

PRINCIPALS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR INSTRUCTIONAL
LEADERSHIP ROLE IN THE IMPROVEMENT OF
NUMERACY AND LITERACY IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

By

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PRETORIA

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DEDICATION

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ABBREVIATIONS

ANA	Annual National Assessment
APPA	Australian Primary Principals' Association
CAPS	Curriculum and Policy Statements
DBE	Department of Basic Education
FFLC	Foundations for Learning Campaign
HOD	Head of Department
IQMS	Integrated Quality Management System
LDE	Limpopo Department of Education
MEC	Member of Executive Council
PDE	Provincial Department of Education
PIRLS	Progress in International Reading Literacy Study
SACMEQ	Southern African Consortium on Monitoring Education Quality
SGB	School Governing Body
SMT	School Management Team
TIMMS	Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study

ABSTRACT

The aim of this research was to explore the principals' perceptions of their instructional leadership role in the improvement of literacy and numeracy in the Foundation Phase. This study was guided by a desire to find out and understand what principals perceive as their instructional leadership role in the improvement of literacy and numeracy. Although instructional leadership has been studied intensively, these studies have not explicitly considered principals' perceptions of this concept. Most of the research has tended to explain this phenomenon from other stakeholders' point of view. There has been very little research that has sought to understand how and in what ways principals view their instructional leadership role. As a domain of school leadership, instructional leadership is viewed by many as the primary role of principals which is meant to ensure effective and efficient teaching and learning.

The deteriorating level of learner performance in both national and international tests has prompted the South African ministry of education to redirect efforts and seriously consider the importance of basic numeracy and literacy skills. The Department of Basic Education introduced programmes, namely the Foundations For Learning Campaign, the Annual National Assessment and Action Plan to 2014 to address the problems of learners' inability to read, make basic calculations and write. This study is, thus, premised on the assumption that literacy and numeracy are prerequisites for learners' future learning.

To best understand instructional leadership, six primary school principals were purposefully sampled according to their schools' performance in the 2012 Annual National Assessment results. They were sampled as "good", "average", and "poor" performing schools. All these participants shared the same socio-economic background and were situated in the deep rural villages of Limpopo Province. Semi-structured interviews were used as a data collecting technique for the study.

The conceptual framework that guided my study is consistent with Weber's (1996) Instructional Leadership model, which consists of five leadership domains, namely:

- Defining the school's mission;
- Leadership in the curriculum and instruction;
- Promoting a positive learning environment;
- Observing and improving instruction; and
- Assessing the instructional programme.

It emerged from the findings of this study that although principals did, to a greater or lesser degree, apply instructional strategies and carry out instructional leadership roles, most of them did not have a solid theoretical understanding of the concept. The carrying out of their instructional leadership roles was mainly informed by past experience that taught them that these roles must be performed by a school principal. It further emerged that the principals' knowledge and perceptions of their instructional leadership roles alone could not account for poor performance in national and international tests. Other factors such as operational and administrative issues, including, but not limited to, shortage of textbooks, dilapidated infrastructure and over-crowded classrooms, also need to be considered and researched further.

KEYWORDS

Principals' perceptions
Primary schools
Instructional leadership
Instructional programme
Learner performance
School climate
School' mission
Staff development

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DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

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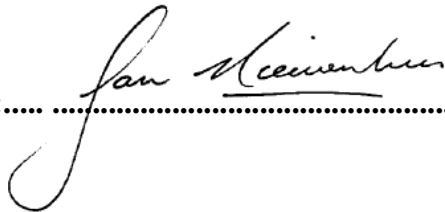
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I, Bevelyn Dube, declare that I was responsible for the editing of the thesis: *Primary school principals' perceptions of their instructional leadership roles in the improvement of literacy and numeracy*.



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CHAPTER 1

CONTEXTUALISATION AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

1.1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Although the country had scored an increase in the 2010 Matric results by attaining the targeted 60%, some Provinces did not. Empirical evidence suggests that this problem can rightfully be traced back to the first years of learners' schooling in the foundation and intermediate phases where South African learners are underperforming compared to learners in other countries. In his analysis of the education crisis, Nieuwenhuis (2010:15) claims that apparent ignorance of the importance of basic education in Mathematics and Literacy is one of the causes for this trend. According to the Southern African Consortium on Monitoring Education Quality's (World Bank, 2004) test, South Africa's educational quality lags far behind even much poorer countries like Mozambique and Botswana. It is placed at position eight and outperformed in both reading and Maths by seven of the participating countries in the region. This is despite the much higher expenditure per pupil than almost all the other participating countries (Soudien, 2008:5).

Chisholm (in Van der Berg 2008:146) indicated that in South African literature which is based on the country's participation in international evaluation studies, there is an "established trend" that South African educational performance is extremely weak. In the 2003 Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), out of 46 participating countries South Africa scored the lowest in both Maths and Science. South Africa was ranked 264 in Mathematics compared to an international mean of 467 and 244 in Science compared to an international mean of 474 (Martin, Mullis, Conzales & Chrostowski, 2004)

According to the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) conducted in 2006, South African learners' overall achievement with regard to the reading curriculum is far below the international average of 500 (Mullis, Martin, Kennedy & Foy, 2007). The above-mentioned statistical evidence of underperformance in relation to international standards has prompted the Department of Basic Education to take steps to address this concern. These steps are briefly described below.

All schools that achieve less than a 60% pass at Grade 12 are designated as “underperforming” and are the focus of special interventions across the country. Each provincial education department has to draw up an improvement plan to address the problem. In the Limpopo Province, the 2009/2010 Matric results district figures appeared as follows:

TABLE 1.1: MATRIC RESULTS PER DISTRICT FOR 2009 AND 2010

DISTRICT	2009	2010
Capricorn District	57.7%	64.4%
Vhembe District	55.4%	63.1%
Waterberg District	43.9%	41.4%
Mopani District	41.4%	41.4%
Greater Sekhukhuni District	40.3%	52.5%

Source: Limpopo Department of Education (2010)

According to the Limpopo Department of Education (LDE, 2010), the following problems caused the not-so- much improvement in results:

- Weakness in time management;
- Bunking and skipping of classes; and
- Absenteeism by both learners and educators.

As such, efforts have been put in place to improve the quality of results in various districts, with the MEC aiming to improve and attain a Matric pass rate of 60%. Although the province scored a 9.7% increase in the 2010 Matric results, the targeted 60% has not yet been attained. It is presumed that if the problem can be traced back to underperformance in primary schools, such interventions would yield fruits. The former Minister of Education, Naledi Pandor, did by process of law, publish and introduce the contents of the Foundations of Learning Campaign (Department of Education, 2008) whose purpose was to improve learners’ performance in reading, writing and numeracy in schools.

This campaign was a national response to national, regional and international studies that had shown, over a number of years, that South African children are not able to read, write and count at expected levels, and are unable to execute tasks that demonstrate key skills associated with Literacy and Numeracy (Department of Education, 2008).

The Minister of Basic Education, Angie Motshekga, has invited public comment on Action Plan to 2014, which is also aimed at improving the schools through achieving 27 national goals. Goals 1 and 2 focus on grades 3 and 6 learners' mastery of minimum language and literacy competencies through the Foundations for Learning Campaign (FFLC) and the Annual National Assessments (ANA) (Department of Education, 2010). The main focus of the campaigns is on primary schooling, in order to lay a solid foundation for future learning.

A matter of grave concern is the persistent poor performance of South African learners, not only in international tests, but also in national tests, as noted in the ANA results. Results from these tests on six million pupils in Grades 3 and 6 show that only 12% of Grade 6 learners can do maths properly (Mtsali & Smillie, 2011:10). According to this source, the literacy rate of grade 3s is 35% and for grade 6s, is 28%. The Minister of Basic Education, Angie Motshekga, indicated that the low levels of literacy and numeracy in primary schools were “worrying precisely because the critical skills of literacy and numeracy are fundamental to further education and achievements in the worlds of both education and work”(Mtsali & Smillie, 2011:10). Learners who struggle to progress in the system are likely to struggle in post-schooling education and schooling. This view harmonises well with Nieuwenhuis' metaphor of education as a Pandora's Box (Nieuwenhuis: 2010).

Foster and Young (2004) in Stewart (2006:3) maintain that “when goals are not met, people lose confidence in and tend to blame those believed to be responsible for leadership”. Contemporary educational reform places a great premium on the relationship between leadership and school improvement (Harris, 2004). The principal is the key to a good school. Barth (1990) in Alig-Mielcarek (2003) stresses the importance of effective instructional leadership by saying, “*Show me a good school and I will show you a good principal*”.

According to a presentation to Portfolio Committee on Basic Education (2010:8), literacy and numeracy are important building blocks in establishing an educational foundation for later learning (Department of Education, 2010). Hallinger, Bickman & Davis (1996:527) are of the opinion that principal leadership is critical to the success of educational programme. They go on to indicate that the success of schools as centres of learning rests mostly on the efficiency of instructional leaders to turn schools into centres of excellence. Hoadley, Christie & Ward (2008:163) contend that there is consensus in the US and increasingly also in South Africa that school managers play a crucial role in creating the conditions for improved instruction.

1.2 PURPOSE STATEMENT

A review of the empirical research of the past twenty years indicates that a principal's instructional leadership can make a difference in student learning (Alig-Mielcarek, 2003). Hallinger and Heck (in Paine, 2002) posit that considerable evidence exists that a strong instructional leader is a fundamental characteristic of an effective school. Although leadership in general explains only about three to five% of the variation in student learning across schools, this effect is actually nearly one-quarter of the total effect of all school factors (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). Improved education for learners therefore requires improved instructional leadership (Chell, 1995). Based on the above argument, the purpose of my research was to explore primary school principals' perceptions of their instructional leadership roles in the improvement of Literacy and Numeracy.

