch on the methodological approach on which the study is based.

Chapter 2 focuses on the literature review. I first explain what is meant by the literature review, its importance and necessity. I then then proceed by exploring what existing literature says about school leadership, instructional leadership, teaching and learning as well as schools in challenging circumstances. The aim of this chapter, thus, is to locate this study within the existing body of knowledge and evaluate the current discourses in the field of educational leadership pertaining to instructional leadership in particular.

Chapter 3 introduces methodology. By this I mean specifying the target group, sampling methods; the research instruments; research paradigms; research design; data analysis; reliability; validity and the ethical considerations.

Chapters 4 & 5 report on the findings of the case study school.

Chapter overview

In this chapter, I did a number of things. First, I have touched briefly on the research topic by referring to the debates on the role that school leadership plays towards improving the academic performance of the learners. Thereafter, I gave the general background that covered the local and international contexts of the study. Under the background, I first introduced the reader to the research topic and stated why this study was worth conducting. Secondly, I also introduced the reader to the statement of the problem, aims of the study and research questions linking them to successful instructional leadership practices in challenging circumstances. Furthermore, I briefly touched on the methodological approach on which the study is based.

Moreover, I provided the justification for undertaking this study and also providing the significance thereof to its end-users. In addition, I touched on the anticipated contribution of the study in the knowledge economy. I also gave the structure of the report. I concluded with the chapter overview. This chapter has revealed a number of things. One, it has revealed that the schools in challenging circumstances rely on the quality of their school leadership to perform at the level that transcend their socio-economic conditions. What this revelation suggests is that school leadership remains the most important piece of the puzzle in the learners' academic performance. In addition and perhaps most importantly, although the majority of the township schools still considerably underperform, there are those that manage to consistently do well in

the matric examinations and these are the schools from which inspiration, lessons and hope can be drawn.

In the next chapter, I am going to look at the existing empirical literature on leadership, instructional leadership, teaching and learning as well as schools in challenging circumstances.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

In this chapter, I am going to review literature with the aim of gaining a better understanding of the focus of this study, instructional leadership and its impact on learner outcomes. The aim is to locate this study within the existing body of knowledge and evaluate the current discourses in the field of educational leadership pertaining to instructional leadership in particular. Before anything else, the concept of literature review will be clarified. This will include its importance and necessity, and how I plan to undertake mine for this study. This chapter includes a review of some of the academic literature so as to demonstrate how leadership, instructional leadership, teaching and learning as well as schools in challenging circumstances have been conceptualised. In addition, this review will show how research evidence supports conceptions of successful school leadership practices in challenging circumstances. The particular focus will be on instructional leadership and its role in improving the learner academic outcomes**.** I am also going to look at both the international and national studies on the concept of instructional leadership in order to locate how it is conceptualised. Most importantly, I hope to identify knowledge gaps so that my study adds value to existing debates in the cycles of instructional leadership and the connection thereof on improving learner outcomes.

The selection of the literature was primarily informed by a strategic review related to the three main themes of the research questions: exploring how the theory and practice of instructional leadership can be developed to enhance the academic performance of learners in challenging circumstances; instructional leadership strategies that are commonly practiced and the effects thereof on the learners' academic performance and how the enacted instructional leadership practices are perceived to enhance the learner academic performance. The selection strategy for the retrieval of the electronic database involved the use of key words around successful leadership practices, instructional leadership, schools in challenging circumstances, township schools as well as teaching and learning. Although the retrieval strategy mainly involved electronic sources, a few conference papers, books, dissertations, mini-dissertations, research reports and theses proved to be valuable sources of information for the literature. I will then conclude by identifying and illustrating, through the model, key concepts and state why they were relevant for this study. The concepts that I refer to here include: leadership, instructional leadership, teaching and learning, township schools and schools in challenging circumstances.

Literature review

Creswell (2009) defines literature review as a written summary of the scholarly works that best describes the current and past state of information so as to justify a need for your proposed research study. On the other hand, McMillan and Schumacher (2010) see literature review as that significant part of research that launches vital bridges between the current knowledge and the research problem that the researcher seeks to research.

The preceding views by Creswell, McMillan and Schumacher reiterate the point that in research the researchers' voices are preceded by other researcher's voice or the claims have to be backed up by the voices of other field players. I will wrap this section with the framework that encapsulates all the key terms of this study.

Literature review serves the following purposes according to Creswell (2009):

- To document how a study adds to the current body of knowledge
- To convince the research committees at your university that you know the existing debates in your field and know their relevance to your study
- To learn new ways of doing research and finding useful models and examples in the literature that will improve your research skills
- It is also as an opportune way of honing your library use skills because of a continuous need to consult different sources in the library.

I have located my study within the existing body of knowledge pertaining to instructional leadership. This has enabled me to know what key field players say about it and how it contributes or does not to learner academic achievement. Extensive perusal of literature has allowed for an informed view of how instructional leadership is perceived by different scholars in the field and has permitted me to take a stand on what I think it means for schools in challenging circumstances.

Leadership

It is worth noting that there is no general agreement on the meaning of the concept of leadership (Leithwood, Jantzi and Steinbach, 1999) as some scholars argue that the definition thereof is a subjective one (Yukl, 2002). Although Christie and Lingard (2001) offer some help in as far as the definition of leadership is concerned, they are quick to warn us that defining leadership is not as easy as it may sound. Nonetheles, Christie and Lingard (2001); Christie (2010); Grobler and Conley (2013) state that leadership is concerned with influencing others. What stands out from the foregoing conception of leadership is the ability of those entrusted with leading others to persuade others to do things that they would not have otherwise voluntarily done. It is about finding inspiration to do something. The evidence of the previous claims is found in the studies of Cuban (2008) and Bush (2010) who purport that leadership is about altering the behaviours and attitudes of others to achieve certain goals. These goals in the context of school can be improving learner academic outcomes.

Christie and Lingard (2001) state that leadership is not bound by the boundaries of organisational settings, that is, it can be exercised both within and without the organisation and it is also not tied to a position (Christie, 2010). On the other hand, Day, Harris and Hadfield (2001) regard leadership as being concerned with helping people to achieve the level of professional development beyond where they are at. Successful school leadership is also one which is always concerned with finding innovative ways that will enhance learner academic outcomes (Bush and Jackson, 2002). Lunnenburg (2011) informs us that effective leaders always think of how things can improve in the

organisation. In addition, part of leadership is the ability to cope with unpredictable change (ibid).

Although there is no general agreement on what this concept means, the general agreement that seems to reappear in literature is that school leadership, mainly through principal, remains critically important in positively impacting the scholastic performance of learners. As a case in point, the study that was conducted by Leithwood, Louis, Anderson and Wahlstrom (2004) revealed that leadership was the second most important school-based element in learners' academic success. These scholars later made a similar contention in their 2010 study in which they stated they were even more confident that leadership was the second most important factor in influencing the learners' academic performance.

To complement the preceding views, Bush and Jackson (2002) as well as Levin and Fullan (2008) state that to effect a positive change in education, strong school leadership is a necessity. Bush (2007); Mizell (2010) echo these views when they posit that we need a high quality school leadership if the main purpose of schooling is to be a reality, to ensure learners reach their academic potential in a safe learning environment. What all of the preceding views seem to suggest is that school principals need to prioritise teaching and learning in the application of their daily duties.

Instructional leadership

In this section, I am going to provide an overview of what is meant by the concept of instructional leadership. To achieve this, I am going to draw on the international literature in order to have a broader perspective on the global understanding of the

concept. Thereafter, the next step is going to focus on the local literature so as to understand what the local scholars have been saying about the concept. I also explore some of the barriers that instructional leaders in the South African context have to deal with on day to day basis. Furthermore, I am going to provide an overview of what activities do instructional leaders undertake every day to be successful in executing their instructional duties.

To help us understand what is exactly meant by the concept of instructional leadership and its primary reason for existence, Southworth (2002) claims that instructional leadership finds its existence in teaching and learning, including the life-long learning of teachers as well as the growth of the learners. Sebring and Bryk (2000) claim that instructional leadership includes all the activities that principals do that to support the academic success of learners and the ability of teachers to teach. In support of the foregoing views are Bendikson, Robinson and Hattie (2012); Bush (2007) who state that this phenomenon strongly focuses on the quality of instruction and on the teacher behaviour towards their learners.

The international perspective

The emergence of instructional leadership is traced back to 1980s in research that studied effective schools (Hallinger, 2003). The work by Leithwood and Montgomery (1982), for instance, identified strong links between the effective school and the principal's involvement in the teaching and learning process. Leithwood, Jantzis and Steinbach (1999) state that the studies of instructional leadership work on the premise that principals as instructional leaders are in a better position to influence what is

happening in the classrooms. Interestingly, there are research studies in some parts of the world that support this notion. For example, the study which involved 15 schools located in four different districts of the United States of America (US) undertaken by Portin, Knapp, Dateff, Feldman, Russell, Samuelson, Ling Yen *et al*. (2009) found strong links between the school's successes and their principal's involvement in the teaching and learning process. This study also found that these principals shared their responsibilities with other senior teachers so that whenever any of the school management team members relinquished their leadership position, there could be a senior teacher who can easily take over. This view is supported by Levin and Fullan (2008) who state there should be a particular attention given to building teacher leadership at the school level.

Although Bush, Glover and Harris (2007) think there is a need for principals to be mentored by their seasoned counterparts, my view is those seasoned principals should also take time to mentor teachers so that they can become better leaders themselves. Portin *et al's.* (2009) further interesting finding is that of the emphasis of collaboration among teachers and the principal as an instructional leader. The latter was put as thus: "principals consistently expressed the desire to see teachers work with, learning from, and supporting none another" (Ibid). Mendels (2012) supports this preceding view in that she states effective instructional leaders are those who encourage their teachers to work together for the benefit of their learners. This kind of collaborative culture, it is my view, will enable teachers to share their pedagogic ideas with their colleagues so as to enhance their teaching experience in the classrooms.

The other US study that was undertaken by The Wallace Foundation (2012) found that effective instructional leaders are those who constantly look for new ways through which the instruction in the classroom can be enhanced. What is clear from these studies is that to be an effective instructional leader, a principal needs to be on a constant lookout for opportunities that will help them and their teachers to become better with their pedagogy. Mendels (2012) also notes that successful instructional leaders take time out of their busy schedules to visit the classrooms in order to provide constructive feedback to their teachers on what can be improved and what is working.

What we should note, however, here is that this can work best in learning environments where teachers and teacher unions see classroom observations as an opportunity to improve, not to be exposed. Unfortunately, the study by Sibanda, Mutopa and Maphosa (2011) which sought to investigate the Zimbabwean primary school teachers' perceptions towards classroom observations revealed that majority of the participants saw classroom observations by principals in a negative light. This, they state, was a result of the principal's inability to follow up on the observations made thus making it difficult for teachers to know where they can improve. The other participant in the study revealed that principals were only interested in picking the negatives in their classroom observations. Southworth (2002) says this kind of hostile atmosphere between the supervisor and supervisee hurts what could be a healthy instructional leadership exercise.

Portin *et al.* (2009) also found in one of their participating schools the strong presence of instructional leadership teams set out by the principals themselves. The function of these teams was to ensure that there is an open line of communication between the

senior school management and teachers on matters relating to the instruction. For example, in instances where the principal was absent from school to offer the instructional guidance, the teacher would approach members of the instructional leadership team for guidance. What is important to note here, Portin *et al*. (2009) caution, is that the role principals played in these instructional leadership teams varied as their level of expertise varied from one area to another.

Instructional leadership, despite its positive reviews, has not escaped any criticism. To illustrate this, Horng and Loeb (2010) contest that instructional leadership alone is no answer to school effectiveness. Their argument is centred on the notion that principals are not the masters of every school subject taught. In place of hands-on leadership on teaching and learning, they propose a kind of leadership that is more organisational and their argument is if school leaders shift their focus from instructional leadership to organisational leadership, there will be an improvement in the classrooms. The other criticism that is outlined is that instructional leadership tends to shift the focus of the principal from his or her administrative responsibilities (Hallinger, 2003). The next section examines the barriers that local instructional leaders encounter on day to day basis and how this impedes on the learner academic performance.

The local perspective

There is an increasing expectation for school principals to act as instructional leadership. This is evident in the kind of interest the scholars of educational leadership take in this concept (Mbokazi, 2013). This expectation manifests itself in various ways but the most dominant of these ways is that if principals do not act as instructional

leaders, their learners' academic outcomes will not improve for the better. To illustrate this point, Maringe and Vilakazi (2015) state that this form of leadership works on the premise that the learners' academic outcomes can only improve if principals immersed themselves in the teaching and learning process. The preceding views are backed by Robinson (2007) who accentuates that there is likely to be an improvement in learners' academic performance if principals directly involve themselves in the activities that are happening in the classrooms. While it is theoretically easy to claim principals need to act as instructional leaders, there are perpetual barriers that hamper this process.

A few of South African studies reveal some of these challenges that instructional leaders encounter in the execution of their duties. One such study was conducted by Bhengu, Naicker and Mthiyane (2014). In this study, it was found, among others, that teachers no longer had the motivation to teach. The causes varied from teaching multi-grade classes to high volumes of work they have to do. Maringe and Vilakazi (2015, p. 9) define multi-grade classes as those whereby "one teacher teachers two or more grades simultaneously…" These, Maringe and Vilakazi (2015) further say, are found in rural areas of certain provinces in South Africa.

The other challenge that Bhengu (2014) *et al*. found to impede on the role of principals as instructional leaders concerns principal workload. This confirms what has been stated by other scholars of educational leadership about the workload of principals in South Africa and elsewhere in Africa. For instance, Christie (2010) states that principals in South Africa have to take on many responsibilities such as managing school finances, ensuring effective teaching and learning, going to district meetings, ensuring discipline in the school, overseeing the development of staff training programmes,

serving on school advisory committees etc. Fascinatingly, this phenomenon of multiple responsibilities that school principals have to battle with seems to be a general finding in other studies in some parts of the African continent. To illustrate this, Oduro and Macbeath (2003) found in their Ghanaian study that most principals there often have to act as supervisors to teaching; also forced by staff shortages to teach, acting as security officers, overseeing the building projects in their schools. They even have to ensure that food that is served to learners by the vendors meets the set hygienic standards. It is my contention that these multiple responsibilities, however beneficial they may be, will invariably lead to an impediment on successful instructional interventions that principals need to undertake.

Bhengu *et al.* (2014) also identify teacher unions as one of the main barriers that prevent teachers from exercising their instructional leadership duties. To confirm this**,** Msila (2014) states that of the ten principals that he interviewed in his research study, seven of which cited their frustrations when they stated that unions tended to impose their power by telling them how they should run the schools in which they were appointed principals. What these studies reveal is that if principals in South Africa are to be successful instructional leaders, there should be collaboration and mutual understanding across all levels of the education sector. There should also be an understanding that learners' learning interest should be prioritised above anything else. In the following sections, I am going to explore what is meant by instructional leadership in broad terms and what the role of the principal is in it. Also, I am going to identify common characteristics of instructional leaders. I will conclude by stating what the knowledge gaps that I have identified were and how I hope my study will fill them.