1.3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Main research question:

How do primary school principals see and describe their instructional leadership role in terms of literacy and numeracy?

Sub-questions:

- According to international best practices, what is the instructional leadership role of a primary school principal?
- What policies inform principals on their instructional leadership roles?
- How do school principals understand their leadership role in relation to teaching and learning?
- Can the perceptions of principals regarding their instructional role explain the poor performance of primary schools in both national and international tests?

1.4 THE RATIONALE

My interest in the study/research is rooted in my personal experiences as an educator in Modjadji Circuit under Mopani District in Limpopo Province. According to the targeted provincial norm, of the 24 circuits in Mopani District, Modjadji is among the underperforming circuits. The circuit scored 49.8% in the 2010 Matric results. According to a report by the Portfolio Committee on Basic Education (Department of Education, 2010:8), Literacy and Numeracy are important building blocks in establishing an educational foundation for later learning. Leithwood (in Roe & Drake, 1980) posits that school leaders are being held accountable for how well teachers teach and how much students learn. The blame to this quagmire can rightly be directed to principals who are key individuals to providing instructional leadership.

This research is, therefore, based on the above-claim that basic Literacy and Numeracy skills are the bedrock for future student-learning. It is devoted to addressing the deteriorating levels of achievement in Literacy and Numeracy as a prerequisite for future learner educational development. It is for this reason that the study is significant to schools, policy makers, communities, learners, educators, principals and any person with an interest in education.

1.5 DEMARCATION OF FIELD OF STUDY

This study focuses on the role of the instructional leader in the laying of a solid foundation for learning. It is for this reason that the study is interested in primary school principals' perceptions of their instructional leadership roles in the improvement of levels of achievement in Literacy and Numeracy. In order to get a holistic view of instructional leadership, voices of principals of performing, average and poor performing schools will be considered. The study is based on the supported and evidence-rich claim that a sound and solid foundation, especially in Literacy and Numeracy is a prerequisite for future student learning and good results (Department of Education, 2010:6).

1.6 DEFINING INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

Although this concept will be analysed in greater depth, it is important to provide a basic definition of what is meant by "instructional leadership". The term instructional leader is a construct which describes the primary role of the principal in the quest for excellence in

education (Chell, 1995:9). It involves all beliefs, decisions, tactics and strategies that principals use to generate instructional effectiveness in schools. Instructional leadership can be explained in both “narrow” and “broad” terms. Broad forms encompass organisational and teacher culture issues, whereas narrow forms restrict themselves to leadership, which focuses only on teacher behaviours which enhance pupils’ learning (Southworth, 2002:77). Murphy (1988) is of the view that instructional leadership encompasses everything that a principal does to support the achievement of students and the ability of teachers to teach. Murphy, Elliot, Goldring & Porter. (2007:179) are of the opinion that not all leadership is equal, but that a particular type of leadership is especially visible in high performing schools and districts. They label this “leadership for learning”, “instructionally-focussed leadership” or “leadership for school improvement”. Instructional leadership is a domain of leadership that is focuses on teaching and learning and, thus entails all activities and functions of the principal that affect and enhance student learning. It can be rightly concluded that the principal enjoys both direct and indirect effect on student learning.

1.7 LITERATURE REVIEW

1.7.1 Introduction

Current changes in the management of schools in South Africa make the principals’ tasks more complicated. There is a movement from centralised governance to a decentralised and school-based management model. The major task of schools remains the education of learners (Roe & Drake: 1980). For this major task to be accomplished, the management and leadership role of the principal becomes even more important. Effective management and leadership is the prerequisite for organisational success. According to Ubben and Hughes (1992:20), successful instructional principals coordinate the instructional programme, emphasise achievement, frequently evaluate pupil progress, provide an orderly atmosphere, set instructional strategies and support teachers

Blasé & Blasé in (Southworth, 2002:78) define instructional leadership as a blend of several tasks, such as supervision of classroom instruction, staff development, and curriculum development. School managers are being held accountable for how well teachers teach and how well learners learn. According to Leithwood and Riehl (2003), the leadership role of principals in schools is centred on student learning, that is both the development of academic knowledge, skills, important values and dispositions.

School leadership is deemed successful when it focuses on teaching and learning. The excellence of a school lies in how its internal processes work to constantly improve its performance. Griffiths (in Fullan, 2000) indicated that effective school principals create conditions to achieve school consensus on instructional programme, goals, and academic standards; maintain student discipline; buffer classrooms from outside interferences; allocate school resources effectively; know community power; and maintain appropriate relations with parents. According to Herman and Herman (in Roe & Drake, 1980) if school decision-makers are to make effective, efficient and high-quality instructional decisions, they must truly believe that schools exist for the core purpose of educating students well, be knowledgeable about the areas within which they are to make decisions, and they must possess the skills necessary to carry out the decisions once they are made.

Leithwood and Riehl in (Roe & Drake, 1980) go on to postulate that case studies of exceptional schools indicate that instructional leaders influence learning primarily by galvanising efforts around ambitious goals and by establishing conditions that support teachers and that help students succeed. The traditional top-down bureaucratic leadership style is no longer an effective decision-making structure. It is replaced by the collaborative decision making culture with the greater community and employee support. Decisions made by a group of stakeholders are more effective and efficient than those made by one person. Shared decision-making breeds shared and collective responsibility and ownership of the mission and vision of the institution. Fullan (2000) is of the opinion that effective principals share and develop leaders among teachers.

Contemporary educational reform places great premium upon the relationship between leadership and school improvement (Harris, 2009) From the above it is evident that principals are expected by law to promote the best interest of the school, which is to ensure the education of learners. It is clear that effective leaders exercise an indirect but powerful influence on the effectiveness of the school and on the achievement of students. While the impact of good leadership may be difficult to determine the effects of poor leadership are easy to see (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003).

1.7.2 The instructional leadership roles of the principal

Murphy (1998) is of the view that instructional leadership encompasses everything that a principal does to support the achievement of students and the ability of teachers to teach. As the instructional leader, the principal is the pivotal point within the school who affects the

quality of individual teacher instruction, the height of student achievement and the degree of efficiency in school functioning (Chell, 2010). Based on this statement, my study focuses on both direct (meditated) and indirect effects of principal leadership roles towards student learning, namely:

- Leadership in the curriculum and instruction;
- Promotion of continuous staff development;
- Creation of conducive school climate;
- Defining the school's mission; and
- Assessing the instructional programme.

1.7.3 Leadership in the curriculum and instruction

According to Weber (in Alig-Mielcarek, 2003), the principal is expected to offer curriculum support to staff and to monitor student achievement progress. Leadership in the curriculum must be consistent with the mission of the school. It is expected of the principal to make frequent visits to classrooms and to give suggestions on the improvement of quality teaching and learning. In so doing they can utilize the strengths of master teachers to provide or obtain assistance for teachers in need (Alig-Mielcarek, 2003:123).

Occasional modelling and demonstration of teaching techniques can yield good results. Principals should ensure that learners' contact time is maximally maintained through the drawing and adoption of timetables for both curricula and non-curricula activities. The utilisation of time should be considered an expenditure item for the learners as well as for the school. Alig-Mielcarek (2003) indicates that instructional time must take precedence above other school activities to guarantee student achievement. Together with teachers and curriculum specialists, the instructional leader should make tailored adjustments suited to students. There should be curriculum editing to ensure that there is a one-on-one relationship among what is being taught and what the students are being tested on.

1.7.4 Promotion of continuous staff development within the school

The overarching aim of staff development is the improvement of instruction through the promotion of both formal and informal training programme within the school. Olivia (1989) further indicates that "a major task of the principal is to develop a staff that can most effectively and efficiently help the student to learn how to become a productive and self-

sufficient individual”. According to Clarke (2007), staff development must be seen as an integral part of teachers’ professional lives, not just remediation. The aim should be the improvement of personnel to make the institution effective and efficient.

Professional development must include everyone who affects students’ learning and not only teachers. The principal must apply the principle of adult learning, growth and development to all levels of staff development (Blasé & Blasé, 1999). To guarantee effective and efficient instructional decision-making, the principal should be guided and informed by action research. Instructional leaders must engage in behaviours that inform staff about current trends and issues, encourage attendance at in-service workshops, seminars, and conferences, build a culture of collaboration and learning, and use inquiry to drive staff development (Sheppard, 1996; Blasé& Blasé, 1998). They should align staff development with standards, assessments and projects in the district. According to Borko (2004), research provides evidence that intensive staff development programme can help teachers to increase their knowledge and change their instructional practices.

1.7.5 Creation of positive learning climate

According to Alig-Mielcarek (2003:33), “Schools that were effective had atmospheres that were orderly, serious, quiet, and conducive to academic learning”. This means that principals must be deeply immersed in day-to-day school activities and buffer schools from outside interferences to ensure that the physical working conditions of teachers are appropriate to their status as professionals (Clarke, 2007:133). Teaching staff must be supported, supervised and evaluated to upgrade the quality of instruction.

The principal must ensure that the physical working environment of teachers is appropriate for educators’ status as professionals (Clarke: 2007). The school climate should be conducive for teaching and learning and the core human and social resources should be readily available. The principal is expected to create a school climate that fosters group development, teamwork, collaboration, innovation, respect and trust in staff and students. He/She should further use a broad-based approach that integrates reflection and growth in order to build a school culture of individual and shared examination of improvements attained.

According to Day *et al.* (2000) in Fullan (2002), the vision and practices of principals should be organized around a number of core personal values concerning the modelling and promotion of respect for individuals, fairness and equity, caring for the well-being and whole development of students and staff, integrity and honesty.

1.7.6 Assessing the instructional programme

Principals of effective schools are directly involved in monitoring student achievement, and they work with teachers to overcome achievement deficits. This will create constant data gathering of student progress and enable teachers to identify areas of remediation or enrichment. Herman and Herman (1998:112) indicate that instructional leaders shoulder the responsibility to ensure that the instructional pieces have a close degree of fit. This means that the curriculum should not be disjointed. The planned curriculum should be assessed to ascertain that the scope and sequence is adequately covered. It is the responsibility of the instructional leader to initiate and contribute to the planning, designing, administering, and analysis of assessments to evaluate the effectiveness of the curriculum. Continuous scrutiny of the instructional programme enables teachers to effectively meet students' needs through constant revision and refinement (Alig-Mielcarek, 2003).

Findings indicate that when instructional leaders monitored and provided feedback on the teaching and learning process, there were increases in teacher reflection, and reflectivity informed instructional behaviour and resulted in a rise in the implementation of new ideas (Blasé & Blasé, 1998; Sheppard, 1996).

1.7.7 Defining the school's mission

Effective leaders communicate school goals to staff, parents and learners through the use of formal and informal communication, for example, handbooks, staff meetings, bulletin boards and conferences. They create a mission that is clear and honest, which binds staff, students and parents to a common vision by offering them opportunities to discuss values and expectations. They share and distribute leadership among teachers (Fullan, 2000). They invite staff involvement and cooperation in planning courses jointly or departmentally. To ensure effective teaching and learning, instructional leaders formulate clear expectations of themselves and others. Principals who define and communicate shared goals with teachers provide organisational structures that guide the school towards a common focus.

1.7.8 Conclusion

Most of the existing research on instructional leadership is based on the general leadership roles of principals towards effective schools. My research, therefore, focuses two of the significant aspects of principal leadership, namely student learning and performance. It will provide lived experiences, thick descriptions and first-hand accounts of instructional leadership.

1.8 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The basic model that guided my study is consistent with the conceptual work proposed by Weber (1996). Weber in his research concludes that his work “suggests that even if an instructional leader were not packaged as a principal, it would still be necessary to designate such a leader”. According to Alig-Mielcarek (2003:44), Weber’s point is poignant in today’s educational arena of shared leadership and site-based management.

In this model, Weber has identifies five essential domains of instructional leadership; namely defining the school’s mission, managing curriculum and instruction, promoting a positive learning climate, observing and improving instruction, and assessing the instructional programme. Table 1.1 offers a summary of Weber’s (1996) Instructional Leadership Framework.

TABLE 1.1 WEBER’S (1996) INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP FRAMEWORK

Defining the school’s mission	Managing curriculum and instruction	Promoting a positive learning climate	Observing and improving instruction	Assessing the instructional program
The instructional leader collaboratively develops a common vision and goals for the school with stakeholders.	The instructional leader monitors classroom practice alignment with the school’s mission, provides resources and support in the use of instructional best practices, and models the use of data to drive instruction.	The instructional leader promotes a positive learning climate by communicating goals, establishing expectations, and establishing an orderly learning environment.	The instructional leader observes and improves instruction through the use of classroom observation and professional development activities.	The instructional leader contributes to the planning, designing, Administering, and analysis of assessments to evaluate the effectiveness of the curriculum

1.9 RESEARCH PARADIGM

According to Silverman (in Vivar, McQueen, Whyte & Armayor.2007), the most important consideration in selecting a research paradigm emerges from the aim of the study. This means that the choice of a research paradigm is dependent on the nature of the phenomenon to be studied. My study will follow the interpretive paradigm because it is based on principals’ philosophies, perceptions and assumptions about instructional leadership (Creswell, 2005). I was interested in describing, documenting and understanding principals’

perceptions with regard to their instructional leadership roles in terms of the roles identified in the theoretical framework. Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2007:19) maintain that social studies that strive to understand and interpret the world in terms of its actors follow the interpretive paradigm.

In this research conducted an exploratory study of primary school principals to understand and interpret their perceptions of instructional leadership. Cohen *et al.* (2007) go on to posit that “efforts should be made to get inside the person to understand from within”.

1.10 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

In order to link data to research questions and to locate my research in the empirical world I followed a qualitative design. This design was chosen because of its ability to supply the researcher with thick descriptions of real people in real situations in addressing the research problem. Unlike in quantitative approaches, generalisation is not an issue here. As indicated by Creswell (2005:213), I recorded information on self-designed protocols that helped me organise information recorded by participants in each question. Anti-positivist researchers are united in the view and belief that the social world can only be understood from the standpoint of the individuals who are part of the ongoing action being investigated (Creswell, 2005).

Based on the above-argument I conducted interviews with school principals and visited sites to collect data so as to get thick descriptions of their perceptions of instructional leadership in their natural setting (schools). A selection of principals from “good”, “average” and “poor performing schools”, provided as complete as possible an understanding of principals’ perceptions of their instructional leadership roles through thick descriptions and in-depth descriptions of leadership. Maree (2007) posits that the researcher not only considers the voice and perspective of one or two participants in a situation, but also the views of other relevant groups and their interactions.

1.11 DATA COLLECTION PLAN

To answer my research questions, I conducted an in-depth study of primary school principals in Mopani District at Modjadji Circuit. I used semi-structured interviews. Of the 24 circuits in Mopani District, Modjadji Circuit is one of the eleven (11) underperforming circuits with a 49, 8% Matric pass rate in the 2010 examinations. Provincial Annual

National Assessment (ANA) results conducted in primary schools in the circuit also indicate underperformance in Mathematics and Literacy. As is typical in qualitative research to study a few individuals to acquire thick descriptions, a total of six primary school principals within Modjadji circuit were purposefully sampled based on their school's performance in ANA. Creswell (2005) maintains that to best understand the phenomenon under study, the researcher must purposefully or intentionally select individuals and sites.

In this research I sampled primary schools in Modjadji circuit that feed secondary schools with learners according to their performance in ANA. Creswell (2005) maintains that one characteristic of qualitative research is to present multiple perspectives of individuals in order to represent the complexity of our world.

Maximal variation sampling was be utilised to sample schools that differ in the degree of learner achievement. One-on-one interviews were conducted with principals, using semi-structured questions so that participants could describe their experiences and perceptions unconstrained by the researcher's perspectives. The data was tape-recorded and brief notes were taken during the interviews (Creswell, 2005).I made fieldnotes of observations noted about the schools, that is, their appearances, discipline, cleanliness, routine operations, punctuality, etc.

1.12 DATA INTERPRETATION AND ANALYSIS

Classification of data is an integral part of analysis. In order to make sense of accumulated raw data from participants, I used the narrative technique. According to Nieuwenhuis(in Maree, 2010:103), the researcher tracks sequences, chronology, stories or processes in the data, keeping in mind that most narratives have a backwards and forwards nature that needs to be unravelled in the analysis. It should be borne in mind that data collection and analysis in qualitative research is a cyclic and iterative process. Data analysis is inductive in form, going from the particular to the general (Creswell: 2005:244). I organised, transcribed, saved and got to know the data as outlined by Nieuwenhuis (in Maree, 2007:104) in order to prepare my data for analysis.

According to Creswell (2005), the first step in data analysis is to explore the data. I read the data several times to be familiar with the information, in order to identify categories contained in the transcripts. I coded segments of data with descriptive words, and to do that, I was guided by Weber's conceptual framework. After verifying participants' perceptions of

instructional leadership I structured the analysed data and developed a diagram to illustrate the themes or categories. Lastly, I interpreted the meanings of the findings using the supporting evidence that emerged from data.

1.13 TRUSTWORTHINESS AND CREDIBILITY

According to Nieuwenhuis (in Maree, 2007:113), assessing trustworthiness is the acid test of the researcher's data analysis, findings and conclusions. To enhance the quality of the data, I sampled a combination of one-on-one interviews among principals of "good", "average" and "poor performing" schools. This provided me with thick descriptions of the concept under study. The sampling of principals from different schools in respect of learner achievement facilitated the crystallisation of responses about leadership and reduced bias.

Vithal and Jansen (2002:33) indicate the importance of returning draft reports to respondents for accuracy checks. After the interviews, I listened to the tape and review notes to identify gaps that needed to be explored in follow-up interviews. Participants were asked to verify and confirm their perceptions, beliefs and understanding as a way of checking for consistency. Engaging peer researchers to assist in the analysis and interpretation of data also ensured credibility.

1.14 LIMITATIONS

Reliance on self-reports from school principals about leadership can reflect subjective perceptions and socially acceptable responses rather than actual reflections of reality. It is for this reason that comprehensive fieldnotes were made of observations during the time that schools were visited to avoid bias and to generate thick descriptions of school leadership. The distance between schools, rural roads and general infrastructure and seasonal climatic conditions affected the study in an important way. Resources like a tape recorder may affect the study if precautionary measures are not accommodated, so, I tested it beforehand and arranged reserves.

Matric and ANA results are a limited measure of school quality and may not be strictly compatible due to issues of standardisation of question papers from one year to the other (Hoadley *et al.* 2008:144). Instructional leadership (overseeing teaching and the curriculum) is a domain of the principal's management role, and reliance, thereof, might lead towards a concerted and limited perception of the principal as a school manager.