Principals and their role in the teaching and learning process to enhance learners' academic performance

There is an unwavering consensus among the scholars of instructional leadership that if the school is to achieve academic excellence, the principal's role in this process remains pivotal. To substantiate the preceding view are Grobler and Conley (2013) who postulate that if South African schools are to achieve the learning goals set out by the DoE, it is important that school principals act as instructional leaders as this directly involves them in the teaching and learning process. Grobler's and Conley's argument finds credence in Maringe and Vilakazi (2015) who contend that highly successful schools have strong instructional leaders whose sole focus is in improving the learner academic performance. According to Leithwood, Jantzi and Steinbach (1999), principals become directly involved in the teaching and learning process when they are able to coordinate, control and supervise the curriculum and instructional activities. In instructional leadership, the focus of principals' influence is strongly on learners learning through teachers (Bush, 2007). In support of this view are Grobler and Conley (2013) who state that the success of school leadership is about "achieving results through other people."

Hands-on approach on teaching and learning

Southworth (2002) contends that if the instructional leadership is to be successful, principals need high acquisition skills of professional knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, learner learning, adult learning and good interpersonal skills. In addition, instructional leaders need to focus more on improving teaching and learning and focus

less on administrative tasks (Jenkins, 2009). These instructional leaders need to provide instructional tools, and be in possession of current knowledge of the curriculum, instruction and assessment practices (ibid). The foregoing assertion holds water in Muijs' (2010) argument in which he notes that instructional leaders need to immerse themselves in the teaching and learning processes as opposed to being more concerned with bureaucratic tasks. Further, Hoadley, Christie and Ward (2009) theorise that this approach comprises elements of the school head's pedagogical knowledge, willingness to delegate and connections between management and instructions, organisational factors and social relations within the school environment.

Bhengu *et al.* (2014) are of a view that once the principals have undertaken to oversee the instructional project they should continuously evaluate it in order to ensure that teachers meet the learners' learning needs. However, they caution that the context within which instructional leadership is applied may or not work. The successful application thereof, they argue, depends on the buy-in from the teachers and other stakeholders in education. Now that we know what is meant by instructional leadership and the centrality of principals in it, what does literature say are common features of instructional leaders and the effects thereof on learner outcomes?

To be able to know better what makes for an instructional leader, Bush and Glover (2009) highlight that instructional leaders need to ensure that the necessary materials that support teaching and learning are made available at all times**.** Interestingly, the study by UNESCO (2015) (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) reveals that the availability of good quality educational resources propels

effective and successful teaching and learning. In accordance with the foregoing claims are Bush, Joubert, Kiggundu and van Rooyen (2010) whose study found that schools that had sufficient teaching and learning materials such as textbooks, stocked computer labs and others contributed to positive learner outcomes than those that did not. The other element of successful instructional leaders is goal setting (Hallinger, 2005). The study by Bendikson *et al.* (2012) found that schools that perform well have instructional leaders who take goal setting seriously. Jansen (2011), for instance, states that schools that usually perform well take the tuition time seriously and successful realisation thereof relies heavily on principals. The latter also finds credence in Hallinger (2005) who states that these leaders influence the quality of instruction by aligning school structures such as academic standards and effective use of time.

The other element that Hallinger (2005); Bendikson *et al.* (2012) highlight as the feature of successful instructional leaders is their focus on improving the skills of their teachers through professional development activities. According to Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (1995)**;** Elmore and Burney (1997)**;** Corcoran, Shields and Zucker (1998)**;** Cohen and Hill (2000), teachers who continuously seek to improve their professional skills tend to witness positive results on their learners' academic performance. In addition, Blasé and Blasé (1998) state that instructional leaders also encourage teachers to continuously reflect on the progress that they make in the teaching and learning process.

Teaching and Learning

A school exists for the sole purpose of teaching and learning (Christie, 2010; Pretorius, 2012). If these two core functions are consistently adhered to, there are chances that every learner in the school will achieve some level of academic achievement. According to Cohen, Raudenbush and Ball (2003), teaching is concerned with activities that allow learners to use educational resources in a meaningful way. Furthermore, “teaching is what teachers do, say, and think with learners, concerning content, in particular organisations and other environments, in time” (Cohen, *et al*., 2003, p.124).

The DoE (2012) in the current policy document Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS), states that the aim is “to ensure that children acquire and apply knowledge and skills in ways that are meaningful to their own lives.” It would seem for this to happen both teachers and learners need to show highest levels of commitment (Pretorius, 2014). Hopkins (2006) notes that if any effective learning is to take place, learning spaces, classrooms, remain important. Fleisch (2008) argues that South African classrooms remain pivotal if we are to overcome the crises in the country’s school system. Hoadley (2012) adamantly complements those who support classroom-based research when she says schools can be effective only if research focuses on classroom practices. In recognition of the preceding argument are Levin and Fullan (2008) who argue that to sustainably improve learner outcomes, there is a need for a sustainable effort to change teaching and learning efforts in the classrooms and this necessitates for a system-wide effort.

In addition, this effective learning has to be complemented by the teacher's content knowledge (Carnoy, Chisholm, Addy, Arends, Baloyi, Irvin & Sorto, 2011). City, Elmore, Fiarman and Teitel (2009) state that teachers should not expect their learners to perform well in their studies if they do not take time to improve their level of subject content and engage their learners in the subjects that they teach. Furthermore, to realise effective learning, teachers need to set relevant, thought-provoking, and detailed learning goals, give regular feedback to learners and continuously give them an assurance that they will succeed in their studies (Todd & Mason, 2005).

Schools in challenging circumstances

For the purpose of this study, the concept 'challenging circumstance' will be used to signal a deprivation. In an effort to contextualise schools in challenging circumstances, the British government used the term challenging circumstances to their schools that had an "attainment below what is deemed to be an academic threshold" (Macbeath, Gray, Cullen, Frost, Steward & Swaffield, 2007, p. 40). These are the schools that get more monetary and non-monetary resources and receive compounded administrative and instructional support than other schools in the system (Macbeath *et al.,* 2007). Often, the concept of challenging circumstances is associated with a "disadvantage". For the purpose of this study, schools in challenging circumstances are those that are exclusively based in townships and are often deprived of educational resources such as libraries, dilapidated buildings and poor waste management resources thus pose a threat to human life and socio-economic progress (Xaba, 2006; Lubbe and Mampane, 2008; Kamper, 2008; Xaba and Malindi, 2010). Furthermore, learners who go to these

schools are exempted from school fees payment. Almost 76% of schools in South Africa are categorised as “no-fee schools” (Branson, Kekana and Lam, 2013).

Further, these are the schools that are characterised by unpredictability—today there is a stable learning environment; the other day there is no learning happening. In addition, learners and teachers alike have low confidence levels. These are the views that are echoed by Mbokazi (2013); Maringe and Moletsane (2015) when they note that schools in challenging circumstances characteristically serve communities in abject poverty, often experience social dispossession and bear limited educational gains. However, despite these appalling circumstances that these schools grapple with, there are those that continue to produce impressive academic results (Christie and Lingard, 2001; Naicker, Chikoko and Mthiyane, 2013; Bhengu, Naicker and Mthiyane, 2014; Maringe and Moletsane, 2015). It is the foregoing assertions by Christie and Lingard; Naicker *et al*.; Maringe and Moletsane as well as Bengu *et al.* upon which this study will be based.

Christie and Lingard (2001) identify the following characteristics of successful schools in challenging circumstances: a) flexible leadership; b) a sense of leadership and urgency; c) emphasis on teaching and learning; d) a safe and organisationally functioning institutional culture; e) consistent disciplinary practices; f) and a culture of caring for others. To add to these characteristics, Jansen (2011) observes that schools that function well are those that: a) acknowledge good learner efforts; b) there are established routines and everyone knows what they should do; c) unpredictability is prevented by well- planned timetables; d) there is reciprocal respect between teachers, non-academic staff and learners and; e) there are regular celebratory ceremonies. In the following section, I explain what is meant by a ‘conceptual framework’ and the role thereof in this report.

Conceptual framework

Badenhorst (2007) says a conceptual framework exists for a single purpose: to unpack the central concepts that are used in the research study. Robson (2011) regards it as a system of terms, presumptions and expectations that informs your research. The key concepts for this study were: leadership; instructional leadership; teaching and learning; schools in challenging circumstances and township schools. The reasons why these concepts were chosen for this study were simply based on the premise that any study has to be guided by specific concepts around which the research study will develop its arguments and assumptions. The last and probably the most important reason is that these concepts were also the means by which I was able to retrieve data for literature review. Below is the illustration of the key concepts that I have alluded to in the latter part.

Figure one: concepts that will guide this study



This is what this conceptual framework illustrates: school principals of successful township schools in challenging circumstance influence what happens in their classrooms (leadership and instructional leadership). The assumption is their active participation in the teaching and learning process, either as teachers themselves or offering professional support to their teachers, plays a critical role in improving learner outcomes. This conceptual framework has enabled me to do a few things. First, it has allowed me to shape the research questions for this study. Second, it has allowed me to identify the common features of schools in challenging circumstances. It has also allowed me to keep within the focus of the study because anything that was outside of the conceptual framework would have deviated from the initial aim of this study.

Chapter overview

In this chapter, I have provided a review of literature on successful instructional leadership in challenging circumstances. The ultimate aim was to identify those instructional leadership features upon which school principals who aspire to be successful instructional leaders can leverage on in order to improve learners' academic outcomes. Before anything else, the concept of literature review was clarified. This included its importance and necessity, and how I planned to undertake mine for this study. I then went on to include a review of academic literature so as to demonstrate how leadership, instructional leadership, teaching and learning as well as schools in challenging circumstances have been conceptualised. What the review has shown is how research evidence supports conceptions of successful school leadership practices in challenging circumstances.

A particular focus was on instructional leadership and its role in improving the learner academic outcomes**.** To be able to get an expanded version of views, I looked at both the international and national studies on the concept of instructional leadership in order to locate how it was conceptualised. I was also able to develop the conceptual framework that enabled me to model my research questions, among others. Most importantly, I have identified a few knowledge gaps which I hope this study will fill. One, while there are research studies that focus on the role of leadership to facilitate the academic success of learners in challenging circumstances, few studies in South Africa, if any, have focused on the role of instructional leadership to improve the learners' academic outcomes in challenging circumstances. Lastly, I have also realised that the studies that have been conducted in South African schools in challenging

circumstances have not focused on the common instructional leadership practices that the principals based in challenging circumstances exemplify and with what effects. The next chapter looks at the methodology for the study.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction

In this chapter, I begin by explaining the meaning of the research methodology. I go further to explain the meaning of the paradigm in the research context. This is followed by the explanation of three broad research designs in positivism, post-positivism and critical theory. I then justify locating the study within the interpretive research paradigm. I go on to introduce qualitative and quantitative methodological approaches and provide the justification for using qualitative research methodology in this study. In addition, I proceed to discuss ethical issues for the study. Furthermore, I look at how data was collected, processed and then analysed.

Research methodology

Research methodology is regarded as a map that illustrates how research is to be carried out by the researcher (Rajasekar, Philominathan, Chinnathambi, 2013). Also, it is “the procedures by which researchers go about their work of describing, explaining and predicting phenomena” (Rajasekar *et al*., 2013). This is further explained by Dawson (2009) who regards a methodology as a general guiding principle of research. It is also “the overall approach to studying your topic and includes issues you need to think about such as the constraints, dilemmas and ethical choices within your research” (ibid). What is apparent from the definitions that Rajasekar *et al*. and Dawson put

forward is that methodology is the thread that holds a research study together—without which, research will not be feasible.

Research paradigm

Human beings are not devoid of preconceived ideas about the world in which they find themselves (Neuwenhuis, 2010). The decisions we make—those that affect us directly and indirectly—are, to a certain extent, influenced by how we view the world and our immediate environment (ibid). Others refer to this phenomenon as the world-view while others refer to this as the paradigm. For the purpose of this study, I am going to adopt paradigm to explain this way of looking into the world. To help us with the clearer meaning of what is meant by a paradigm, Neuwenhuis (2010) regards it as a set of presumptions about significant aspects of our reality which in turn gives rise to a certain way by which we view and interact with the world around us.

Furthermore, Lincoln and Guba (1985) state that paradigms are the representation of what we think about the world. These views are the corroboration of what I have mentioned at the beginning of the paragraph that paradigms shape how we view and interact with the world. In research, a paradigm informs how we construct our research questions, problems and interact with our research participants. It informs, among others, the type of questions we think are best for our studies. In the following sections, I am going to extend on some of these claims by looking at some of the research paradigms that we have in the research world.

Although the following research paradigms are theoretically different (Neuwenhuis, 2010), in practice their differences are not always explicit and are often disputed about

(ibid). The research paradigms I am referring to here are positivism, post-positivism and critical theory as well as interpretivism.

Positivism

According to Henning, van Rensburg and Smit (2004), positivism finds its existence in finding the truth and proving it through experimental means. Positivistic paradigm tells us that after the phenomenon had been studied and proven, it remains the only truth there is; in other words, scientific knowledge is thought to be precise and certain (ibid). Positivism also operates on the assumption that reality can be expressed in numbers (quantitatively) (Collins, 2010). In addition, "in a positivist view of the world, science is seen as the way to get at truth, to understand the world well enough so that it can be controlled by a process of prediction" (Henning *et al*., 2004, p.17).

The world in a positivist world operates by laws of cause and effect that can be detected by means of research in a scientific way (ibid). The underlying assumption here is that the causes and effects of the phenomenon under the scrutiny can be accurately predicted even before the research has been undertaken through a sensual experience (ibid). One of the criticisms that positivism is subjected to is that it dismally fails to take into account that as human beings we have an inherent ability to interpret our experiences and represent them to ourselves (Cohen and Manion, 1995).

Post-positivism

For post-positivist studies, Creswell (2007) asserts that researchers who employ a post-positivist perspective to their research believe that knowledge is not absolute. This finds support in Hesse-Biber's and Leavy's (2011, p. 16) view that post-positivists

“attempt to create evidence that will confirm or refute a theory, although not in absolute terms.” Post-positivists believe in the existence of multiple realities (Creswell, 2007).

Critical theory

Gunter (2009, p. 96) defines critical theory as one which concerns itself with giving people opportunities to reflect “on what they do, are told to do, and would like to do.” Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011); McMillan and Schumacher (2010) further observe that critical theorists are concerned with giving the voiceless a voice of their own and this is achieved by destabilising oppressive symbolic relations of dominance. They also note that critical theorists’ much interest is in appreciating the bigoted knowledge—knowledge closely linked to the discriminated groups. What is also worth emphasising here is that critical theory challenges those who have power to keep it in constant check so that it does not offend nor oppress those who may otherwise be on the margins. In the next section, I introduce the research paradigm that has informed how I interacted with the research participants during my visit to the schools for data collection.

Interpretivist research paradigm

By the mid-20th century, a move away from positivism was seen to studies that orientated themselves around the lives and experiences of research participants so as to understand and interpret their meanings around their social world (Henning*, et al.,* 2004). Also, interpretivist research in education has gained the momentum and is highly popular among educational researchers (Mbokazi, 2013). It was thus fitting for this study to adopt a qualitative interpretive that focused on the instructional leadership practices in challenging circumstances of one QwaQwa township secondary school.

This research paradigm was adopted for this study because it was suitable for the kind of information that I sought. Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011); Mbokazi (2013) assert that an interpretive research is more inclined to a notion that meaning is constructed through human interactions.