1.15 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

In qualitative research, the focus is on the selection of people and sites in order to get thick descriptions of the phenomenon under study (Creswell, 2005). Gaining access to people and sites involves a wide range of ethical considerations. Among others, the following ethical issues were considered: Getting permission from the Provincial Department of Education to visit schools and conduct research among educators; applying for ethical clearance from the University of Pretoria; informed consent from respondents; guaranteeing respondent confidentiality, privacy and anonymity; prepublication access by respondents; and guaranteeing non-betrayal and deception of respondents.

1.16 LAYOUT OF THE RESEARCH

The study consisted of five (5) chapters as outlined below:

Chapter 1

Background of the study

Chapter 2

Literature review

Chapter 3

Methodological considerations

Chapter 4

Data analysis and findings

Chapter 5

Recommendations and conclusion

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW: THE ROLE OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP IN LEARNER PERFORMANCE

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Instructional leadership, as indicated in Chapter 1, is often viewed as an important strategy in improving schools in particular and education in general. In this chapter, I provide a brief overview of what instructional leadership entails and present some of the conceptualisations of instructional leadership found in the literature. The purpose of this exposition is to provide a framework for my research on primary school principals' perceptions of their instructional leadership role in the improvement of literacy and numeracy. In so doing different models of instructional leadership were explored. Much attention was directed at instructional leadership in primary schools, in particular with regards to Literacy and Numeracy. It is common knowledge that literacy and numeracy are prerequisites for successful future student learning.

According to Ubben and Hughes (1992:20), successful instructional principals coordinate the instructional programme, emphasise achievement, frequently evaluate pupil progress, provide an orderly atmosphere, set instructional strategies and support teachers. Blasé and Blasé in Southworth (2002:78), define instructional leadership as a blend of several tasks, such as supervision of classroom instruction, staff development, and curriculum development. School leaders are being held accountable for how well teachers teach and how well learners learn.

According to Leithwood and Riehl (2003), the leadership role of principals in schools is centred on student-learning that is both the development of academic knowledge, skills, important values and dispositions. School leadership is deemed successful when it is focuses on teaching and learning. The excellence of a school lies on how its internal processes work to constantly improve its performance. Griffiths (in Fullan, 2000) argues that effective school principals create conditions to achieve school consensus on instructional programmes, goals, and academic standards, maintains student discipline, buffers classrooms from outside interferences, allocates school resources effectively, knows community power, and maintains appropriate relations with parents.

According to Herman and Herman (in Roe & Drake, 1980), if school decision makers are to make effective, efficient and high-quality instructional decisions, they must truly believe that schools exist for the sole purpose of educating students well. They must be knowledgeable about the areas within which they are to make decisions, and they must possess the necessary skills to carry out the decisions once they are made.

Leithwood and Riehl (in Roe & Drake 1980) go on to postulate that case studies of exceptional schools indicate that instructional leaders influence learning primarily by galvanising efforts around ambitious goals and by establishing conditions that support teachers, and by helping learners succeed. The traditional top-down bureaucratic leadership style is no longer an effective decision-making structure. It should be replaced by a collaborative decision-making culture with great community and employee support. Decisions made by a group of stakeholders are more effective and efficient than those made by one person. Shared decision-making breeds collective responsibility and ownership of the mission and vision of the institution. Fullan (2000) is of the opinion that effective principals share and develop leaders among leaders. Contemporary educational reform places a great premium upon the relationship between leadership and school improvement (Harris, 2009).

From the above-argument it can be concluded that effective leaders exercise both direct and indirect roles in the effectiveness of schools and on the achievement of learners. The subject of leadership has attracted considerable interest internationally and nationally. There has been an abundance of research looking at what constitutes effective school leadership (Harris, 2004; Marks & Printy, 2003).

Despite the volumes that have been written on principals' leadership, the nature of the principals' effects on student learning remains poorly understood (Hallinger *et al.*, 1996:529). Most of these studies have tried to reveal the concept of the principal's leadership roles from the voice of stakeholders. I strongly agree with Southworth (2002) that "we cannot know what effective leadership means unless and until we include the stakeholders' perspectives and their constructions of leadership". If leadership is a social construct, then we need to make it truly social by considering the lived experiences and voices of the concerned individuals. We need to hear more accounts of individuals working in different ways and contexts over time (Southworth, 2002).

The South African education system is moving to the stage referred to by Granston (cited in Odhiambo & Hii, 2006) as “the golden age”, and it has become necessary that we understand perceptions of principals themselves regarding effective instructional leadership. While the impact of good leadership may be difficult to determine, the effects of poor leadership are easy to see (Leithwood, 2003). My study, therefore, aims at providing thick descriptions of instructional leadership in the form of principals’ lived experiences and first-hand accounts.

2.2 DEFINING INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

Researchers usually define instructional leadership according to their individual perspectives and the aspects of the phenomenon which interest them (Yukl, 1998 in Alig-Mielcarek, 2003). This view is supported by Weber (1987a) who says that “the strength of leadership models in identifying the sort of issues confronting leaders, their responses and the objective sets of behaviours leaders regularly display”. Researchers define instructional leadership through the traits, behaviours and processes a person needs to have to lead a school effectively. As such, a multitude of definitions and conceptual models exist depending on individual perspectives and areas of interest of researchers.

Broadly speaking, instructional leadership can be seen as a process, a set of tasks or roles, or a specific focus of a school principal. Instructional leadership in primary schools, thus, is a process and a set of the principal’s tasks aimed at establishing a solid foundation for learners’ future learning. This entails ensuring that learners gain an understanding of phonics, basic calculations, reading and writing skills.

As a process, instructional leadership evolves and expands. It consists of the principal’s behaviours that set high expectations and clear goals for student and teacher performance, monitor and provide feedback regarding the primary function of schools, and help create and maintain a school climate of high academic performance (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Weber, 1997; Blasé & Blasé, 1999b). Common denominators among different definitions and models of instructional leadership include, but are not limited to the following functions; defining the school mission, management and leadership in the curriculum, creation of a positive learning climate, observing and improving instruction, and assessing the instructional programme.

According to Ubben and Hughes (1992:20), successful instructional principals coordinate the instructional programme, emphasise achievement, frequently evaluate pupil progress, provide an orderly atmosphere, set instructional strategies and support teachers. When instructional leadership is viewed as a set of tasks or roles, numerous variations are found in the literature. Blasé and Blasé (in Southworth, 2002:78) define instructional leadership as a blend of several tasks, such as supervision of classroom instruction, staff development, and curriculum development. Keefe and Jenkins (in Weber, 1987b) posit that instructional leadership is the principal's role in providing direction, resources and support to teachers and students for the improvement of teaching and learning in schools. Finally, Hallinger and Murphy (1985) distinguish three dimensions in instructional leadership, namely defining the school mission, managing the instructional programme, and promoting the school climate. Murphy (1990) in (Mielcarek, 2003) built an instructional leadership framework which consisted of four dimensions which were broken down into sixteen different roles or behaviours.

Instructional leadership as a particular focus is described by Murphy *et al.* (2007) as a domain of leadership that is focuses on teaching and learning. The principal is viewed as the primary source of educational expertise. The role of the principal is to maintain high expectations of teachers and learners, supervise classroom instruction, coordinate the school curriculum and monitor student progress (Barth, 1986 in Marks &Printy, 2003). It is the kind of leadership that is directly related to the process of instruction where teachers, learners, and the curriculum interact (Weber, 1987). The focus of instructional leadership is again related to sets of tasks and functions. It encompasses those actions that a principal takes, or delegates to others, to promote growth in student learning. Principals of primary schools are expected to provide leadership focussed on the acquisition of basic skills and knowledge so as to guarantee student future learning.

Instructional leadership can also be viewed more broadly. Kim (2002), Elmore (2000) and Spillane *et al.*(2000) view the instructional leadership role of the principal as extending beyond the scope of the school principal to involve other stakeholders (Reading First Notebook,2005:1). They further indicate that leadership should be seen as the domain of a number of actors at the school level, and that it is not intended to be the sole domain of the principal. The principal works with leadership functions that are sometimes shared and sometimes not shared, either de facto or intentionally (Weber, 1987:7).

Glickman (1992) (in Blasé & Blasé 2009:35), supports this view by describing ideal instructional leadership as a collaborative endeavour enacted in a supportive environment that leads to an “all-school action plan”.

More recent research, as indicated by Weber (1996), has approached the topic by investigating what instructional leaders *do*, what they *believe*, and how they *interact* within the context of a school and community. The effects of principal leadership should be examined in terms of theoretically relevant frameworks, as well as outcomes (Hallinger & Bickman, 1996). Based on the above-definitions, instructional leadership in primary schools would, therefore, entail observations of lessons in practice, creation of a positive learning environment, assessing and evaluating educator and learner performance, and the collective development of the mission and vision of the school. As an instructional leader, the principal is expected to spearhead school developments and innovations. It is expected of primary schools and principals to pioneer and craft learners’ future learning through the development of reading, writing and counting skills.

2.3 MODELS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

A multiplicity of conceptual models that demonstrate instructional leadership exist. In the previous section I have indicated that this study was informed by the view that instructional leadership must be seen as a process, a set of tasks or roles of the principal aimed at effective teaching and learning as the core business of schools. Based on my focus on the improvement of numeracy and literacy in primary schools, selected elements of other views from proponents of instructional leadership were taken into consideration in developing the conceptual framework for the study.

2.3.1 Hallinger and Murphy’s model (1985)

This model consists of three broad categories or dimensions of leadership practice, namely (1) defining the school’s mission, (2) managing the instructional programme, and (3) promoting the school climate. Ultimately a three-fold classification of principals’ effects on learner achievement was developed vis` a vis` (a) direct effects which are principals’ actions that influence school outcomes, (b) mediated effects which affect outcomes indirectly through other variables, and (c) reciprocal effects in which principals and teachers affect each other and ultimately the outcomes.

Leadership practices contribute to the outcomes desired by schools, but the contribution is always mediated by other people, events and organisational factors such as teacher commitment, instructional practices or school culture (Southworth, 2002:78). The following aspects from this model will be taken into consideration in the theoretical framework:

- a) Defining the school's mission: The purpose is to indicate how and why the mission is developed. This will further explain and indicate all the activities that will be geared towards the attainment thereof, that is, the laying of a solid foundation for student future learning.
- b) Promoting the school climate: This will focus on factors within and outside the school that promote or inhibit teaching and learning. The criterion will further focus on what instructional leaders perceive as their roles in promoting a conducive climate for student future achievement.

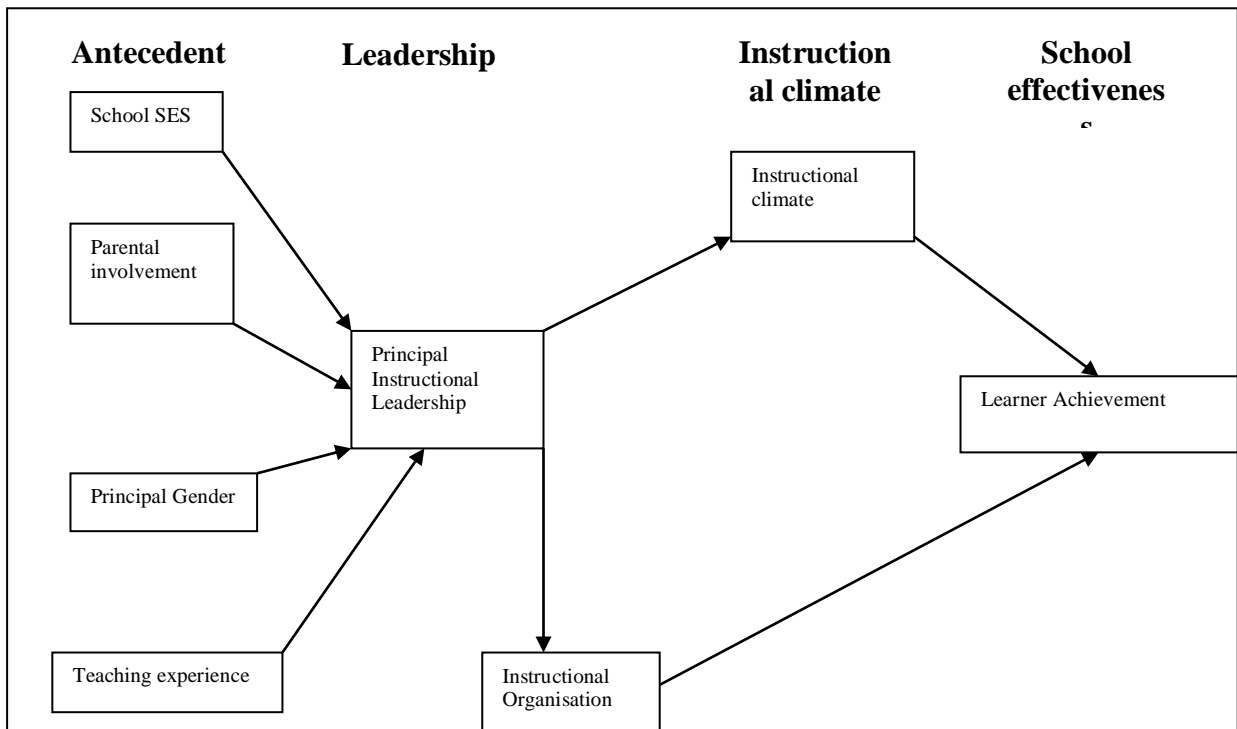
2.3.2 Bossert *et al.*'s model (1982)

This model shows the principal's leadership and management behaviours as the result of personal factors, school district relationships and policies, and community characteristics (Weber, 1987:8a). It incorporates contextual and personal antecedents of principal leadership, a principal's leadership construct, in-school factors related to teaching and learning, and student achievement outcomes as indicated on page 22.

2.3.3 Murphy's model (1990)

Murphy's model was developed through a synthesis of literature from effective schools. However, it was not been empirically tested. His framework incorporated four dimensions of instructional leadership broken into sixteen different roles and behaviours (Alig-Mielcarek, 2003). Table 2. 1 offers a schematic illustration of the instructional leadership model of Murphy.

FIGURE 2.1 BOSSERT ET AL.'S MODEL OF PRINCIPAL EFFECTS ON ACHIEVEMENT



Source: Bossert, *et al.*, 1982

TABLE 2.1 MURPHY'S MODEL (1990) OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

Developing mission and goals	Managing educational production function	Promoting an academic learning environment	Developing a supportive work environment
Framing school goals. Communicating school goals.	Promoting quality instruction. Supervising and evaluating instruction. Allocating and protecting instructional time. Coordinating the curriculum Monitoring student progress	Establishing positive expectations and standards. Maintaining high visibility. Providing incentives for teachers and students. Promoting professional development.	Creating a safe and orderly learning environment. Providing opportunities for meaningful student involvement. Developing staff collaboration and cohesion. Securing outside resources in support of school goals. Forging links between the school and the home

Source: Alig-Mielcarek, 2003

2.3.4 Weber's model (1996)

The basic model that guides my study is consistent and guided by the conceptual work proposed by Weber (1996) in Mielcarek,(2003)(see Table 2.2) In this study, instructional leadership should be viewed as a process which encompasses all the tasks and roles played by the school principal towards the attainment of the vision and mission of the school. This kind of leadership is poignant in today's educational arena of shared, site-based and distributed leadership. There are two assumptions that underlie this model, namely (1) the principal is the prime instructional leader, and (2) the principal works with leadership functions that are sometimes shared and sometimes not shared, either in de facto or intentionally (Weber, 1987a).

This framework consists of five domains of leadership which are relevant to my study, namely defining the school mission, managing curriculum and instruction, promoting a positive learning climate, observing and improving instruction, and assessing the instructional programme. These dimensions are further broken down into different roles and behaviours as illustrated below:

TABLE 2.2 WEBER'S (1996) INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP FRAMEWORK.

Defining the school's mission	Managing curriculum and instruction	Promoting a positive learning climate	Observing and improving instruction	Assessing the instructional programme
The instructional leader collaboratively develops a common vision and goals for the school with stakeholders.	The instructional leader monitors classroom practice alignment with the school's mission, provides resources and support in the use of instructional best practices, and models the use of data to drive instruction.	The instructional leader promotes a positive learning climate by communicating goals, establishing expectations, and establishing an orderly learning environment.	The instructional leader observes and improves instruction through the use of classroom observation and professional development activities.	The instructional leader contributes to the planning, designing, administering, and analysis of assessments to evaluate the effectiveness of the curriculum.

Source: Alig-Mielcarek, 2003

2.4 THE INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP ROLES OF THE PRINCIPAL

The overriding philosophy of this study is that the core function of schooling is teaching and learning (Smith & Andrews, 1989). Roe and Drake (1980) contend that “instruction of the students and learning by the students is the supreme reason for the school’s existence...” The quality of learning and teaching can only come about as a result of effective and efficient leadership of the instructional leader.

The role of the instructional leader is to help establish, develop, and maintain a teaching staff that will provide the best possible opportunities for teaching and learning (Paine, 2002:210). Principals are directly accountable and responsible for the academic achievement of learners. Their role is to stimulate and support those involved in teaching and learning in order to achieve the goals of the school. To succeed they need a sound knowledge of learners and the learning process.

Fink and Resnick (2001:2) argue that sound knowledge of instruction alone is not enough to upgrade teaching within the school, but principals also need “special qualities of leadership, recruiting teachers loyal to the idea of professional development and building relationships so that staff is able to discuss specific improvements in a non-judgemental manner”. Instructional leadership is thus not only concerned with a particular set of knowledge and skills, but, more importantly, also with the type of person – the values, attitudes and beliefs of principals.

Murphy (1988) is of the view that instructional leadership encompasses everything that a principal does to support the achievement of the students and the ability of teachers to teach. Generally, such functions focus on setting school-wide goals, providing the resources needed for learning to occur, supervising and evaluating teachers, coordinating staff development programmes, and developing collegial relationships with and among teachers (Wynn De Bevoise, 1984 in Weber, 1987b). As the instructional leader, the principal is the pivot point within the school that affects the quality of individual teacher instruction, the height of student achievement and the degree of school functioning (Chell, 1995). This role covers the establishment and maintenance of teaching staff, which in turn provides the best possible opportunities for teaching and learning (Paine, 2002). Principals work with educators and learners to develop anticipated levels of achievement and behaviour.

Among different perceptions and definitions of instructional leadership are common denominators. The general aim is to improve and maintain conditions that encourage student learning. Lezotte *et al.* (1980) (in Weber, 1987) argue that principals have an influence on student outcomes primarily through their efforts to improve instruction and create a positive learning climate. According to Ubben and Hughes (1992:20), successful instructional principals coordinate the instructional programme, emphasise achievement, frequently evaluate pupil progress, provide an orderly atmosphere, set instructional strategies, and support teachers.

Based on the above-argument, my study is focussed on the following dimensions of principals' leadership, which are poignant in today's educational arena of shared and distributed leadership:

- Defining the school's mission;
- Leadership in the curriculum and instruction;
- Promoting a positive learning environment;
- Observing and improving instruction; and
- Assessing the instructional programme.