In addition, it operates on the premise that “observation is fallible and has error and that all theory is reversible” (Henning *et al*, 2004). The focus of interpretive paradigm is on “understanding, interpretation, and social meaning” (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2011, p. 16). Hussey and Hussey (1997) also raise a point that it is by and large possible to understand people if you place them within their social contexts. In support of the foregoing are Crewell (2008); Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011) who further state that interpretive researcher understands that the only way to understand social reality is by being in touch with those who are immersed in it. It may have a strong standing and be glorified, but interpretivism has not been without faults.

This is exemplified in the work of Scott and Morrison (2007) who state that one of the problematic things about interpretivism is that it assumes people engage deliberately in their inter-social interactions. Giddens (1984) further states that human beings tend to favour routines, and as a result, time to reflect on their actions and the impact thereof on others tends to happen occasionally. What this means is that if researchers do not invite human beings to engage in social gatherings by means of focus groups or interviews, for instance, they will not have the willingness to reflect on their actions and the impact those actions have on others. Consequently, it assumes, Scott and Morrison (2007) argue, that people will not be in a position to fully grasp the impact of their actions. In the next section, I look at two commonly used research approaches in

qualitative and quantitative approaches and provide the justification for locating this study within the qualitative approach.

Quantitative research approach

What is important to note before I can delve into the meaning of quantitative research approach and how it differs from qualitative approach is that none of these research approaches is better than the other (Dawson, 2009); the one that the researcher chooses to adopt is one that is deemed to be suitable for the study and is closest to reveal most reliable research outcomes. Referring to quantitative research, Mbokazi (2013, p. 57) avers that “these methods of science used to study the natural world, are seen by social researchers as not being feasible for the study of human experiences.”

Mbokazi’s view finds credence in Bryman (2004) who argues that quantitative research tends to rely heavily on instruments and processes that prevent the connection between the research and everyday lived experiences. By implication, these methods tend to assume human experiences can be controlled and predicted. This, I would argue, goes against the inherent human uniqueness of versatility. It is solely because of the underlying positivist assumptions of this approach that I did not choose it in compiling this study. When you deal with human beings, you have to be open to unpredictability but unfortunately quantitative studies tend to overlook the existence of such eventualities.

Qualitative research approach

I chose to adopt a qualitative study because of my belief that the meaning of reality can best be understood if gained from the lived experiences of my research participants. Creswell (2007) regards qualitative research as one that traces its existence in assumptions, a paradigm and the study of research challenges that human beings encounter in their day-to-day experiences. He further avers that the voice of the research participants is more audible than that of the researcher (ibid). In a qualitative study, the researcher gathers data directly from the source, participants (McMillan and Schumacher, 2010). This method was suitable for the study because it sought to understand the 'why' and 'how' of the school leaders, thus acknowledging their lived experiences and views. It was also suitable for the study because it studied things in their natural being (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). The other emphasis of a qualitative study is that it strongly believes in investigating the quality, as opposed to, the quantity of the phenomenon under study (Fraenkel, Wallen and Hyun, 2012). Creswell (2007) indicates that this method is appropriate for use when the researcher has identified a problem that needs to be explored and requires human interactions. Part of qualitative studies is their openness to unpredictability (Maxwell, 1994). This allows the researcher to go to the field with the understanding that things may not work out as it was initially planned. Qualitative studies also place much emphasis on holistically describing the phenomenon under scrutiny as opposed to quantifying these descriptions (Fraenkel *et al*., 2012).

To simplify the meaning of qualitative research approach, Fraenkel *et al.* provide a detailed summary of the characteristics of qualitative research. They are as follows:

- The first and perhaps the most important one is that the natural setting serves as the direct source of data
- Qualitative data are collected in the form of words or pictures rather than numbers
- Qualitative researchers are also intrigued by how things happen. It is for this reason that they are likely to observe how people interact with each other
- They do not formulate a hypothesis before they carry out a research and then test it later. Instead, they tend to go with the follow
- Last but not least, they are interested in what the people think and why they think that way.

All of these characteristics and what I have already mentioned in the latter parts of this section about qualitative research perfectly sum up the reasons why I have chosen to adopt a qualitative study.

Data collection methods

Data collection methods refer to what the researcher is going to use to gather the study data (Tshabalala, 2011). Because qualitative researchers need to spend a considerable time with the research participants, understand their lived experiences and contexts within which they live in order to fully understand the phenomenon researched (McMillan and Schumacher, 2010). My main sources of information were the principal, head of department (HoD) and two senior teachers from the selected school in challenging circumstances. These were the participants from whom a better understanding of the impact of instructional leadership on the learner academic success

was gained. I also collected data through documentary analyses. This was followed by an in-depth data analyses.

The point of departure for this study is that the researcher is not, and will never be, fully knowledgeable about the phenomenon of the understanding of instructional leadership in schools that are based in challenging circumstances but still do well academically—hence the adoption of an in-depth interview as the data collection method. To illustrate this clearly are Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011) who opine that researchers use in-depth interviews when they understand that they do not know everything thereby appreciate the unique and significant transferable knowledge that other people possess about their social settings. Neuman (2000, p.272) posits that while "face-to-face interviews are costly, and the potential for bias is high, they also have a high rate of response, and they allow for flexible probing."

In-depth interviews are characterised by a communication between the researcher and the research participants and need active questioning and attentive listening (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2011; Kvale and Brinkman, 2005). During the interviewing process, I saw this in practice where I was forced to listen attentively to what the participants were saying as sometimes they were giving me valuable information that was not part of the interview questions but formed the critical part of the study itself. Attentive listening proved to be a valuable asset to have because I would have missed those key points. Further, Marshall and Rossman (2011) observe that the interviews can yield better results when the interviewer is adequately prepared.

To ensure I was adequately prepared for the interviews on the agreed upon day, I first ensured that the batteries for the audio recorder were fully charged. Thereafter, on the day of the interview, I arrived one and half hours prior to the interviews. This provided me with an opportunity to observe the school so that I can compare what the participants were saying to what I have observed. This is despite the fact that observations were not part of the data collection method. Also, arriving early allowed me to prevent any disturbances such as being allocated the venue that may have been loud for the interviews etc. While I had initially estimated the interviews to last for the minimum of 30 minutes to the maximum of an hour, surprisingly, the longest interview lasted for 18 minutes.

I particularly chose to use in-depth interviews for the following reasons:

- Using in-depth interviews allowed me to gain better insights into how principals and teachers of the selected schools understood instructional leadership and its impact on learner academic success

- I also chose this data collection method because of its ability to get me closer to the research participants thus understand their lived working experiences

- Because I chose to use one-on-one interviews, this enabled me to form strong ties with the researched thereby acquiring information needed for the study relatively easily and also enhance the quality of experience.

What to consider when designing the in-depth interviews:

- Both the researcher and the participants need to agree on the suitable setting that will make both of them feel comfortable

- They also need to agree on the duration of interview and if the agreement is not reached, some sort of a compromise needs to be reached

- What I also think is important to know are the participants' values so that you know what questions may offend them and be able to rephrase them in a way that is sensitive.

After permission had been granted onto the participants' natural setting (the school) and the consent was granted to do interviews, responses of participants were tape-recorded. After that, data was transcribed and I used them as the sources of direct quotations (see also McMillan and Schumacher, 2010).

Documentary Analysis

The other source of data was documents that I accessed with the help of the principal from the case study school. Cohen *et al.* (2011p.248) see a document as "a record of an event or process. Such records may be produced by individuals or groups, and may be drawn between types of documents…" Bush (2012) regards documentary analysis as a valuable part of case studies. However, Cohen *et al*. (2011) note that documentary analysis can be problematic as the authenticity thereof can be in doubt because sometimes the content can be forged. Even so, documents were a valuable source in this study because they provided the valuable information about the school's Grade 12 results in the last three years. The reason for the choice of Grade 12 results was

informed by the fact that in South Africa Grade 12 is the benchmark that is used to measure the quality of the schooling system and also because it is the exit point for learners.

Instrument Design

In this study, one instrument was used for data collection: in-depth interviews. These in-depth interviews were designed to establish how participants: a) understood and conceptualised instructional leadership; b) how can a theory and practice of instructional leadership be enhanced to add value to learners' academic performance; c) how is instructional leadership perceived to enhance the learner academic outcomes. All the interviews were audio-recorded and the participants gave the consent to be recorded.

Piloting

I selected one of the schools as a pilot school. This was the school that had similar characteristics to the case study school in terms of consistent excellent academic performance and is also plagued by similar environmental challenges. Polit *et al*. (2001) state that a pilot study can also be referred to as a feasibility study which is small in scale and it is done to prepare for the major study. This pilot was important in that it allowed me to test the trustworthiness and dependability of the data collection instruments. Baker (1994) states that one of the main purposes of a pilot study is to test the clarity and accuracy of the data collection instrument, in this study it was in-depth interviews. This allowed me to check if the length of the interviews was appropriate, not too long or short. Pilot studies may be of great help in identifying potential practical problems that may arise in the major study (Van Teijlingen and Hundley, 2001).

It must be noted, however, that pilot studies can render themselves problematic in that the researcher may make inaccurate assumptions on the basis of pilot data (Van Teijlingen and Hundley, 2001). In the case of this study, the pilot went very well as the result thereof did not force me to change the data collection instrument.

Sampling

Sampling has to do with the total population that the researcher hopes to work with in a particular sphere of society. In my case, the population is all the secondary schools in the QwaQwa township. A sample, then, is a group of people, in case of a qualitative methodology, which a researcher chooses from the population for data collection purposes (McMillan and Schumacher, 2010). Because of time and financial constraints (Marshall and Rossman, 2011) only two secondary township schools were initially selected for this study and purposive as well as convenience sampling were adopted for the selection of these schools. McMillan and Schumacher (2010); Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011) define purposive sampling as a form of sampling that the researcher adopts because it will be representative or rich of information about the topic under study. Because the purpose of this study was to understand how instructional leadership has led to the academic performance of the school in challenging circumstances, it was fitting to select participants who will provide rich information about the phenomenon that is instructional leadership.

In purposive sampling, “a judgement is made about which subjects should be selected to provide the best information to address the purpose of the research” (McMillan &

Schumacher, 2010, p. 138). McMillan and Schumacher (2010) further opine that this sort of sampling is appropriate if the purpose of the study is not to generalise the findings. In consequence, schools that were chosen here were deliberately chosen solely because of the research purpose and the determination to shy away from generalisations. Convenience sampling, on the other hand, is employed in the wake of constraints that the researcher may encounter in the process of conducting a study. In addition, this sampling method is used because of the availability of resources, time and financial resources (McMillan and Schumacher, 2010; Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2011).

The other two important dimensions that were used to select the sample were: Grade 12 results and socio-economic and educational conditions of the township in which the school is. The dimension of Grade 12 was valuable in exploring the impact of the principal's instructional leadership practices on the learner academic outcomes. The underlying assumption I hold is that the principal had an overarching contribution to see the school consistently achieving the above average Grade 12 results. Although the school has consistently been doing well in the Grade 12 results, I only looked at their performance over the last three years (2012-2014).

I interviewed all the participants individually. In selecting the sample, the principal selected for me the teachers as well as the HoD. However, the teachers had to be seniors, that is, those who have worked in the school for three years and beyond. Since the focus of the study was on successful instructional leadership practices in challenging circumstances, the case study school was purposively selected on the grounds of evidence of consistent high academic performance and being in a low socio-economic location.

Sample Size

In total, eight participants were chosen for the study. They included four participants from each participating school, a principal, HOD and two teachers. Unfortunately, one of the two schools that were targeted for this study was not available to participate. The principal cited a hectic schedule as the main reason why he could not participate in the study. In the same school, getting some of the participants to agree for the interviews was difficult than climbing Mount Kilimanjaro. Nonetheless, the teachers eventually agreed but their responses could not serve the purpose of the study as the main participant, principal, against whom their responses were going to be compared was not available for the interviews. This meant I had no choice but to work with only four participants from the other school.

Data analysis and interpretation

In order to answer the research questions, the study used a qualitative approach for the analysis of data. In the qualitative approach, different data analysis methods are used (Mbokazi, 2013). For this study, I used a thematic content analysis method to develop raw ideas during the analysis. Social researchers use the term *thematic content analysis* to cover a wider category that includes social practices, people and institutions that make it possible to understand a phenomenon in a certain way (Rogers, Malancharuvi-Bekers, Mosley, Hui, O'Garro, 2005).

The adoption of this method meant going through a process of summarising, categorising and identifying emerging patterns from the data. These dimensions are regarded by many educational research authors as the main elements of thematic content analysis in qualitative data (Creswell, 2008; McMillan and Schumacher, 2010; Cohen et al., 2011). The adoption of themes was also informed by McMillan and Schumacher (2006); McMillan and Schumacher (2010) who argue that it is difficult to analyse data that is not organised. To organise my data, I codified it. Codes can include a name or phrase that the researcher uses to give a meaning to the segment (McMillan and Schumacher, 2010). A segment, according to McMillan and Schumacher (2010, p. 370), is a "text that is comprehensive by itself and contains one idea, episode, or piece of relevant information."

Assigning codes to themes will make it easy to identify recurring patterns in my study. All the themes that emerged in the study are included in appendix D.

The approach to data analysis was based on synthesis. This meant as the researcher, I had to draw different themes and concepts together from the research and form them into new integrated patterns. Creswell (2008) stunningly states this when he insists that qualitative data analyses require a deep understanding of the texts that were obtained during data collection stages.

Strategies used for ensuring trustworthiness

This study has taken a qualitative approach to research and this renders itself to challenges of qualitative studies whereby perceptions of validity and reliability are conceived differently by researchers who lean more on quantitative approach to research (see Cohen *et al*., 2011). Issues of reliability and validity are concerned with the data collection methods and tools used in research. These issues are taken into consideration in research in order to ensure quality by limiting any bias in data collection processes and in order to ensure trustworthiness of the data. Creswell (2007); Lincoln and Guba (1985) state that reliability, which is concerned with trustworthiness, dependability, and credibility of a research study, can be ensured by "prolonged engagement in the field and the triangulation of data of sources, methods, and investigators to establish credibility" (p. 202). Cohen and Manion (1994, p. 233) define triangulation as an "attempt to map out, or to explain more fully, the richness and complexity of human behaviour by studying it from more than one standpoint."

To ensure trustworthiness in this study, through triangulation, the participants' responses, especially the principal's, were carefully analysed to check for discrepancies. The teachers' interview questions were the same while the principal had only one question that was different from the teachers'. That different question related to the role that the principal played in the teaching and learning process and the teachers were asked to give their opinion on the principal's involvement in the teaching and learning process. This was deliberately done in order to trace consistencies or inconsistencies in the participants' responses.

Validity, on the other hand, is a "process whereby the researcher earns the confidence of the reader that he or she has "gotten it right" (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2011). Creswell (2007) sees validity as an attempt to evaluate the precision as set out by the researcher. The foregoing is also backed up by McMillan and Schumacher (2010) when they postulate that what makes for a valid research is the extent to which it accurately reports the findings. What comes out of these definitions is that validity is concerned with the ability of the research project to measure that which it has intended to measure and this accomplishment can be measured against the research questions emanating from the objectives of the study. For this study to meet validity requirements mentioned above, I had to constantly measure the research findings against: 1) research questions; 2) and the research objectives.