2.4.1. Defining the school's mission

A school's mission is a succinct statement of what the school aspires to achieve. A school mission statement defines what the school sets out to achieve and the way it organises and musters support to achieve it. The mission statement is aligned with their educational goals. Most school mission statements are overly vague to the point of being unable to provide any direction to the school. Others are too lengthy and cumbersome. The best are specific, distinctive, and succinct (<http://pressingpause.com/2010/02/26/school-mission-statements/>). Effective leaders communicate clear goals and expectations to staff, parents, learners and themselves through the use of formal and informal communication, for example, handbooks, staff meetings, bulletin boards and conferences. They consistently demonstrate a commitment to academic goals. Principals who define and communicate shared goals with teachers provide organisational structures that guide the school towards a common focus. Smith and Andrews (1989) posit that effective instructional leaders use easily understood language symbols that communicate a sense of purpose so that "everyone shares ownership of the school".

The mission of the school should serve to head everyone in the same direction. Locke and Latham (in Alig-Mielcarek, 2003) assert that goal setting is an effective way to increase motivation and performance among educators and learners. They further posit that goals increase attention to the attainment of the task, increase the effort expended on goal relevant activities, increase persistence to achieve, and increase the development of strategies to attain the goals.

Articulating a mission, reminding people of the theme, and helping people to apply the theme to interpret their work, are all major tasks of principals in loosely coupled systems (Weber, 1987a). This means that instructional leaders should guide the day-to-day functioning of the school. They should engage other stakeholders in the realisation of the mission. Effective instructional leaders create an environment in which both educators and learners share a clear mission. There should be a collaborative agreement by all as to what the purpose of the school is, and what beliefs the purpose is built on. According to Paine (2002:198), all stakeholders should be involved in school's organisation, planning, and curriculum delivery. Effective leaders share and distribute leadership among teachers and invite staff involvement and cooperation in planning courses jointly or departmentally (Fullan, 2000). Collaborative engagements breed collective responsibility and ownership, which are a recipe for organisational success. Instructional leaders communicate missions by expressing their importance to stakeholders.

Weber (1987:13) argues that a statement of mission means little without a plan to bring it into reality. This view is supported by Smith and Andrews (1989:16) who indicate that effective instructional leaders should strive to make the mission a reality. There should be interplay of the mission and practical action in successful schools. The net effect of mission communication is to bond students, staff members, parents, and the community as believers in the work of the school (Smith & Andrews, 1989). Effective leaders should engage other members in the realisation of the mission. This implies that the mission should be clear for everyone to understand. Frequent articulation of the mission can promote accountability and a sense of personal ownership and instructional improvement (Alig-Mielcarek, 2003).

2.4.2 Leadership in the curriculum and instruction

Leadership in the curriculum involves being familiar with content areas, instructional goals, and the whole range of approaches that can be used to meet those goals. It must be consistent with the mission of the school. The task of the principal is the improvement of the curriculum and teaching as well as leading the school in making decisions about the learning that is to go on in the school (Mazzarela in Paine, 2002:213). Instructional leaders need to have a sound knowledge of learners, the curriculum, and the learning process if they are to be effective (Paine, 2002:212). Principals must have a vision of academic excellence and inspire educators and learners to strive towards similar goals.

This view is supported by Alig-Mielcarek (2003:44) who indicates that the principal's repertoire of instructional practices and classroom supervision offers teachers the needed resources to provide students with opportunities to learn. According to Acheson (in Weber, 1987) a principal needs to have knowledge and skills in three areas when observing and evaluating teachers, namely planning with teachers, observing instruction, and providing feedback.

An effective instructional leader's knowledge must be credible to teachers. This implies that leaders must be experts on general principles of teaching and learning. To facilitate good teaching, the instructional leader must stay abreast of new developments and strategies for improving instruction. The leader must know the latest trends in instructional media and technology, invest time in reading, attend courses and develop new skills... (Keefe and Jenkins in Paine, 2002). Alig-Mielcarek (2003) goes on to indicate that effective instructional leaders demonstrate the ability to evaluate and reinforce appropriate and effective instructional strategies by knowing and sharing the latest research findings with staff. They help teachers use current research in best practices and instructional strategies to reach goals for student performance. In primary schools, principals are expected to have a mastery of basic grammatical, phonetic and mathematical skills to best assist teachers to lay a solid foundation of future learning.

They need to provide informed advice and communicate priorities for improvement. Griffiths in Fullan (2000) maintains that instructional leaders should make frequent visits to classrooms and give suggestions for improving the quality of teaching and provide instructional guidance. They must be actively involved in all aspects of the instructional

programme and stay abreast of new developments in materials and strategies for improving instruction. Weber (1987) is of the view that the major task of the instructional leader is to recognise options available to teachers and then select, with teachers, those that best fit the constraints provided by the school environment. This indicates that leaders should have knowledge of instructional methods and trends. Together with teachers, they should coordinate the curriculum through aligning school goals with national goals outlined in the Action Plan to 2014 (Department of Education, 2010).

Frequent monitoring of both teachers' work and student progress can yield positive results. Occasional demonstration and modelling of teaching techniques can also yield good results. Principals should ensure that learners' contact time is maximally maintained through the drawing of timetables for both curricula and non-curricula activities. The utilisation of time should be considered an expenditure item for the learners, as well as for the school. Alig-Mielcarek (2003) indicates that instructional time must take precedence above other school activities to guarantee student achievement. Together with teachers and curriculum specialists, the instructional leader should make tailored adjustments suited to students. There should be curriculum editing to ensure that there is a one-on-one relationship between what is taught and what is being tested.

Paine (2002) posits that a wise principal may find it advantageous to give the leadership function to another in the interest of the total situation. Master teachers may be delegated with responsibilities in areas in which they excel. Theodore Roosevelt (as cited in Roe&Drake,1980) indicate that “ the best executive is the one with sense enough to pick good men to do what he wants done and then the self-restraint to keep from meddling with them while they are doing it”. Effective leaders give praise and credit where it is worth for a job well done.

2.4.3. Creation of a positive learning environment

Lezotte, *et al.* (1980) in Weber (1987) defines a learning climate as “the norms, beliefs, and attitudes reflected in institutional patterns and behaviour that enhance or impede student learning”. Freiberg (1999) supports this view by indicating that “school climate is like the air we breathe- it tends to go unnoticed until something is seriously wrong”. The concern for the climate or atmosphere of the school and its effect on the student and the learning environment has been a concern of the educational community for many years (Freiberg, 1999:1).

Brookover (1978) in Hallinger *et al.* (1996) supports this viewpoint by adding that instructional climate comprises “those facets of a school that shape the attitudes and behaviours of staff and students towards instruction and learning”. Studies of teacher expectations have shown that principals play a key instructional role by shaping teachers’ attitudes concerning students’ abilities to master school subject matter through raising teachers’ expectations for student learning (Purkey& Smith, 1983 in Hallinger *et al.* 1996).

The most important factor that affects students’ learning is the set of beliefs, values and attitudes that teachers and learners hold about learning (Weber, 1987). This implies that in schools where expectations are low, the attitudes of teachers and learners can form a vicious circle referred to by Weber (1987) as a “destructive self-fulfilling prophecy”. “Schools that were effective had atmospheres that were orderly, serious, quiet and conducive to academic learning” (Alig-Mielcarek, 2003:33).

The principal is the key to promoting an environment that is conducive to student learning (Chell, 2010:19). The creation of such a setting does not just happen; it takes the continued effort of both the principal and the staff to identify factors that create, and those that inhibit the development of a positive climate. It takes cooperative team work to develop strategies to promote the desired climate or to overcome the inhibiting factors (Chell, 2010). Many agents, including the teacher, parents, and older students, principal, outside speakers, and enthusiastic alumni are involved in the development of the esprit de corps (Freiberg, 1999:1-2). Effective instructional leaders must be deeply immersed in day-to-day activities and buffer schools from outside interferences to ensure that the physical working conditions of teachers is appropriate to their status as professionals (Clarke, 2007:133).

Smith and Andrews (1989) are of the view that the principal who displays strong instructional leadership creates a climate of high expectations in the school, characterised by a tone of respect for teachers, students, parents and the community. Every school must believe that all students can learn and that all teachers and administrators can help them. A school staff must share a common belief and high expectations about student achievement, and explicitly communicate that belief. High expectations are a fulcrum point that supervisors can use to pry teachers and staff away from unhelpful, discouraging habits of instruction (Weber, 1987). According to Alig-Mielcarek (2003:32), effective schools avoid actions and activities that do not work, and are committed to implementing teaching strategies that do.

To maintain an excellent learning climate, instructional leaders must raise teachers' expectations of students, communicate high expectations to all students, and establish an instructional programme that requires a mastery of objectives. Principals must use their professional knowledge and skills to create good schools where all students can grow to their full potential. The leadership of the principal is also critical in improving the workplace for teachers. The school climate must be conducive for teaching and learning, and the core human and social resources should be readily available.

Principals are expected to create school climates that foster group development, teamwork, collaboration, innovation, respect and trust in staff and students. They must use a broad-based approach that integrates reflection and growth in order to build a culture of individual and shared examination of improvement. According to Day *et al.* (2000) in Fullan(2002) the vision and practices of principals should be organised around a number of core personal values concerning the modelling and promotion of respect for individuals, fairness and equity, as well as caring for the well-being and whole development of students and staff.