Ethical Considerations

McMillan and Schumacher (2006) state that whenever there is a human contact, as is the case in this study, ethical considerations need to be taken in serious light. To bring clarity to what is meant by ethics, McMillan and Schumacher (2010) define them as what is normally considered morally wrong and right. Although they agree that there is no general agreement on what ethics mean, they assert that researchers need be conversant of ethical considerations when they engage with the research participants. Basit (2013); Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) contend that any research undertaken should be bound by ethical requirements. To guard against ethical transgressions, there have been ethical guidelines that different academic projects have to abide by as set out by their respective professional bodies and research councils (Basit, 2013; Mbokazi, 2013; Marshall and Rossman, 2011). In this particular study, plans to visit the involved township school started as soon as I was granted the ethical clearance by the University of the Witwatersrand's ethics committee which gave the following 2015ECE032M as the protocol number. To also guard against any transgressions, permission had to be granted by the Free State Education Department (FSPD) to gain access into the school. Together with the department's approval letter, the ethics letter was enclosed detailing ethical considerations that I had to adhere to.

To further mitigate unethical research practices, there were six main ethical variables that I had to abide by, namely: *informed consent*, *confidentiality*, *anonymity* and *right to withdraw.* Each one of these variables will be thoroughly explained below.

Informed Consent

The concept of informed consent finds its existence and relevance in thoroughly explaining the purpose of the study to the participants and the opportunity to terminate their participation in the study at any given moment (McMillan and Schumacher, 2010; Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2011). Diener and Grandall (1978, p.57) see informed consent as “procedures in which individuals choose whether to participate in an investigation after being informed of facts that would be likely to influence their decisions”. I had initially planned to email the participants the informed consent and other accompanying documents via email but upon the realisation that they do not use this channel of communication often, I opted to hand them in person. Once the participants had understood what the study entailed and they had agreed to participate in the study, they signed the consent forms and gave them back to me.

Right to withdraw and voluntary participation

This part of ethics involves the understanding that research participants are entitled to withdraw from the study at any time of the study and this should be made explicitly clear to them upon accepting participation in the study (McMillan and Schumacher, 2010). Right from the beginning of the interviews, I reiterated to the participants that their participation in this study was voluntary and they had every right to withdraw at any stage of the interview.

Anonymity and Confidentiality

As the researcher, I ensured the participants' right to privacy was respected through anonymity and confidentiality. To this end, I declared not to reveal any information which may identify the study participants or that might make it possible to trace who the participants were. Walford (2005), however, contends that although it is every researcher's wish to observe these sacred ethical considerations, it is not always that they are applied or achieved. As a case in point, Oliver (2003) states that some institutions or people may wish their names to be identified as this may advance their interests or cause. In the case of my study, some of the participants did not mind being identified because they take pride in the milestones that they have managed to reach despite their challenging circumstances. Nonetheless, I stuck to the ethical responsibilities that were given to me by the university and provincial education department.

Chapter Overview

This chapter dealt with the methodology of research. To this end, I began by explaining the meaning of the research methodology. I went further to explain the meaning of the paradigm in the research context. This was followed by the explanation of three broad research designs in positivism, post-positivism and critical theory. I then went on to justify locating the study within the interpretive research paradigm. I went on to introduce qualitative and quantitative methodological approaches and provided the justification for using qualitative research methodology in this study. In addition, I proceeded to discuss ethical issues for the study. Furthermore, I looked at how data

was collected, processed and then analysed. The chapter also included an account of triangulation in the data collection. The most important lesson I drew from this chapter is that any credible research study has to abide by ethical standards and the results thereof have to be trustworthy. The next chapter presents the findings of the case study school. The chapter also gives the profile of the case study school.

CHAPTER FOUR

CASE STUDY FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to provide a detailed description of case study school A by means of a presentation of findings and the analysis thereof. I first present the background and context of the school and this will be done through the documentary analysis. I then proceed by presenting data from the interviews with school teachers and the HoD. I conclude with the analysis of the data from these interviews by means of identifying and debunking the emerging themes out of this data. I interviewed all the participants individually.

One significant assumption in this study is that the consistent academic achievement of this school is a result of the principal's instructional leadership practices and one purpose of this research is to find out if, indeed, this assumption has truth in it and, if so, determine to what extent has instructional leadership contributed to this. Research has consistently established that the quality of teaching and learning rests on the strong presence of school leadership (Levin and Fullan, 2008; Leithwood *et al.,* 2004). Spillane *et al.* (2001, p.23) reiterate that "an in-depth analysis of the practices of school leaders is necessary in order to render an account of how school leadership works."

The centre of my analysis of the findings was essentially to determine the extent to which the principal as the instructional leader has enacted common characteristics that literature says the successful exhibit. According to Bush and Glover (2009), instructional leaders need to ensure that the necessary materials that support teaching and learning are made available at all times. The second characteristic that Hallinger (2005)

maintains a successful instructional leader exhibits is goal setting. On top of making sure that instructional materials are available and goals are set, Jansen (2011) reiterates that successful principals prioritise tuition time. The last element that Hallinger (2005); Bendikson *et al.* (2012) highlight as the feature of successful instructional leaders is their focus on improving the skills of their teachers through professional development activities.

All these characteristics were mainly used in this study in order to determine whether they can be applied across all situations and bear the same outcomes that literature says they bear. As Mbokazi (2013, p.80) says “there is a myriad of factors influencing the decisions that the principal makes, as informed by their unpromising contexts.” I now proceed to the next section that will unpack the school through the documentary analysis with the aim of understanding what appear to be the successful instructional leadership practices of the school.

Documentary Analysis

For the purpose of the documentary analysis, I asked the principal to give me the school Grade 12 final results for the last three years (2012-2014) in order to make a thorough analysis of the school performance. The analysis of this document in particular was to scrutinise the quality of their matric passes. I was also able to obtain the school’s Vision and Mission statements in order to better understand the school in question. The biographical details about the school principal are also contained in the school profile.

Background and context of the case study school

The case study school is located in the business district of QwaQwa and was established in 1988. In 2015, the school had an enrolment number of 1000 learners. Of this 1000, 593 were female while 407 were male. Learner age ranges from 16-17. The school offers both commercial and scientific subjects and the number of learners in these areas of specialty is evenly spread. The school is classified as a quintile 3 school. These are the schools whose learners are exempted from paying school fees. The school heavily relies on the grant provided by the Free State Department of Education (FSDE) to for their daily errands. The school is under-resourced as, among others, it does not have a fully-stocked library and science laboratories. At the time of my visit, the school library was closed on the account of lack of librarians who could guide learners in their pursuit of knowledge.

Learners in this school are drawn from the same community where the school is situated; although there are other learners who come from other communities outside of the school boundaries. The community within which the school is based is fairly affluent as it is located in the economic hub of QwaQwa, Setsing shopping complex. Despite this fact, the community is still plagued by high levels of crime and unemployment. The school profile further states that the staff is committed to continue toiling in providing quality education at the school. The school Vision Statement captures this well:

> *The school aims to provide quality education that unfolds the learners' talents that will help them to play a responsible and meaningful role in the society.*

In order to accomplish this vision, the school profile mentions that the school mission is to *educate and lead the child and to unfold his or her potential through intra and extra curricula activities.*

The current school principal took to the office in 2011. He holds a Bachelor of Education degree. Upon completing his studies, he worked in another town and returned to the school as a Mathematics teacher. He went on to become the HoD for Maths and Science department and later became the principal at the very same school. The principal has 15 years of experience teaching at secondary schools. This was his first appointment at a school principal.

Under the guidance of the new principal, the school has won a number of prestigious awards for its meritorious academic performance. Notably, its former Maths teachers was crowned the best Maths teacher in the Free State in 2013 and its learners continue to feature among the best matric learners in the province.

School performance

The table below shows the Grade 12 results of the case study school from 2012 to 2014. The enrolment figures are also highlighted in the table.

Year	**Enrolment**	**Bachelors**	**Diploma**	**Higher Certificate**	**Overall Percentage**
2012	188	63	88	28	95.21
2013	244	85	108	40	95.49
2014	179	65	78	25	94.38

Table 1.1 shows learner enrolment and Grade 12 pass rates from 2012 to 2014.

Interviews

The study used purposive and convenient sampling technique. Because the study focuses on 'successful instructional leadership practices in challenging circumstances', it was important that I make "a judgement about which subjects should be selected to provide the best information to address the purpose of the research" (McMillan & Schumacher, p. 138, 2010), and "to select participants that are information-rich" (ibid). Given the meritorious pedigree of the school, as published in the Free State Department of Education website and documented in the school profile, the principal, head of department and two senior teachers met the criteria for information-rich participants. In addition, the school meets the criteria for challenging circumstances as it is located in a low socio-economic area (see chapter 2).

To table and analyse the material from the interviews with the principal, HoD and teachers, I extracted key concepts that appear to be important in the way that the principal saw the role he plays in the success of the school, and also how the HoD and teachers saw the role the principal plays in the success of the school and also how the teachers understood instructional leadership. When I described the interviews, I treated the participants' answers as the descriptions of the actual lived experience of their school leadership and whether they can ascribe the success of their school to their principal.

Interview with the principal

The interview with the principal took place in the school's boardroom. Prior to the interview, I went to the school to make an appointment with the principal. Unfortunately, on that day he was out of the office for a lengthy meeting at the district office. However, the deputy principal was really helpful as he suggested the day that he believed would suit the principal. Fortunately, the deputy's guess was accurate as the interview materialised two days later. During my first visit, I presented all the documentation that explained the purpose of my visit to the school. On the day of the interview, the principal selected the senior teachers and the HoD whom he thought will suit the purpose of the study. Before the interview, the principal and I discussed the structure of the interview and he agreed to be audio-recorded. The interviews took place over one day with the principal being the first person being interviewed. In the section of the interview with the principal and the one that immediately follows it, interview with the HoD, I will use a pronoun 'he' to refer to the principal and the HoD respectively.

Ensuring the availability of necessary instructional materials

It became apparent from our interview session that the principal understood that if the school was to maintain their meritorious academic performance that they have shown consistently throughout the years, he had to ensure that the necessary instructional materials were always available for both learners and teachers. He even went on to say that his responsibility is not only to ensure instructional materials are present but human resources as well (teachers) in this case. In this regard, he had this to say:

…my involvement in the teaching and learning is to ensure that learners receive all the required learning resources, both the human resources in the form of teachers and the stationery.

Honouring the instructional time

What struck me was his understanding that having instructional materials alone was not enough if those who are supposed to deliver the content to learners were not honouring their contact time. Perhaps most important was his commitment to ensuring that each and every learner at the school received quality education. The principal commented on this commitment by stating the following:

My other involvement is to ensure that learners receive education, not just education, but quality education on daily bases and this would mean I have to ensure that teachers honour the contact time.

It is evident from the interview excerpt above that the principal prioritised quality teaching and learning in the school and understood that time on task was an important ingredient to a successful school. This is particularly encouraging to hear because of a few research studies that maintain that the majority of teachers in South Africa spend far less time teaching**.**

As a case in point, a study that was carried out by the DoE found that a high number of teachers often come late and leave early for work and hardly ever use their full tuition time. In addition, they also spend only 46 per cent of their instruction time teaching and hardly ever teach on Fridays (McCarthy and Bernstein, 2011). Another similar study that was conducted by Bush *et al.* (2010) revealed that the principals and some members of the school management team were concerned by the low levels of teacher commitment in their school as some teachers lacked commitment and were often absent from school; when they were present, they often arrived late in their classes. Similarly, a study conducted by Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) (2010) revealed the absenteeism rate among teachers in South Africa stood at 10 to 12 per cent per year. This, compared to Southern African Development Community's (SADC's) 0.16 days is the highest in the aforesaid region (Wills, 2014).

Collaborating with the relevant stakeholders

His additional answer to how he is involved in the teaching and learning process signaled his belief in collaboration in education for the betterment of learners' academic achievement. He believed that as the school they can only do so much but parents were the most important stakeholders in the child's education. To this end, these were his words:

> *One of my key roles is also to ensure that parents are heavily involved in the education of their learners. Remember that we only spend time with these learners from Monday to Friday and not for the whole day while parents spend much of the time with their*

children, including weekends; as a result, they play a major role in contributing towards the academic performance of their children.

There is an abundance of the body of knowledge which points out parental involvement as one of the key elements that lead to a child's academic success at school. To substantiate this, Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997); Hoover-Dempsey, Battiato, Walker, Reed, DeJong, and Jones (2001); Harber (2004); Moggach (2006) maintain that there is a strong correlation between a child's academic performance and the level of parental engagement in the child's education.

Proper management of curriculum

He further reiterated the importance of ensuring that the curriculum was correctly managed and everyone in the school understood the importance of adhering to the policy stipulation in as far as teaching and learning were concerned. He states this as thus:

I have to ensure that curriculum is properly managed and the implementation of the policies is taking place.

It is clear from this response that he holds in high regard the compliance to the school policies. By implication, this commitment to successful implementation of school policies suggests that successful teaching and learning cannot materialise in the absence of this practice.

What the three extracts clearly reveal is how important the principal believes the focus on managing teaching and learning than using too much energy on administrative tasks

is for the achievement of the school's academic goals. "It is increasingly recognised, internationally and in South Africa, that managing teaching and learning is one of the most important activities for principals and other school leaders" (Bush *et al*., 2010, p.162). Leithwood *et al.* (2004); Maringe and Vilakazi (2015) recognise the importance of leadership, especially instructional leadership, in enhancing classroom practice and improving academic achievement of learners.

To support the preceding views, Robinson (2007, p.21) insists that "the impact on student outcomes is likely to be greater where there is direct leader involvement in the oversight of, and participation in, curriculum planning and co-ordination." The principal's answers confirm these views and this sheds light on what has led to the success of the school and the principal's immense contribution in this process.

Perception of the importance of instructional materials

In reply to a question on what role does he think instructional materials play in the academic performance of learners, he was resolute that their importance could not be emphasised enough. His conviction was based on the premise that without the LTSM (Learning and Teaching Support Material) it was almost impossible for teachers to provide the quality education to learners. His understanding of the LTSM transcended the conventional views of stationery but also included a whole assortment of other educational resources such as laboratories and libraries stocked with relevant materials. This is what he had to say:

> *Sir, without the LTSM (Learning and Teaching Support Material) it becomes difficult for teachers to perform their duties. Without textbooks, furniture in the classroom, laboratory equipment such as chemicals, teachers can barely afford learners the best available education*. *That is why I have to ensure that learners have access to these resources. We cannot neglect that aspect of education.*

From the extract above, it is clear that the principal believes the cornerstone of the school academic success, among others, is the availability of good quality instructional materials. This is one feature of an instructional leader that has received much attention in the scholarly world of educational leadership and management. For instance, Bush and Glover (2009) highlight that instructional leaders need to ensure that the necessary materials that support teaching and learning are made available at all times. Interestingly, the study by UNESCO reveals that effective and successful teaching and learning are mainly made possible by the availability of good quality educational

resources (Benavot *et al.,* 2015). In accordance with the foregoing claims are Bush *et al.*, (2010) whose study found that schools that had sufficient teaching and learning materials such as textbooks, stocked computer labs and others contributed to positive learner outcomes than those that did not.

Having competent teachers not enough

Interestingly, he also believed having highly qualified teachers was not enough if the school did not have enough good quality instructional materials. Not only that, he also believed a lack of these materials will make it difficult even for learners to learn. He was quick to note that his school did not have a major problem of a lack of these instructional materials. He said this as follows:

> *You can have highly qualified teachers but if there is a lack of these resources, they will hardly succeed in the exercise of their duties. It even becomes difficult for learners to learn at home because they will not have textbooks at home. Fortunately, the school does not have such difficulties at the moment.*

Another point that he emphasised was that as the education landscape is changing, it is equally important that as teachers they take full advantage of these new changes- technological advancements- because “these learners are so keen in using technology to learn.”