Rewards and recognition add to the motivation and academic press of both teachers and learners. This is linked to high student achievement. Effective instructional leaders help their teachers to organise their classrooms in ways that foster the learning of all their students. They engage teachers in pre- and in-service stages to adopt ways of working that can take account of all learners in class, including those experiencing difficulties in learning. Each of the dimensions of instructional leadership describes roles and behaviours of the instructional leader that guide the creation of a school climate that promotes an emphasis on academic rigour (Alig-Mielcarek, 2003:71). They are all positively related to the academic press of a school.

Morris, Crowson, Porter-Gehrie and Hurwits (1984) regard the following as factors which bear directly on the effectiveness of a school: academic emphasis; a regular, rigorous and consistent student reward and punishment structure; a clean and tidy environment; policies emphasizing student responsibilities and participation; and staff cooperation in planning courses jointly and departmentally.

2.4.4 Observing and improving instruction

When done well, observations and feedback are among the best forms of instructional leadership (Weber, 1996). One way to help teachers improve instruction is through supervision and observation. This process starts with instructional leaders establishing trusting and respectful relationships with the school staff. To change teaching practice and make an impact on student achievement, instructional leaders must build an open and honest culture of learning and develop skills in specific practices within their individual schools (Fink & Resnick, 2001).

In addition to improving teacher performance, observations can be psychologically and socially beneficial as well. They offer teachers a sense of excitement about performing work that matters, and can reflect on principals as well. Teachers may be accorded professional rewards (as in advancement, recognition, or collegiality) or bureaucratic consequences. Effective instructional leaders must be actively engaged in the improvement of classroom activities that enhance learning. As change agents principals can facilitate change through class observation by providing legitimate and descriptive feedback for the teachers to consider and reflect upon. Blasé and Blasé (1999:13) indicate that by giving post-observation feedback to teachers, leaders “*hold up the mirror*” and are “*critical friends*” who engage in thoughtful discourse with teachers. This will lead to instructional improvement. They must demonstrate the ability to evaluate and reinforce appropriate instructional strategies. The evaluation system must be firmly established and frequent evaluation of teaching and learning should be monitored.

Supervising and evaluating instruction comprises activities that provide instructional support to teachers, monitor classroom instruction through informal classroom visits and align classroom practice with school goals (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). Effective instructional leaders are directly involved in monitoring student achievement and work with teachers to overcome achievement deficits (Herman & Herman, 1998). They work with teachers and curriculum specialists in making tailored adjustments suited to the students.

Weber (1987) posits that the idea of instructional leadership means very little unless leaders are willing and able to observe teachers, offer advice about problems, and make formative evaluations that encourage and pinpoint areas to improve. Regular observation and evaluation of students and teachers enables leaders to make instructional decisions and to identify areas of remediation and enrichment.

Instructional leaders must model their teaching as an example of what and how to do things (Southworth, 2002). This implies that they must monitor teachers by looking at weekly plans, visiting classrooms, examining samples of learners' works, observing the implementation of school policies and reviewing tests and assessment information. This further enables leaders to intervene in a supportive or corrective manner when this seems necessary.

Observations are opportunities for professional interactions with teachers. Professional development must include everyone who affects student learning, not only teachers. According to Clarke (2007), staff development, not just remediation, must be seen as an integral part of teachers' professional lives. Blasé and Blasé (in Southworths, 2002:79) strongly believe that instructional leadership is concerned with teaching and learning, including the professional learning of teachers, as well as student growth. Good instructional leaders use inquiry to drive staff development (Sheppard, 1996; Blasé & Blasé, 1998). According to Borko (2004) research provides evidence that intensive staff development programmes can help to increase their knowledge and change their instructional practices. In their focus on improving instruction, effective instructional leaders use multiple sources of information to assess performance, that is, they use data to become more effective leaders and to make decisions regarding policy and curriculum. Effective leaders function as leaders with direct involvement in instructional policy (Smith & Andrews, 1989). As an instructional resource, the principal is actively engaged in the improvement of classroom circumstances that lead to the quality of teaching and learning. He/she views resource provision in terms of maximizing instructional effectiveness and student achievement. Principals must make the necessary resources available for quality instruction. Paine (2002:240) maintains that the instructional leader is usually involved in designing and structuring the school timetable in order to allocate classes to educators for subject teaching. Effective leaders mobilise resources to enable the school and its personnel to be most effective in meeting academic goals.

Bird and Warren (in Weber, 1987:209) maintain that effective observation occurs in an environment in which there is agreement on five points, namely (1) the positive value of observation, (2) its place in the organisation, (3) its nature and relevance for teachers, (4) the professional norms that it may strain, and (5) the time constraints on adequate observations.

2.4.5 Assessing the instructional programme

As a principal, one must critically question the success of the instructional programmes and determine what changes need to occur. It is the primary task of instructional leaders to assess and revise instructional programmes in schools. This involves ways of following up the results of instructional planning and teaching in schools. Continuous scrutiny of the instructional programme enables teachers to effectively meet students' needs through the constant revision and refinement (Alig-Mielcarek, 2003). Herman and Herman (1998:112) indicate that instructional leaders shoulder the responsibility of ensuring that instructional pieces have a close degree of fit. This means that the curriculum should form a collective whole and not be disjointed. The planned curriculum should be assessed to ascertain that the scope and sequence is adequately covered. In South Africa, there is very little room for principals to change the curriculum. A single policy document is drawn nationally to replace the current Subject and Learning Area Statement known as Curriculum and Policy Statement (CAPS).

2.5 INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

Recently South African and international educational reforms were shaped by the need for governments to deliver quality education in the context of high rates of technological advances and globalisation (Cuming *et al.* 2006). According to Hill (2000), literacy has benefited from a renewed interest among political leaders in ensuring high standards of basic education as a precondition to national prosperity and social stability. Many countries have developed future-oriented policies to deliver anticipated educational outcomes deemed necessary for citizens to engage effectively in a world of change. Assessment of student achievement, programme evaluation, and rigorous monitoring were deemed essential.

A study of elementary teachers in thirty-three Seattle schools showed that student gains in reading and mathematics were higher in schools whose principals were seen as strong leaders than in schools with "weaker" leaders (Andrews *et al.*(1986)(in Weber, 1987). Leithwood and Riehl (2003:1) have this to say, "scratch the surface of an excellent school and you are likely to find an excellent principal. Peer into a failing school and you will find weak leadership". This view is supported by Robinson, Lloyd and Rowe (2008) who insist that leadership should not be radically disconnected from the core business of teaching and

learning. The closer instructional (educational) leaders get to the core business of teaching and learning, the more likely they are to have a positive impact on student outcomes.

According to a survey undertaken by the Australian Primary Principals' Association (APPA) and the Centre For Applied Education Research at the University of Melbourne (1998) the most positive actions that could be taken to ensure that literacy and numeracy are given priority within the school curriculum were (1) to increase funding, (2) to increase access to appropriate professional development and training, (3) to increase the provision or access of specialist and support staff, and (4) to reduce overcrowding of the curriculum (Hill, 2000).

Bossert *et al.* (1984) identify four characteristics of effective schools as follows:

- They have a school climate that is conducive to learning- i.e., one that is free from disciplinary problems and vandalism;
- They have a school wide emphasis on basic skills instruction;
- They have the expectation among teachers that all students can achieve; and
- They have a system of clear instructional objectives for monitoring and assessing students' performances.

Information regarding the performance of South African students in international tests was perceived to be generally negative. South Africa is not among the top League of Nations in both numeracy and literacy. In the Trends in International Maths and Science Study (TIMSS, 2003), South African learners scored the lowest out of 46 participating countries. South African learners further scored far below the international average out of 500 in the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS, 2006).

Case studies of “turn around” schools and interventions into teaching and learning invariably credit school principals with considerable responsibility for effectiveness (Edmonds & Maden 1979 Robinson *et al.* 2008). The public and politicians are vesting more confidence in the capacity of instructional leaders to make a difference in student outcomes (Robinson *et al.* 2008:636). Of grave concern is the persistent poor performance of South African learners, not only in international tests, but also in national tests as noted in the Annual National Assessment (ANA) results. The Minister of Basic Education, Angie Motshekga, indicated that the low levels were “worrying precisely because the critical skills of numeracy and literacy are fundamental to further education and achievements in the world of both education and work” (Mtsali & Smillie, 2011).

Learners who struggle in the foundation phase are likely to struggle in post-schooling education and schooling. This view harmonises well with Nieuwenhuis' metaphor of education as a Pandora's Box (Nieuwenhuis, 2010). According to this view, once the process of struggling has begun, it will generate many more unmanageable problems. High levels of basic education in both numeracy and literacy are essential for students' future learning.

ANA results provided a stimulus for the department to pay attention to a number of deficiencies in Literacy and Numeracy. Through these results, the rationale for improvement in numeracy and literacy were established. The Ministry of Education developed intervention programmes and drew policies which involved the setting of standards and national targets over a finite period of time (FFLC of 2008; Action Plan to 2014 of 2012). The FFLC provides clear directives on minimum expectations at each level of the General Phase of schooling to the entire education system. Action Plan to 2014 describes what should be achieved by 2014 to improve schooling in South Africa. It focuses on a set of goals, targets and activities required by the Education Department, schools and civil society to achieve national goals. Goals 1-13 deal with better school results, especially in numeracy and literacy, and aim to better learner enrolment in schools. Goals 14-28 deal with the things to be done to achieve the 13 output goals. Inferentially, they deal with principals as instructional leaders who are responsible and accountable for the attainment of the output goals.

Action Plan to 2014 is aimed at promoting more rigorous monitoring of the quality of learning, time use in schools, teachers' professional needs, and grade repetition among learners. Schools are expected to re-focus their missions and re-design how they operate so that meeting their standards becomes their main priority. This harmonises well with the principal's instructional role of setting high expectations of teaching and learning that is, the adoption of "zero tolerance of failure" policies.