Causal link between teacher continuous professional development and learner outcomes

To a question on whether he thought there was a causal link between teacher continuous professional development and learner academic outcomes, he unequivocally agreed. His firm belief in the continuous professional development is based on the premise that knowledge evolves and effective instructional leaders are those who seek to keep up with this evolution in order to be kept abreast of new developments in the industry. This was his response:

> *As teachers and principals, we are instructional leaders, therefore, as instructional leaders we need to be lifelong learners—you cannot stop learning. I believe in the saying that "we cease to live the moment we stop learning." It is for this reason that we need to continuously improve our skills by enrolling for additional qualifications so as to learn of new pedagogies.*

The above passage confirms the views by Laal and Salamati (2012) who have outlined the following reasons why life-long learning is critically important:

- It promotes social inclusion, active citizenship and knowledge throughout the life of a person
- It builds skills and knowledge and
- It also boosts the levels of competitiveness and employability.

Knowing how to teach

He also raised a concern that has been on the lips of people like Jansen (2011) who purport that chief among the knowledge deficiencies from which the majority of South Africa's teachers suffer is the pedagogic knowledge. Although he believes (principal) most of the teachers know the subject content, contrary to what research says, his concern is that they do not seem to know how to teach and this is where continuous teacher professional development will come in handy as teachers will learn new and innovative ways of transferring knowledge in an understandable way. He put this as follows:

> *I am convinced that most of our teachers in the system know the content, but the question is: are they able to deliver the content to the learners? Continuous learning will ensure that teachers are armed with the innovative ways in which learners will understand them better.*

The importance of goal setting

In respect of the importance of goal setting for the attainment of desired learners' academic outcomes, he held no reservations as it was his conviction that without goal setting as the school they could hardly achieve anything worth mentioning. "A school that has no goals for learner academic achievement will hardly ever achieve anything noteworthy", he said. He also mentioned it is critically important that all the stakeholders of the school are involved in the goal setting process so that everyone can take ownership of it. This was also done in order to solicit ideas on the best way forward:

It is quite important for us as the governance structures of the school, school governing body (SGB) and the school management team (SMT) to set academic targets for a particular period. After this process, we need to ensure that these targets are debated with the teachers to evaluate their achievability and relevance. Thereafter, we go to the learners through learner representative council (RCL) to interact with them on what the school hopes to achieve and we also seek their views on how to achieve these set goals.

All Grades matter

What was interesting to note in his response was even as lower a Grade as 10 was regarded equally important, as opposed to focusing almost exclusively on the Grade 12s when the school's goals are set. This is what he said in this regard:

It is worth noting that when we set goals, the focus is not only the Grade 12s, we start right from the Grade 10 learners.

Responding to the country's critical skills

Another interesting point that he made was in relation to being responsive to the country's shortage of critical skills. Therefore, it was important that their goals were aligned to those of a country. He made this point by emphasising that any school has to respond to what the country needs as it was their responsibility to prepare learners who can participate actively in the country's economy. On this account, this is what he said:

> *In our goal setting, we also bear in mind that the school is part of the country—the county that desperately needs certain critical skills—and it is for this reason that our goals are aligned with those of the country. For instance, the country desperately needs scientists, engineers and accountants and as the school, we always strive to prepare the citizens who will fill this gap.*

This passage is in line with one of the purposes of South African National Curriculum in which the DoE states that it seeks to equip learners "irrespective of their socio-economic background, race, gender, physical ability or intellectual ability, with the knowledge, skills and values necessary for self-fulfilment, and meaningful participation on society as citizens of a free economy" (DoE, 2014, Section 1(1.3)).

Further highlighting the importance of goal setting, the principal said it "ensures that the whole school community remains focused and relevant."

Instructional leadership matters

When asked what contribution has he made to the school's meritorious achievement, he said it was difficult to provide answer to that as it is not easy for a leader to measure themselves but the subordinates (teachers) should be left to do that:

> *This is difficult to answer because I do not think it is easy for one to measure oneself.*

However, he was equally comfortable to admit his positive contribution to the school's consistent academic achievement. He also drew to my attention that even prior to his

appointment as the school principal, the school has always been doing extremely well— thanks to his predecessor. What he had to ensure though— when he was appointed the school's principal— was to keep the momentum. He had this to say:

> *…as the manager, my role has ensured that we stay on track. Prior to my appointment as the school principal, the school has always been up there with the best of other schools. What I did though was to ensure that we do not drop the standard set by my predecessor.*

The principal could not contain his unwavering sense of pride in the fact that since he took over in 2011, the school has consistently featured as one of the best Maths and Science as well as Commerce in the province, featuring in the top ten in the latter stream for the past four years and for the past three years in the former subject category:

> *My role since I took over in 2011 has been to ensure that the school becomes one of the best Maths and Science as well as commerce. For example, for the past four years we have been in the top ten of best performers in Accounting and for the past three years we have been the top Maths and Science performers in the province.*

The general perception among most of the people is that being subjected to challenging circumstances equates to intellectual inadequacy and leads to an inherent inability to move past the socio-economic shackles (Maringe and Moletsane, 2015). The views are confirmed by the principal when he noted that, although not explicit, the schools in

challenging circumstances are not expected to break into a territory of academic excellence, especially in subjects like Maths and Science. He said it this way:

> *For the township school to do this well shows we have been doing our level best as the school.*

Establishing sound relationships with all the stakeholders

He also hinted that much of his success as the instructional leader also depended on how he relates to his staff and learners on the personal level. His belief is providing emotional support to his teachers and learners will go a long way in ensuring the school continues to stay on the excellent academic territory despite their challenging circumstances:

> *…I listen to atrocities that my learners and teachers are subjected to in their families and if I do not offer that emotional support as the head of the school, our academic performance will be negatively affected.*

The interview with the principal highlighted a few significant points that further enhance our understanding of instructional leadership. The first of these manifestations of instructional leadership is that it comes in different forms but which are all directed at teaching and learning. The extract above confirms this observation. One other thing that has manifested itself in the interview is that successful instructional leaders have to be collaborative with the rest of the school community if they are to achieve their instructional goals. The other new understanding is that instructional leaders also have

to forge strong and good relationships with parents so as to ensure that learning extends beyond the school boundaries. In consequent, this interview has revealed that successful instructional leaders should be versatile beings.

Interview with the head of department

The purpose of interviewing the HoD was to get his views on the role of the principal in the academic success of the school. To achieve this, I extracted key issues that appear to be important in the way that the HoD viewed the role of the principal as the instructional leader to be. One HoD at the school was interviewed and this section presents the findings of the interview with him. I treated the discussions that emerged out of the interview with the HoD as his actual lived experiences of the school leadership and management in his school and whether he could ascribe the successes of the school to the role that principal played.

The participating HoD had been at the school for almost twenty -five years. Of which, five were spent as the HoD. The first question that I asked him was about his perception of the principal's involvement in the teaching and learning process. In response, he stated that the principal's involvement in the teaching and learning process took many forms. One of these forms involved ensuring that teachers were aware of their responsibilities in the school and so were the learners:

> *The principal usually participates in the teaching and learning process in various ways. He always ensures that each teacher is aware of what they have to do in the school and learners taking ownership of their own studies.*

Ensuring quality education for every learner

One of the things that the HoD mentioned was that chief among the principal's priorities was to ensure that every learner in the school passes and with high quality marks:

> *He is one person who always strives for each learner to pass at the end of the year—not only pass but with quality.*

The above passage resonates with the views of Bush *et al.* (2010) when they note that role of being the principal is to set high academic expectations for the learners while ensuring that the necessary support materials are made available.

Respecting the instructional time

The HoD also confirmed what the principal mentioned in his interview that every teacher in the school was expected to arrive in time for class and actually be on-task for the duration of the lesson. Further, he mentioned that learners were also expected to make full use of the tuition time. What is further interesting is that this expectation is not only the principal's but everyone in the school:

> *There is also an expectation on the side of everyone in the school, including him, that time should be used effectively and efficiently. Teachers are expected to arrive early for their lessons and make sure that they teach for the whole duration of the lesson (they must be on-task). Also, learners are expected to respect their tuition time.*

Offering motivation

Another important thing that he mentioned about the principal's involvement in the teaching and learning process was his commitment to motivate both teachers and learners by means of recognising their efforts. Literature on successful school leadership shows that principals in challenging circumstances, most in particular, appear to be aware of the significance of recognising the efforts of academic and non-academic staff, learners and other important stakeholders in the school community in order to further build successful learning community (see McLaughlin and Talbert, 2001; Clarke, 2007). The following extract captures this literature on the role that principals as instructional leaders play in recognising the efforts by members of the school community:

> *He also motivates us teachers as well as learners. To achieve this, on quarterly basis, top performing learners across all grades in the school are given merit awards and we teachers are sometimes motivated by being given certificates for our teaching efforts. He does not only acknowledge our efforts through these means but also by telling us whenever we do well.*

The above extract is consistent with the study by Sim (2011) which indicates that one of the multiple roles that principals as instructional leaders seem to increasingly execute excellently these days is recognising the efforts of outstanding learners in an effort to motivate their peers.

Ensuring appropriate instructional materials are readily available

The HoD also sung praises for his principal for ensuring that the necessary instructional materials were made available in time. When the schools close for the festive season, all the learners are already given the stationery and textbooks so that they can have time to run through them for what they will be covering in the following year and the next grade, in case of those who have passed:

> *In making sure that the school is fully equipped with instructional materials, he also excels. As we speak now, each and every learner has his or her own textbook. Before learners who will be doing grade 11 and 12 in the following year go on holidays for the festive season, they already have all the necessary learning material because they are already ordered.*

What one can deduce from the above extract is that having a proactive instructional leader helps to drive the school in the right direction. In addition, this passage indicates that the cornerstone of the school success has been the presence of a leader who understands the importance of having instructional materials ready for learners even before the start of the classes each year. This prevents situations whereby there is a delay of the resumption of schooling because of the shortage of instructional materials.

Encouraging the staff to develop their professional skills

When asked to give his account of the principal's role in encouraging the staff to take on professional development opportunities, the HoD was equally full of praise as he

mentioned that their principal always encourages the staff to develop their skills by either studying further or attending professional development workshops:

> *He always encourages teachers to study further. Alternatively, workshops at the school are organised and in other instances subject specialists from the outside are invited to the school to help our teachers.*

Setting high expectations as a collective

What also came out strongly from the interview with the HoD were the high expectations that they have set for themselves as the school community. As the whole teaching staff, they clearly emphasise quality instead of quantity passes for their learners. Interesting to also note here is that the whole school community seems to have bought into the goals of the school. The operative word that he used to show this was ‘we’; indicating that they strive to reach the goals of the school as a collective:

> *Every year, we set ourselves benchmarks and we always strive to reach a 100% pass rate for our grade 12 learners. If we fail, we strive for at least 90%. We also strive to ensure that we have more bachelor passes. This is to ensure that when our grade 12 learners exit the school, they do so knowing that they will be accepted in the institutions of higher learning.*

It is clear from the above passage that goal setting is taken seriously in this school. Doing seems to keep them focussed and committed to their teaching responsibilities.

With regard to how the principal's involvement in the teaching and learning process contributed to the school's academic performance, he was not shy to indicate that the principal is doing everything in his power to ensure that learners' interests are prioritised. He singled the new infrastructural development projects as some of the signs of the principal's commitment to ensuring that every learner of the school receives the best possible education. This is what he said:

> *He is trying his best. He always asks HoDs to come up with the programmes that will enhance the learner academic performance. There is also the emphasis on the improvement of the school infrastructure such as computer labs and science laboratories. As we speak now, the maths laboratory is in the pipeline.*

The interview with the head of department shows that the principal takes teaching and learning seriously at the school. This is in line with literature on instructional leadership which states that instructional leaders prioritise teaching and learning (see Bush, 2007; Jenkins, 2009; Muijis, 2010; Grobler and Conley, 2013) and disregard anything that does not contribute positively to this process (Jenkins, 2009).

Interviews with the teachers

While the teachers were interviewed individually, their interview discussions were juxtaposed against each other in order to identify the recurring themes about their experiences and perceptions of the leadership of their school principal and his contribution towards the academic achievements of the school. The two teachers were selected by the principal himself. The disadvantage with the 'snowball' sampling is that

teachers may have been selected because of the principal's belief that they will only give positive responses about his instructional leadership practices. This may have impacted on the data.

A supportive instructional leader

The dominant perception of teachers towards the instructional leadership of their principal is that that he is fully supportive. They had this to say:

Teacher A

> *Whenever I struggle with specific mathematics concepts, he, the maths teachers himself, never hesitates to offer his help.*

Teacher B

> *My principal [really] is very much supportive when it comes to teaching and learning—I have no reservations in this regard. I do not have any problems regarding his commitment towards our education.*

Principals are also teachers

What also came out from teacher A was that their principal has not stopped teaching despite his daunting administrative duties. She expressed this by referring to the fact that you are the teacher before you are the principal:

> *The fact remains: even if he is the principal, he still remains a teacher. He sometimes teaches certain classes.*

Also coming to the fore was that the principal's instructional leadership was not confined to the normal teaching and learning process but extended to other activities that have a direct effect on the instructional process. This is how the participants expressed this:

Teacher A

> *In extreme cases, we consult him when learner discipline escalates.*

Teacher B

> *He is one person who will always help you whenever you encounter any problems.*

What these two passages reveal is that instructional leadership in challenging circumstances takes different forms and one of those is to intervene in instances where the potential to disrupt the instructional process exists.

Responding to teachers' personal challenges

There is also an assumption by the principal of the school that taking an interest in his teachers' lives will lead to an even greater productivity by the teachers. Teacher B revealed this when he said:

> *What is also striking about him is that he takes interest in our personal lives as he is always that person who will ask how you are doing and where you have personal challenges, he is unhesitant to support you.*

From the above extract, it is clear that the school principal enforces what Northhouse (2010) calls the sociability leadership trait. According to this trait, a leader's quest is to build strong relations with people, taking interest not only in their professional lives but also in their personal lives. It also suggests that leaders always have to be sensitive to the people's needs (ibid).

Availability of appropriate instructional materials remains critically important

There was an agreement among the teachers that the availability of instructional materials at the school is very important. This statement found relevance when teacher A had this to say:

> *It is very helpful for every learner to have textbooks even though some do not use them. They are very important.*

Instructional materials alone cannot guarantee learner academic success

However, teacher A was quick to warn that instructional materials alone cannot guarantee academic learner success as this will depend on the attitude of the learners towards their education:

> *Instructional materials can only benefit learners who take their studies seriously. These are the learners who tackle subject content even before teachers tackle it—they are proactive.*

Cohen *et al*. (2003) support the teacher A's views when they argue that having the best instructional materials is of little use if the learners towards which they are aimed do not use them effectively to engage the tasks.

Both teachers highlighted the significant role of their school leadership in ensuring that instructional materials at the school were always available. One of the teachers further mentioned that their principal even supports teachers who recommend supplementary textbooks, among others, that may not have initially been allocated for when plans to buy the stationery were made. This is what they said:

Teacher A

> *But in all honesty, the school management does its utmost best to ensure that we do not experience difficulties in as far as the availability of instructional materials are concerned.*

Teacher B

> *Even if you have spotted the textbook that you believe will be useful for your learners, he will just ask you to send him the quotation so that it can be bought.*

Learner headcount matters

Teacher A also made an important point, one point which might inform us on how we understand and assess the effectiveness of an instructional leader in challenging circumstances. She highlighted that sometimes they experience a shortage of instructional materials at the school not because the principal has failed, but because the school had more than enough learners to admit. This is not surprising for a school

that almost every parent would love their child to go to owing to its outstanding academic pedigree. She put this as follows:

> *Sometimes we encounter supply challenges as the numbers of learners we have each year differ; this year the instructional materials may be sufficient while in the following year they may be insufficient because the increase in learner intake.*

Continuous professional development

When teachers were asked to give their account of the importance of professional development, they both agreed that continuous professional development is a worthy investment on oneself:

> Teacher A
>
> *It is really helpful because lifelong learning ensures that you are in tune with new ways of teaching. Let's say, for instance, I enrol for a course that touches on learner discipline, it means I will learn of new ways of maintain order in my classroom; especially now that corporal punishment is abolished in the schools.*
>
> Teacher B
>
> *There is a particular programme that I have gone to where we were tackling the difficult subject contents and it is through it that I am now able to confidently teach the commonly difficult electro-magnetism Physics content.*

There was also an acknowledgement that teacher professional development initiatives such as workshops offer teachers invaluable opportunities to share pedagogic ideas with other teachers. Teacher B sums this as follows:

> *It is also through these continuous professional development opportunities that we are able share ideas on how to best teach our subjects.*

Challenge to balance work with professional development activities

Although teachers acknowledged the significant contribution of continuous professional development, teacher A was quick to admit that is it really tough to balance work with studies, in particular. She put this as follows:

> *I must admit, though, that it is very tough to study while you work. I registered for honours but I ended up dropping my studies because I couldn't manage my time well.*

The importance of goal setting

When they were asked to share their views on the importance of goal setting towards the improvement of learner academic outcomes, both teachers unanimously agreed that it is an important element of maintaining their commendable academic performances. Teacher B said the following about this:

It is very important. For the past four years, we have been getting 90% pass matric rate and it is through the sheer focus, as a result of the targets we have set for ourselves.

The kind of learner a school has matters

While teacher B held no reservations about its significance, she was quick to warn that the achievement of academic goals for the school heavily depends on the kind of learners the school has at the particular time. She also noted that falling short of the set goals is not a true reflection of the teachers' commitment towards the goals; rather, it has a lot to do with the dynamics of the period within which the goals were set:

It is very helpful but it depends on the kind of learners we have. If, for instance, this year we have learners who are extremely determined, the school results will shoot up. What is also important to note is if the school does not do well in matric in a particular year, it does not mean teachers did not do their work, we would have worked extremely hard, even more than we actually could manage.

What we can learn from the above excerpt is that goal setting, while important, does not guarantee success, more especially for schools in challenging circumstances, because of frequent challenges that they have to navigate around.

The principal remains important to the school's academic successes

The two teachers did not doubt their principal's direct and indirect involvement in the teaching and learning process and the link thereof on the learner academic outcomes. Teacher A reiterated the point that she made earlier on that being the principal should not stop one from taking teaching responsibilities. These are their views on how the principal's involvement in the teaching and learning process has led to improved learner academic achievement:

Teacher A

> *As I have indicated earlier that as we are here, we are all teachers. As he is a trained maths teacher, he helped a lot in that particular department. If I have a problem with a particular concept, I go to him and collectively we will share ideas on how to teach it better. Sometimes he will even teach what I am not confident teaching. If he is approached by a teacher who does not teach mathematics to intervene in the teaching and learning process, he usually invites the Learning Facilitators (LFs).*

Teacher B

> *It has helped considerably. For instance, it is his willingness to allow us to make as many copies for our learners as we see fit that has allowed us to consistently perform well. He supports anything that advances the learners' interests in the teaching and learning process.*

Data analysis

The aim of this section is to identify and analyse themes that emerged from the data derived from the interviews. Mouton (2001, p. 137) defines data analysis as “breaking up the data into manageable themes, patterns, trends and relationships.” I interpreted themes that emerged from the data in order to make sense of the data and answer the research questions. Mouton further states that “data analysis also helps the researcher to answer the research question in a systematic way” (ibid). I used the present literature to describe, narrate and analyse the findings. In this study, analysis of data provided insights into what leads to successful instructional leadership in challenging circumstances. The process of identifying themes from the interview data included constantly going through the participants’ responses to the set questions in order to identify the recurring patterns that emerged across their interview data. Categories and themes were identified in line with what the existing literature says are the common characteristics of successful instructional leaders, aims and research questions of the study. Table 1.1 illustrates how the codes were extracted from the data.

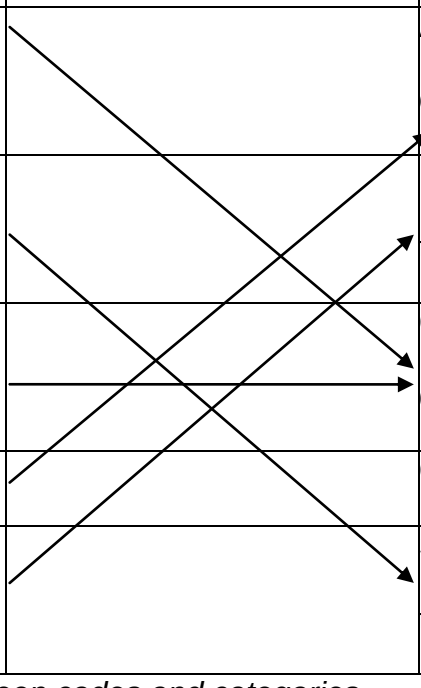
Codes		Categories
Results-orientation		Availability and effective use of instructional materials
Teaching and Learning		Effective use of instructional time
Capacity building		Continuous professional development
Instructional materials		Goal setting
Quality education		Strong focus on managing teaching and learning

Table 1.2: Relationship between codes and categories

Effective use of instructional time

This theme considers two things. Firstly, it considers how important the use of instructional time in the school is considered. Secondly, it considers the extent to which instructional time is believed to contribute to the learner academic performance. Instructional time is considered to be the amount of time in which learners are actively, successfully and prolifically engaged in the learning activities (Fisher and Berliner, 1985). Consistent with the preceding views is Gettinger (1995) who views instructional time as a time in which learners are fully focused on the learning activities with the aim of enhancing their content knowledge. There was a strong conviction in the school that instructional time had to be used effectively and efficiently. Teachers were expected to arrive in time for class and teach for the whole duration of the lesson every day. Likewise, learners were expected to respect their contact time and make full use of it.

It would appear from this data that it is no coincidence the school has consistently been on top of the academic ladder because available research evidence indicates that there is a strong relationship between the learner academic outcomes and the use of instructional time. As a case in point, Fleisch and Christie (2004) maintain that strong focus on the effective use of the teaching and learning time is by and large likely to improve the learner academic outcomes. This is in line with Colclough's and Lewin's (1993) insight that regular and higher teacher presence in the classroom, together with full use of teaching days, will result in an improvement in learner academic achievement.

Developing countries can witness an increase in the learner academic achievement if there is a strong emphasis on the effective and efficient use of instructional time (Fuller and Clarke, 1994). Fleisch and Christie (2004, p.107) further state that "while the increased number of hours that teachers and students interact does not guarantee that all students will acquire higher - order thinking skills it does mean that mote of the official syllabuses would be covered." It is clear from what this theme reveals to us that the main purpose of schooling, teaching and learning, in this school is religiously followed with the conviction that it is the only way learners' academic aspirations will be fulfilled.

It was encouraging to learn that the instructional time was a valued commodity at the school given that the study that was carried out by the DoE found that a high number of teachers often come late and leave early. In addition, they also spend only 46 per cent of their instruction time teaching and hardly ever teach on Fridays (McCarthy and Bernstein, 2011). This is in line with a study by Chisholm *et al*. (2005) which found that the majority of schools in challenging circumstances spent far less than required time

teaching. This is in contrast to a study by Christie *et al.* (2007) which found that successful schools in challenging circumstances highly respected by tuition time.

Goal setting

This theme looks at whether the principal set any goals for the school and how this was seen to have any positive effect on the learner academic performance. It further looks at how the set goals were transferred to the school community so that there is a buy-in of the vision. Bush (2010) regards vision as an important part of effective leadership. In agreement is Southworth (1993) who states that leaders who set goals for themselves are always motivated to work hard because their vision pushes them. Furthermore, Day, Hopkins, Harris and Ahtaridou (2009) states that a well-defined vision as well as the establishment of clear values could remarkably improve the staff morale and learner expectations, subsequently their academic achievement. Hill (2001) maintains that the main responsibility of an effective leader is to set the tone for the school by initiating a vision that will be shared by the whole school community.

Hallinger (2005) confirms the previous views by Hill when he states that successful instructional leaders regard goal setting as an important component of their leadership. Another study by Bendikson *et al*. (2012) found that schools that perform well have instructional leaders who take goal setting seriously. Taking these views into account, it would seem that the school that stands a chance of fulfilling its goals has to have an instructional leader who will ably communicate the vision to teachers and all other important stakeholders in the school. This is in line with Leithwood *et al's* framework where they noted that successful principals regard vision creation and goal setting as one of their prime activities.

The pronunciation of the school vision was evident in the school because the teachers and HoD were able to mention the school goals that the principal communicated with me in the interview session. For example, the HoD indicated how the school's main goal for this year was to obtain above-average Grade 12 results.

This shows how the school vision has filtered through to the rest of other stakeholders in the school. This was also clear when the principal mentioned that he does not set the goals for the school singlehandedly, but articulates them with the rest of the school community, including learners. This goes to show that the principal understood that he could not achieve anything noteworthy without help of others but needed to collaborate with other people. This is consistent with Fullan's (2002) insight that one of the best leadership qualities is the ability to build strong relationships with those who are being led. This is one powerful strategy to a successful school (ibid).

I will also argue that leaders who articulate their vision well to their colleagues ensure that there is ownership thereof and consequently the ownership of failures and triumphs. What the school principal seems to have successfully done was to ensure that a school vision was not owned by a select few but by the rest of the school community. This suggests that even when the principal happens to leave the school, there will be continuity in the school without major adjustments to the school culture. Goodman (1997) stated that the vision of the school should be co-created. To be convinced that the school vision was shared among the teachers and learners, the HoD kept referring to 'we' each time he referred to the goals of the school.

Managing teaching and learning and the availability and effective use of instructional materials

Under this theme, I place particular emphasis on how the school prioritised teaching and learning. It became apparent that the availability and effective use of instructional materials were the means of achieving their academic goals. Because of the inseparable nature of teaching and learning as well as instructional materials, I have decided to merge the theme of managing teaching and learning with the availability and effective use of instructional materials. Bush *et al*. (2010) maintain that the core responsibility of any school leader should be the creation of an enabling environment under which learning and teaching will take place. This finds credence in the work of Christie and Potterton (1997) in which they found that successful schools, specifically those in challenging circumstances, placed teaching and learning at the top of their priorities. A strong focus on teaching and learning was just as powerful as the availability and effective use of LTSMs.

For instance, the principal reiterated that the school could not have achieved what they have achieved without instructional materials. It was this belief that he mentioned one of his prime roles was to ensure that every learner at the school had access to these resources. The principal went on to say they can have the best teachers but if they did not have the necessary LTSMs, they were doomed as the school. “It even becomes difficult for learners to learn at home because they will not have textbooks at home”, the principal said. Although none of the participants refuted the views of their principal in as far as his role of ensuring each learner had the necessary learning material, teacher A was adamant that it is equally important to know how to use those available instructional materials as the availability thereof could not guarantee learner success. Taylor (2007);

Van der Berg (2008) confirm the teacher A's views when they assert that the availability of instructional materials has to equate to a substantial educational performance. It is clear from this view that the available instructional materials should be viewed in conjunction with the teachers' ability to use them wisely and creatively.

The school did not seem to have major, if any, problems with the availability of instructional materials. To confirm this, all the participants were full of praises for their principal for ensuring that the school had more than enough learning materials. This is what teacher B and the HoD said respectively:

> *He makes sure that whenever you have a lack of instructional materials in your classroom, there are made available in no time. Even if you have spotted the textbook that you believe will be useful for your learners, he will just ask you to send him the quotation so that it can be bought.*

> *In making sure that the school is fully equipped with instructional materials, he also excels. As we speak now, each and every learner has his or her own textbook. Before learners who will be doing grade 11 and 12 in the following year go on holidays for the festive season, they already have all the necessary learning material because they are already ordered.*

While the school has other LTSMs in place, the library was not functional as it was still undergoing the renovations. This places a disadvantage to the learners who cannot afford to buy additional materials for a broader point of reference on what they are being taught at school. It is important that learners have full access to these facilities as it

broadens their minds and allows for even richer educational experience. Christie and Potterton (1997) support these views when they state that a lack of additional LTSMs such as fundamental facilities like fully stocked libraries tends to promote rote learning among the learners because learners' learning will be confined to what their teachers teach them. This in consequent will mean learners' ability to think critically will be in jeopardy.

Continuous professional development

Available literature states that one of the important responsibilities of an instructional leader is to ensure that the teaching staffs are exposed to an array of professional learning opportunities in order to broaden their knowledge about the teaching profession. To support this assertion, Harris and Chapman (2002); Hallinger (2005); Bendikson *et al.* (2012) state that capacity building is one other important component of a successful leader. As an instructional leader, there were a few capacity building opportunities that the principal said he initiated at the school. The first of which was to encourage his teachers to register for additional academic qualifications. The second was to send teachers or bring in experts to hold workshops for his staff.

Mizell (2010) says while it is important to recognise the orthodox formal professional development activities such as attending workshops, conferences and seminars, she cautions against using that narrow view of professional development. Instead, professional development, according to her, can and should also happen informally as well. This can include discussions with colleagues on various pedagogic and classroom management issues such as managing discipline in classrooms and encouraging learner participation.

What was further interesting in the school was that capacity building was not reserved for teachers only but learners as well. Although this was not all that clear but the principal did mention that learners were included in the decision-making processes of the school and were invited, through the RCL, to weigh in on matters of the vision creation. This platform is necessary because it affords learners a rare opportunity to know what it takes to build a school as an organisation and which processes are followed when the decisions are taken in any successful organisation. Part of capacity building was also through motivational talk sessions that the principal and the teachers said were organised for them and learners. Other than that, teachers' and learners' academic efforts were frequently recognised at the school's annual prize giving ceremony. However, one of the teachers conceded that it was very difficult to balance work with further studies. This has led her to drop her studies along the way.

Chapter Overview

This chapter was divided into two sections, namely the case study findings and data analysis. I reviewed the patterns that have emerged out of the data. The study involved face-to-face in-depth interviews with the principal, one HoD and two teachers. Documentary analysis was used to obtain data for the school. The in-depth interviews and documentary analysis were applied in order to get a broader perspective about the state of instructional leadership at the school and how it has contributed to the school's academic achievements. The obtained data from the interviews suggested that the principal is seen as someone who is deeply committed to ensuring that each learner of the school, across all grades, gets the best possible education the school can offer. This was evident in how all the participants overwhelmingly provided a positive feedback

about their principal's role in ensuring that their school remained highly competitive in its academic endeavours.

What has also emerged strongly is the principal understanding that without his strong focus on the teaching and learning process, the school stood little chance of doing well academically. Surprisingly enough, the interview data provided nothing insofar as the principal's engagement with administrative tasks that have often been cited as one of the reasons why many of the principals in South Africa fail to focus on the core business of teaching and learning. This does not, however, mean that he was not concerned about his administrative duties.

What has also come out from the data is that the principal takes the well-being of his teachers seriously as it is his belief that doing so will lead to increases in teacher morale, ultimately leading to improvements in learner outcomes. This could be one of the reasons why the school has returned consistent Grade 12 results, producing percentage marks above 90 per cent in the last three years under his leadership. One other striking evidence from interview data revealed principal as someone who involves all the stakeholders in the school including learners and most importantly their parents. Interview data also revealed that teachers felt their principal fully supported them to carry out their teaching duties. Goal setting was also seen as the thread that held the school together and without which, it appeared as though the school felt it was impossible for them to achieve anything noteworthy.

In addition, five dominant patterns emerged in the data analysis section, namely goal setting, effective use of the instructional time, managing teaching and learning and effective use of instructional materials and continuous professional development. Although the participants offered varied responses to variables that might have contributed to the school success over the years, there was a general agreement that

their principal has played a major role in this process. What has also come out strongly was that teachers and learners had to respect the instructional time because it determined the extent to which everyone at the school will reach their goals. In addition, all the participants agreed that continuous professional development remains a critical part of their professional success.

However, a concern was raised that although capacity building was important, there were other things that were difficult to do such as studying further because of time constraints. What has also appeared to hold the case study school together was the strong focus on the management of teaching and learning; tied to this was the availability and effective use of instructional materials. Lastly, goal setting was considered a critically important component of the school success as the participants mentioned that without which the school could not stay focused on their targets.

In the next chapter, I aim to show how the research questions have been answered. To wrap up the study, I shed light on some of the limitations of this study and conclude with the recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The previous chapter provided a case study analysis of the school located in the township of QwaQwa, eastern part of the Free State province. The chapter presented the case study findings and went further by presenting the emerging themes out of the case study school. This study was located within the qualitative methodological approach, using interpretivism as a research paradigm. The two sampling methods that I used were purposive and convenience sampling. The sample size was four participants, the school principal, one HoD and two senior teachers. In this chapter, I aim to show how the research questions were answered. I go on to show the contribution of the study towards the knowledge economy around issues of instructional leadership in challenging circumstances. In addition, I highlight the recommendations for future research. Lastly, I discuss the limitations of the study.

The study was guided by the following aims:

- Identify successful instructional leadership practices in the challenging circumstances of one township secondary school in the Free State province of South Africa and the contribution thereof on the learner academic outcomes

- To also explore how instructional leadership is understood and conceptualised by the principal and teachers in the identified school in challenging circumstances.

Answering the research questions

The study was undertaken to address the following questions:

Question One:

How might the theory and practice of instructional leadership be improved in schools facing multiple deprivations?

Question two:

What instructional leadership strategies are commonly practiced in these schools and with what effects?

Question three:

In what ways are instructional leadership practices perceived to enhance learner outcomes in these schools?

Question One: How might the theory and practice of instructional leadership be improved in schools facing multiple deprivations?

Research on instructional leadership says successful instructional leaders execute the following key functions:

- Prioritisation of teaching and learning as the most important mission of the school
- A culture of continuous learning for teachers
- A culture of continuous learning for teachers (Halverson and Diamond, 2000).

At the back of this literature, it is important to compare to some of the findings of this study. While the participants agreed with the notion that continuous professional development was important for their up skilling, there was also a general feeling that time was an important factor. For instance, teacher A said she was forced to quit her studies because she just did not have enough time to focus on her studies. Although this problem is not exclusive to schools in challenging circumstances, it is most likely that many of the teachers in challenging circumstances will be tempted to fall short of their aspirations, in this case, developing their skills because many of opportunities are in urban areas— making it hard for them to access some of these opportunities. As a case in point, Masinere, Maringe and Nkambule (2014) state that the challenge of leading South Africa's schools in challenging circumstances is that training is very urban-centric, with many of the training institutions such as universities based in urban areas; as a result, making it hard for those far afield to access them.

What has also come out of this study is that instructional leadership is not and cannot be confined to a select few features because schools in challenging circumstances have unique set of challenges that they have to come to terms with on daily basis. For instance, a principal said sometimes he has to leave everything that has to do with the instruction to attend to emotional aspects of her teachers and/ or learners. He gave account of how sometimes learners come to his office crying because there are problems at home.

It would seem from this finding that instructional leadership practices in these contexts are dictated by the prevailing circumstances at the time. This point finds credence in the studies of Ramatseba (2012) and Mbokazi (2013) who argue that leadership in challenging circumstances is affected by myriad factors.

I therefore argue that while the theory of instructional leadership is empirically credible and helpful, we need to bear in mind that the context will by and large impact on how it is enacted in different circumstances. In case of the case study school, it was clear that the principal did not believe he could singlehandedly accomplish the aspirations of the school but needed to work with the whole school community, including parents. This collaborative leadership is consistent with the study by Mbokazi (2013) who found that the schools which he studied relied on the inputs from other stakeholders within the school community for the achievement of their academic aspirations. It became much easier to even minimise disciplinary problems because parents and the whole community which the learners came from were able to help the school where it fell short (ibid).

Question two: What instructional leadership strategies are commonly practiced in these schools and with what effects?

This question sought to gather evidence on the instructional leadership strategies that the township secondary school in question practiced and the effects thereof on the learner academic outcomes. The study found that there were five dominant instructional leadership practices that were evident in the case study school, namely continuous professional development, goal setting, effective use and availability of instructional

materials, effective use of the instructional time and strong focus on the management of teaching and learning.

While the school might not have had instructional materials in totality such as fully stoked library, the school principal clearly prioritised this component of instructional leadership as all the teachers were full of praises for his role in ensuring that the school did not run out of the TLSMs. This point is captured by Bush and Glover (2009) who suggest that one of the key activities of a successful instructional leader is to ensure that instructional materials are always available at the school. Interestingly, the study that was commissioned by UNESCO (2015) reveals that effective and successful teaching and learning are mainly made possible by the availability of good quality educational resources.

The study also reveals that managing teaching and learning is a serious business at the school. There is unwavering research evidence which suggests that if the school's main function of teaching and learning is not adhered to, chances of learner academic success will remain only fictitious. For instance, Fleisch (2008) states that if South Africa's chronic learning deficits are to be dealt with in the schools plagued by multiple challenges, classrooms should be the first point of contact. This point is also credited by Hoadley (2012) who states that South Africa's education stakeholders, including research community, desperately need to focus more on the learning and teaching spaces if every learner is to reach any academic success. One of the teachers in the participating group continuously mentioned that at their school, the principal remained a teacher before anything else. This suggests that the school considered anything that was not contributing meaningfully to the learning spaces secondary. It would seem from

this evidence by the teacher that leading teaching and learning process at the school was not considered to be the principal's sole responsibility. In support of the preceding views is Grant (2006, p.154) who contends that "schools can no longer be led by a lone figure at the top of the hierarchy." She goes on to say the only way schools can overcome their challenges is if everyone at the school felt their skills and experience were being valued by being given an opportunity to lead some aspects of change process (ibid).

The school also placed much emphasis on the optimal use of the instructional time. The HoD captured this when he said the principal and everyone at the school, including learners, understood that the effective and efficient use of the instructional time remained seriously important if they were to maintain their academic successes. There is also research evidence in which this point is emphasised (see Jansen, 2011).

There was also a belief by the school principal and the three other participants that goal setting remains one other critical factor that contributes to the general academic performance of the learners in that it helps the whole school community to stay in tune with their mandate of ensuring that each learner reaches the best possible academic success**.** This is consistent with the studies by Cuban (1988); Bush (2010) who regard goal setting as one of the primary roles of a leader. The distinguishing feature of how goals were set at the school was that everyone's contribution, including learners', was sought. This sort of decision making process can be regarded to as 'participative leadership'.

Leithwood *et al.* (1999) see this form of leadership only being effective where decision-making processes are a part of whole group, not certain individuals. A study by Huang *et al.,* (2010) reveals that there is a correlation between the workers' level of performance and the sense that their contribution in the workplace is valued. This is what I sensed in my interviews with the teachers as none of them never considered to leave the school because they felt they were valued people in the school. It would seem that instructional leadership best works when the principals do not centre their decision-making to themselves, but disperse it to their staff.

While the school's principal may have been instrumental in championing the vision (Bush, 2003; Harris, 2009), the encouraging sign was that everyone at the school seemed to own it. There is a body of knowledge which guards against a leader-orientated vision. For instance, Fullan (1992) argues that schools whose principals are the sole owners of a vision, however successful their school may be, eventually flounder once the principal leaves. With the evidence at hand, this seemed not to be the case at this school.

Lastly, there was a general agreement that the teachers could only become better pedagogically and in other areas of their professional life if they continuously take the professional development opportunities. What was concerning, however, was that there seemed to be over-dependence on conventional professional development initiatives such as workshops; failing to evolve into nuanced new ways of professional development. For instance, this is what the HoD said: "…workshops at the school are organised and in other instances subject specialists from the outside are invited to the school to help our teachers." Mizell (2010) says while it is important to recognise the

orthodox formal professional development activities such as attending workshops, conferences and seminars, she cautions against using that narrow view of professional development. Instead, schools should leverage on the skills-set they possess before sourcing expertise from outsiders (ibid). This is perhaps where the case study school could improve.

Question three: In what ways are instructional leadership practices perceived to enhance learner outcomes in these schools?

This question aimed to understand how the identified instructional leadership practices were perceived to enhance the learners' academic performance. These included: goal setting; continuous professional development; the principal's direct and indirect involvement in the teaching and learning process as well as instructional materials. There was unequivocal agreement among the participants that all these four variables had a tremendous role to play in the school's success. When the principal was asked to give his account on the role that instructional materials play in the academic achievement of learners, he held no reservations on their significance. His unequivocal position on the importance of the LTSMs is testament to the view that relevant instructional materials and the availability thereof play a critical role in the learners' academic performance.

To this end, Bush and Oduro (2006) contend that it is very difficult for teachers to teach and learners to do well academically if there is a lack of proper instructional materials. In addition, Myende (2012) assets that one of the yardsticks that can be used to measure if the principal is effective in executing her or his instructional leadership is their role in

ensuring the that the school has the necessary instructional materials. The HoD had this to say: “In making sure that the school is fully equipped with instructional materials, he also excels. As we speak now, each and every learner has his or her own textbook.”

However, while teacher A believed in the importance of having instructional materials, she equally believed “Instructional materials can only benefit learners who take their studies seriously.” This was because she believed there are some of the learners who, despite taking books with them to their homes, still did not study.

The principal was also asked to share his views on the role that his involvement in the teaching and learning process has had in the school’s academic success. He was quick to acknowledge the role that his predecessor has played in the school’s successes but also acknowledged his instrumental role in the current successes. The principal echoes what the South African Standards for Principalship (DoE, 2005) document stipulates as it is the incumbent on the principals to influence, direct and support the quality teaching and learning in order to allow learners to achieve the highest possible levels of achievement in their chosen fields of interest and serve their community and country as a whole.

One of the teachers had this to say about the principal’s involvement in the teaching and learning process: “If I have a problem with a particular concept, I go to him and collectively we will share ideas on how to teach it better. Sometimes he will even teach what I am not confident teaching. If he is approached by a teacher who does not teach mathematics to intervene in the teaching and learning process, he usually invites the Learning Facilitators (LFs).”It can be said that – based on the response by the principal

and the teachers' perceptions – that the principal played a significant role in ensuring that the schools remained one of the highest academic achievers in the Free State province.

As I have documented in the second research question, the participants strongly believed the goals that they set have had a positive impact in the school's scholastic successes. The same with professional development, there was a general agreement among the participants that investing their time – and at times money – in professional development initiatives was an important step in being better teachers. About this, Supovitz and Poglinco (2001) opine that teachers can learn better about their pedagogical habits and where they can improve through professional development activities. This eventually will lead to an improvement in the learner academic outcomes (ibid).

The contribution of the study

The following section discusses the empirical contribution of the study.

Empirical contribution

I deem it fit to first acknowledge that this was a small scale study thus its contribution to the body of knowledge is limited.

Within the context of schools facing multiple deprivations, this study was able to contribute to international debates on various ways in which schools facing challenging circumstances manage to rise above conditions that would otherwise seem impossible to overcome (Harris and Chapman, 2002). In particular, I found the following five

dimensions of instructional leadership that both the school principal and participant teachers attributed the school's outstanding academic success to over the years: the school prioritises the effective use of instructional time, continuous professional development, collaborative partnerships between parents and the school, prioritisation of quality teaching and learning, effective use of instructional materials as well as goal setting. These are some of successful instructional leadership features that can be suggested to other schools facing multiple deprivations. Likewise, there are studies which have consistently found a correlation between the improved academic performance of learners and the principal's preoccupation with these instructional leadership practices (see Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin, 1995; Elmore, 1997; Corcoran, Shields and Zucker, 1998; Cohen and Hill, 2000; Hallinger, 2005; Bush *et al.,* 2010; Bendikson *et al.,* 2012).

Another important contribution of this study is that it contributes to the limited body of knowledge on school leadership in post-apartheid South Africa (Christie and Potterton, 1997; Hoadley and Ward, 2009; Bush *et al.,* 2010).

Limitations of the study

Although this research achieved its goals, there were a few limitations that I inevitably encountered. I expand on three of these limitations, namely language issues, time constraints as well as the sample size.

Language issues

Although this was not a major problem to all of the participants, it became apparent to me in the process of the interviews that some of the participants could not fully express themselves in English solely because it is probably their second language or even third language. I feel they could have benefitted immensely had the interviews been conducted in a language that we could all understand, Sesotho. I acknowledge this language limitation in this study.

Time constraints

The available time within which this study was conducted is another constraint that I would like to acknowledge. I conducted the study at a time when the school was busy with their trial exams and this proved to somewhat disturb the school proceedings, although not substantially.

Sample size

One of the schools that I had initially thought would participate in the study failed to because the school principal said he was insanely busy. I feel this robbed me of a great opportunity to get rich information and compare their findings with their counterparts in case study B. Their reluctance meant I was left only with four participants for the study and this I feel is too small a sample size if I am to get a better understanding of what leads great successes in challenging circumstances. I therefore acknowledge I could have drawn on other data collection methods in order to do a more in-depth analysis.

Recommendations

In this section, I provide the recommendations for the principals facing challenging circumstances and for further research. The case study school is an exceptional school

that continues to be a beacon of hope for many of the schools in challenging circumstances. It is exceptional in that it has continued to produce outstanding results despite multiple challenges—challenges that others have hardly overcome. One of the striking features of the school to emerge out of the data was that of collegiality. It also became clear that the school highly regarded the importance of effective use of the contact time as one of their key ingredients of their outstanding achievements over the years. The school principal also hinted that collaborations with the learners' parents were an important factor in ensuring every learner's academic success. The case study school has shared with us some of the suggestions which may be helpful for instructional leaders in similar schools.

The following recommendations for principals are grounded in the study findings.

Recommendations regarding professional development

One of the concerns that emerged from the data is that professional development is highly rated in the school but the major problem was there seemed to be a sense of apathy. By this I mean there was an over-reliance on the district or provincial education department to arrange professional development workshops for them as opposed to initiating the process. While there is nothing wrong this this approach, it is advisable that the school adopt a new approach. Mizell (2010) suggests that schools should explore other avenues of professional development such as forming intra-school professional development activities whereby teachers as per their subject specialisations can arrange intra-departmental workshops in which they share ideas on how to improve their subject content knowledge and pedagogy.

Recommendation regarding teacher and learner moral support

As mentioned earlier, the principal of the school extended his instructional leadership to supporting the emotional needs of his staff and leaners. This is a plausible leadership practice; however, if it is not wisely approached, the principal could end up being overly overwhelmed by the problems that his learners and teachers bring forth. In consequent, this could lead to chaos in the school whereby everyone is in an unstable emotional state. I suggest the principal apply for the stationing of a full-time social worker at the school so that they can unburden the principal in this regard.

Recommendation regarding partnerships with other surrounding schools

Levin and Fullan (2008) advise that one of the many ways in which a systemic change in education can reach to other schools is if there is a sense of collaboration among the schools in the same district. Similar suggestion is made to the case study school. In an effort to see other schools in the same location as the case study school reach the levels of success that it has, I see it fit if the case study school can help a few other schools in their district with tools on how to perform better in their academics.

Recommendations for further research

It is no doubt school leadership in South Africa's township schools remains relatively under-researched (see Mbokazi, 2013). It is, therefore, imperative for education researchers to look into researching more about this area, in particular successful instructional leadership practices in schools facing multiple deprivations.

The following are the recommendations for further research:

1. This study focused exclusively on successful instructional leadership practices in a township secondary school. Thus, it will be useful if other future studies equally focus on successful instructional leadership in primary schools facing multiple deprivations

2. While it is useful to focus on township schools, it is equally important for future studies to look at successful leadership practices in rural settings. The hope is this sort of approach will provide a broader scope of what leads to successful instructional leadership practices in different contexts of South Africa.

Chapter Overview

What I intend to do in this section is to offer closing remarks on each of the research questions for this study. Before that, it is best to start with what I aimed to achieve through this study. Mainly, this study sought to understand how instructional leadership was able to act as a catalyst for consistent and commendable academic performance of one QwaQwa township secondary school faced by challenging circumstances. The findings contained in this study reveal that the case study school has shown that despite discouraging circumstances that some of our schools operate under; it is still possible to overcome them and produce the best possible academic results.

<u>How might the theory and practice of instructional leadership be improved in schools facing multiple deprivations?</u>

Because the study only focused on one school, it will be naïve to provide conclusive and general suggestions on how the theory and practice of instructional leadership can be improved in schools facing multiple deprivations. Nonetheless, what has emerged in this study is each one of the schools facing multiple deprivations probably faces a set of unique challenges that require a different approach from their instructional leaders. For instance, in the case study school, there were no major disciplinary problems and

vandalism was not evident at all—a feature that is dominant in many of these schools. This can be the case in another school in the same context and this would mean their principal may have to prioritise restoring discipline in the school.

What instructional leadership strategies are commonly practiced in these schools and with what effects?

The study found that there were five dominant instructional leadership practices that were evident in the case study school, namely continuous professional development, goal setting, effective use and availability of instructional materials, effective use of the instructional time and strong focus on the management of teaching and learning. In consequent, these findings strongly suggest that any school facing multiple deprivations and it is academically underperforming will probably benefit from perfecting these five features of instructional leadership.

In what ways are instructional leadership practices perceived to enhance learner outcomes in these schools?

Lastly, this study has revealed that there was a strong link between the above mentioned instructional leadership practices and the learner academic outcomes. One can, thus, conclude that one of the reasons why the case study school has consistently outperformed its peers was their constant focus on collectively setting clear and achievable goals, prioritising teaching and learning, ensuring that the necessary instructional materials were readily available and effectively used, ensuring that teachers and learners respected the instructional time and the principals exposing their teachers and other support staff members to different professional development initiatives.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Letter to the Principal



September 2015

Letter to the School Principal

Dear Sir

My name is Lehlohonolo Mofokeng. I am a Master's student in the School of Education at the University of the Witwatersrand.

I am doing research on 'Successful Instructional Leadership Practices in Challenging Circumstances: Case Studies of Two QwaQwa Township Secondary Schools'.

I hereby ask to interview you as the school principal and one of your heads of department and two senior teachers, that is, those who have been at your school for 3 years and beyond. These interviews will be audiotaped. The aim is to understand how you and school teachers understand and conceptualise instructional leadership and its

role in improving learner academic outcomes. I hope to be in your school for two days. One interview will last for the minimum of 30 minutes and the maximum of an hour.

The reason why I have chosen your school is because it has consistently performed well in matric despite it being in challenging circumstances such as teenage pregnancies, crime rates and high poverty levels. I therefore invite you participate in this research in order to gain better understanding on how instructional leadership has contributed to your school's consistent outstanding academic performance over the past three years.

The research participants will not be advantaged or disadvantaged in any way. They will be reassured that they can withdraw their permission at any time during this project without any penalty. There are no foreseeable risks in participating in this study. Please note that, however, the participants will not be paid for this study.

The names of the research participants and identity of the school will be kept confidential at all times and in all academic writing about the study. Your individual privacy will be maintained in all published and written data resulting from the study.

All research data will be destroyed between 3-5 years after completion of the project.

Please let me know if you require any further information. I look forward to your response as soon as is convenient.

Yours sincerely,

SIGNATURE

MOFOKENG LEHLOHONOLO

PO Box 10312

Mokodumela

9868

929221@students.wits.ac.za

Appendix B: Letter to the Teachers and Head of Department



September 2015

Letter to the Teachers and Heads of Department

Dear Mrs/ Ms/ Mr……..

My name is Lehlohonolo Mofokeng. I am a Master's student in the School of Education at the University of the Witwatersrand.

I am doing research on 'Successful Instructional Leadership Practices in Challenging Circumstances: Case Studies of Two QwaQwa Township Secondary Schools'.

I hereby ask to interview you for my research study on the topic mentioned above. These interviews will be audiotaped. The aim is to understand how you understand and conceptualise instructional leadership and its role in improving learner academic outcomes. I hope to be in your school for two days. One interview will last for the minimum of 30 minutes and the maximum of an hour.

The reason why I have chosen your school is because it has consistently performed well in matric despite it being in challenging circumstances such as teenage pregnancies, crime rates and high poverty levels. I therefore invite you participate in this research in order to gain better understanding on how instructional leadership has contributed to your school's consistent outstanding academic performance over the past three years.

Thi research will not advantage or disadvantage you in any way. I assure you that you can withdraw your permission at any time during this project without any penalty. There are no foreseeable risks in participating in this study. Please note that, however, your participation in this study will not result in any monetary rewards whatsoever.

Your name and identity of the school will be kept confidential at all times and in all academic writing about the study. Your individual privacy will be maintained in all published and written data resulting from the study.

All research data will be destroyed between 3-5 years after completion of the project.

Please let me know if you require any further information. I look forward to your response as soon as is convenient.

Thank you very much for your help.

Yours sincerely,

MOFOKENG LEHLOHONOLO

P.O Box 10312

Mokodumela

9868

929221@students.wits.ac.za

Appendix C: Participant's interview guide: Principal



School of Education

Principal's Interview Guide

Research title: Successful instructional leadership practices in challenging circumstances: case studies of two Soweto township secondary schools

1.1 The interview protocol:

1.1.1 My name is Lehlohonolo Mofokeng and I am a Master's student in the School of Education at the University of the Witwatersrand. Thank you for allowing me in.

1.1.2 The purpose of this study is to understand how instructional leadership contributes to the academic performance of the learners.

1.1.3 I want to assure you that whatever information I get from you will not be disclosed to anybody and will be highly confidential. It will solely be used for the purpose of this research. Also, only my supervisor and I will have access to the information. You will be interviewed separately in an office or empty classroom

and your name will not be used when writing the report or any write-up about the research. To this end, coding system will be used in place of your name. You have the right to say that you will not participate in the research again at any time without penalty, or refuse to answer any question that you are not comfortable with.

1.1.4 I will not take much of your time; the interview will last for the minimum of 30 minutes and the maximum of one hour.

1.1.5 I was wondering if you could allow me to audio-record our interview.

1.2 Biographical data on principal

A. Gender:

Female		Male	

B. Age group:

25-34		35-49		50-64	

C. Years of service in the teaching profession:

D. Years of service as a principal of present school:

E. Level of study:

Certificate		Diploma		Degree		Postgraduate	

1.3 School background information

F. School quintile

G. Learner number Female

Male

H. Age range of learners:

1.4 Research questions:

How is Instructional leadership conceptualised and understood in schools in challenging circumstances?	What is your involvement in the teaching and learning process?
What instructional leadership strategies are commonly practiced in these schools and with what effects?	What role do instructional materials play in determining the learners' academic performance?
How can a theory and practice of instructional leadership be improved in schools facing multiple deprivations?	What, in your view, is the link between continuous professional development by both you and your academic staff and learner academic outcomes?
	What role does goal setting play towards the achievement of academic goals for the school?
In what ways are instructional leadership practices perceived to enhance learner outcomes in these schools?	How has your involvement or lack thereof in the teaching and learning process contributed to the academic performance of learners?

Appendix D: Participant's interview guide: HoD



Head of Department's Interview Guide

Research title: Successful Instructional Leadership Practices in Challenging Circumstances: Case Study of One QwaQwa Township Secondary School

1.2 The interview protocol:

1.2.1 My name is Lehlohonolo Mofokeng and I am a Master's student in the School of Education at the University of the Witwatersrand. Thank you for allowing me in.

1.2.2 The purpose of this study is to understand how instructional leadership contributes to the academic performance of the learners.

1.2.3 I want to assure you that whatever information I get from you will not be disclosed to anybody and will be highly confidential. It will solely be used for the purpose of research. Also, only my supervisor and I will have access to the information. You will be interviewed separately in an office or empty classroom and your name will not be used when writing the report or any write-up about the

research. To this end, coding system will be used in place of your name. You have the right to say that you will not participate in the study again at any time without penalty, or refuse to answer any question that you are not comfortable with.

1.2.4 I will not take much of your time; the interview will last for the minimum of 30 minutes and the maximum of one hour.

1.2.5 I was wondering if you could allow me to audio-record our interview.

1.5 Biographical data on HoD.

I. Gender:

Female		Male	

J. Age group:

25-34		35-49		50-64	

K. Years of service in the teaching profession:

L. Years of service as the Head of Department of present school:

M. Level of study:

Certificate		Diploma		Degree		Postgraduate	

1.2 Research questions:

How is instructionalleadership conceptualised and understood in schools in challenging circumstances?	Please describe how is your principal involved in the teaching and learning process
What instructional leadership strategies are commonly practiced in these schools and with what effects?	What role do instructional materials play in determining the learners' academic performance?
How can a theory and practice of instructional leadership be improved in schools facing multiple deprivations?	What role does continuous professional development play to improve learner academic outcomes?
	What role does goal setting play towards the achievement of academic goals for the school?
In what ways are instructional leadership practices perceived to enhance learner outcomes in these schools?	How has your principal's involvement in the teaching and learning process contributed to the academic performance of the learners?

Appendix E: Participant's interview guide: Teachers



Teacher's Interview Guide

Research title: Successful Instructional Leadership Practices in Challenging Circumstances: Case Study of One QwaQwa Township Secondary School

1.3 The interview protocol:

1.3.1 My name is Lehlohonolo Mofokeng and I am a Master's student in the School of Education at the University of the Witwatersrand. Thank you for allowing me in.

1.3.2 The purpose of this study is to understand how instructional leadership contributes to the academic performance of the learners.

1.3.3 I want to assure you that whatever information I get from you will not be disclosed to anybody and will be highly confidential. It will solely be used for the purpose of this research. Also, only my supervisor and I will have access to the information. You will be interviewed separately in an office or empty classroom and your name will not be used when writing the report or any write-up about the

research. To this end, coding system will be used in place of your name. You have the right to say that you will not participate in this research study any further at any time without penalty, or refuse to answer any question that you are not comfortable with.

1.3.4 I will not take much of your time; the interview will last for the minimum of 30 minutes and the maximum of one hour.

1.3.5 I was wondering if you could allow me to audio-record our interview.

1.6 Biographical data on the teacher

N. Gender:

Female		Male	

O. Age group:

25-34		35-49		50-64	

P. Years of service in the teaching profession:

Q. Years of service as a teacher at the present school:

R. Level of study:

Certificate		Diploma		Degree		Postgraduate	

1.7 Research questions:

How is Instructional leadership conceptualised and understood in schools in challenging circumstances?	Please describe how is your principal involved in the teaching and learning process
What instructional leadership strategies are commonly practiced in these schools and with what effects?	What role do instructional materials play in determining the learners' academic performance?
How can a theory and practice of instructional leadership be improved in schools facing multiple deprivations?	What role does continuous professional development play to improve learner academic outcomes?
	What role does goal setting play towards the achievement of academic goals for the school?
In what ways are instructional leadership practices perceived to enhance learner outcomes in these schools?	How has your principal's involvement in the teaching and learning process contributed to the academic performance of the learners?

Appendix F: Emerging themes

Combined Findings	**Emerging Themes**
Combined Finding 1	Strong focus on the managing teaching and learning
Combined Finding 2	Availability and efficient use of instructional materials
Combined Finding 3	Continuous professional development
Combined Finding 4	Taking goal-setting seriously
Combined Finding 5	Full and productive use of the allotted instructional time

Appendix G: Consent form

Please fill in and return the reply slip below indicating your willingness to be a participant in my voluntary research project called:

I, _____ give my consent for the following:

Permission to be interviewed

I would like to be interviewed for this study. YES/NO

I know that I can stop the interview at any time and don't have to answer all the questions asked. YES/NO

Informed Consent

I understand that:

- My name and information will be kept confidential and safe and that my name and the name of my school will not be revealed.
- I do not have to answer every question and can withdraw from the study at any time.
- I can ask not to be audiotaped, photographed and/or videotape
- All the data collected during this study will be destroyed within 3-5 years after completion of my project.

Sign_____ Date_____

Appendix H: Candidature

Faculty of Humanities – Education Campus

Private Bag 3, Wits 2050, South Africa • **Tel:** +27 11 717 3018 • **Fax:** 0865533480 • **E-mail:** maropeng.maake@wits.ac.za

Mr Lehlohonolo Mofokeng
P O Box 10312
Mokodumela
9868
Free State

Student No: 929221
22 July 2015

Dear Mr Mofokeng

Master of Education by Coursework and Research Report: Approval of Proposal

We have pleasure in advising that your proposal entitled "**Successful instructional leadership practices in challenging circumstances: Case studies of two QwaQwa Township Secondary Schools**" was approved, and you have now been admitted to full candidature.

Please note that copies of your readers report have been forwarded to your supervisor(s)

I confirm that Prof Felix Maringe has been appointed as your supervisor.

You are required to submit 2 bound and 1 unbound copies/CD in PDF of your research report to the Faculty Office for examination and the deadline is 15 February 2016. The bound copies go to the examiners and are retained by them.

Your attention is drawn to the Senate's requirement that all higher degree candidates submit brief written reports on their progress to the Faculty Office once a year.

Please note that higher degree candidates are required to renew their registration in January each year. Keep us informed of any address changes during the course of the year.

Yours Sincerely

Maropeng Maake

Maropeng Maake (Mr)
Faculty Officer
Faculty of Humanities
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