One of the visions of these campaigns is to see a principal who ensures that teaching in the school takes place as it should, according to the national curriculum, but one who also understands his/her role as a leader whose responsibility is to promote harmony, creativity and a sound work ethic within the school community and beyond (Action Plan to 2014). Research conducted by Hallinger *et al.* (1996) indicates that on average, female elementary school principals are more actively involved in instructional leadership than their male

counterparts. Several explanations for this phenomenon have been suggested in literature. For example, female principals tend to spend more years in the classroom prior to becoming principals than males; and female principals are better able to communicate with a predominantly female teaching force at the elementary level (Hallinger *et al.* 1996)

2.6. CONCLUSION

As “headmasters” or “headmistresses” of schools, principals are held accountable for the whole instructional programme. The buck stops with them. Contrary to early predictions, instructional leadership has demonstrated impressive staying power as a core concept guiding both practice and leadership (Hallinger, 2010). Instructional leaders need to support teachers during curriculum change. The major challenge in this task is the resistance of the faculty. Innovations upset established, sometimes hard won ways of teaching (Weber, 1987:20). Chell (1995) maintains that as the instructional leader, the principal is the pivotal point within the school who affects the quality of individual teacher instruction, the height of student achievement, and the degree of efficiency in school functioning.

Dwyer (1986) (in Hallinger *et al.* 1996:533) contend that successful instructional leaders exercise more higher-order thinking in their leadership roles than their typical counterparts. They connect their daily on-the-job practice with their goals for students. Instructional leaders’ priorities are expressed in their day-to-day actions. According to Blasé and Blasé (2009), instructional leaders are deeply committed not only to enacting school improvement and reform, but also to enhancing the professional community in schools. They talk openly and frequently with teachers about instruction, provide resources, manage time, support teachers and learners, and implement action research to inform instructional decision-making.

Most effective leaders switch the leadership styles flexibly to get the best results. Blackbourne (2000) (in Roe & Drake (1980) is of the idea that to be successful, leaders must be flexible in order to stay at the crest of a change wave. Fullan (2002) indicates that successful principals have (1) inclusive and facilitative orientation, (2) an institutional focus on student learning, (3) efficient management, and (4) combined pressure and support. The most important personnel task of the principal is to help and develop a staff that can help the student to learn how to become a productive, self-sufficient individual in line with the corporate plan of the department, and also to be globally competitive in the global economic arena.

Much has been written in literature concerning the importance of instructional leadership. Clearly, improved education for children requires improved instructional leadership (Chell, 1995). If the goal is to have effective schools, then attention must be paid at ways to improve instructional leadership. Each of the dimensions of instructional leadership describes roles and behaviour of instructional leaders which guide the creation of a school climate that promotes teaching and learning. While traditional responsibilities still have to be met, priorities should be shifting toward instructional issues that will impact classroom instruction and student achievement (Reading First Notebook, 2005:2)

McEwan(1998), after studying over five hundred Illinois principals, identified the following tasks and skills as being most critical to success in principalship: evaluating staff performance; setting high expectations for students and staff; modelling high professional standards; establishing and maintaining vision, mission, and goals; and maintaining high visibility.

Different scholars approach and define instructional leadership from different perspectives depending on their interests. All the aspects or dimensions share the same denominators and are interactive. They affect one another and are separated for the sake of discussion (Weber, 1987:7a). Blasé and Blasé (2009:367) are of the view that each of the instructional leadership strategies and roles has strong enhancing effects on teachers emotionally, cognitively, and behaviourally.

Although my study focuses on the perceptions of principals regarding their roles in improving Numeracy and Literacy I would expect other scholars to explore other stakeholders' perceptions and effects as a way of ensuring collective engagements in the laying of a solid foundation for South African students.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In Chapter 2, I reviewed the literature on the instructional leadership roles of principals. This chapter is aimed at discussing and describing the research design and methodology I used to answer the research question. The choice of methods depends on the research question, aims, methodologies, the type of information required, and an evaluation of the human and material resources available for the project. Issues relating to data collection, sampling, research tools used, ethical considerations, data analysis and interpretation are also highlighted.

3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The study explores primary school principals' perceptions of their instructional leadership roles in the improvement of Literacy and Numeracy. The overarching question that I needed to explore was: How do primary school principals perceive their instructional leadership role in the improvement of Literacy and Numeracy? In order to answer this question, the following sub-questions guided me:

- According to international best practices, what is the instructional leadership role of a primary school principal?
- What policies inform principals on their instructional leadership roles?
- How do school principals understand their leadership role in relation to teaching and learning?
- Can the perceptions of principals regarding their instructional role explain the poor performance of primary schools in both national and international tests?

To locate my research in the empirical world and to best understand instructional leadership, I selected a qualitative approach. This approach is concerned with discovering and understanding the meanings seen by those who are being researched on as well as comprehending their views and perspectives of the world rather than that of the observers (Smit, 2001).

Nieuwenhuis (in Maree, 2010) is of the view that “a choice of the research design is based on the researcher’s assumptions, skills and practices”. The interpretative nature of the study warranted that a qualitative design be adopted because it has the potential to explore principals’ perceptions holistically.

The research explored the voices, interpretation and meaning that principals gave to their instructional leadership roles in schools. This enabled me to best understand the principals’ lived experiences. McMillan and Schumacher (1997:554) support this view when they argue that to obtain primary data the researcher has to interact with the participants in their naturalistic and participant-oriented environments.

I decided to collect data in the form of words rather than numbers to capture the richness and complexity of principals’ perceptions and experiences (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997:43). A qualitative approach was chosen for this study because of its ability to supply thick descriptions of principals in real situations, that is, their schools. I could observe and understand their views, perceptions and experiences from their standpoint and within their social contexts unperturbed and “unconstrained by any perspectives of the researcher or past research findings” (Creswell, 2005:225). The goal of qualitative research is to enable researchers to know and understand how individuals in their natural settings interpret their day to day life experiences (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997:373).

In order to achieve the purpose, principals were interviewed in their schools, and times that suited them the most, were chosen. A qualitative design is concerned with understanding behaviour from the research subjects’ frame of reference (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997:373). According to Cohen *et al.* (2000:137) some of the characteristics of this approach are that:

- Humans actively construct their own meanings of situations;
- Meaning arises out of social situations and is handled through interpretive processes; and;
- Behaviour and, thereby, data are socially situated, context-related, context dependent and context-rich.

Unlike in quantitative approaches, generalisation is not an issue here. Qualitative research is fundamentally interpretive and focuses on context. This approach assumes that reality is constructed and that the researcher’s point of view matters. Strydom *et al.* (1998) in Mbatsane (2006) posit that a qualitative design differs inherently from a quantitative research design in that it usually does not provide the researcher with a step-by-step or a

fixed recipe to follow. This gives the researcher much room to probe participants' responses and to closely interact with them in their context. The qualitative approach, however, has the following limitations:

- Participants may be falsely conscious, deliberately distorting or falsifying information (Cohen *et al.*,2000:156);
- It can be time-consuming and demanding as the data obtained through it is voluminous (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997:14);
- The open-endedness and diversity of the situations studied could be problematic;
- More prone to human bias and error because the researcher becomes immersed in the phenomenon being studied (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997:15); and
- It is more expensive because of travelling costs and the need for a tape-recorder.

Despite these limitations, the researcher has attempted to overcome some of the disadvantages to ensure the credibility and reliability of the findings, as will be indicated further on.

3.3 DATA COLLECTION

The manner in which data are collected is crucial as it determines the success or failure of the research. Hoberg, 1999:76 (in Mbatsane, 2006) indicate that qualitative data are collected by interacting with research participants in their natural settings. According to Creswell (2005:212), the process of collecting qualitative data involves identifying participants and sites, gaining access, determining the types of data to collect, developing data collecting forms, and administering the process in an ethical manner. In order to answer the research question, I decided to conduct an in-depth study of primary school principals in the deep rural area of Limpopo Province.

I employed semi-structured interviews. The conceptual framework that guided the formulation of interview questions was based on the five dimensions of instructional leadership as developed by Weber (1996) namely:

- Defining the school's mission;
- Managing curriculum and instruction;
- Promoting a positive learning climate;
- Observing and improving instruction; and
- Assessing the instructional programme.

The following points, as outlined in Paine (2002:272), served as guidelines for conducting interviews:

- The interviews started with a short explanation of the topic, how the interview was going to be conducted and an assurance of anonymity;
- Questions were posed in clear and unambiguous language;
- Leading questions were avoided;
- I established a good relationship (rapport) with the participants by adhering to the social graces common among people in rural areas, where you first have to ask about the welfare of the person, his/her family, the school, and so on, to open the conversation; and
- I did not speak more than the respondent; I was a good listener.

The data was collected using one-on-one interviews with principals. The intent was not to generalise the result to the whole population, but to develop an in-depth exploration of principals' perceptions of instructional leadership (Creswell, 2005:212). Semi-structured interviews were used because they allowed me to probe principals' initial responses until I reached "theoretical saturation". This means that no new information was forthcoming and that the gained information represented the final product. Interviews started with general background questions to allow for the involvement of principals and to build "rapport and a mutuality of purpose" (Smit, 2001). I had an interview schedule to guide the interviews but with sufficient flexibility to allow for probing and clarification (see Annexure D).

One-on-one interviews were deemed suitable for principals because they are not hesitant to speak, they are articulate and they can share ideas and experiences comfortably (Creswell, 2005). These interviews were tape-recorded so as not to lose some valuable information. They were later transcribed verbatim to enable me to analyse and interpret them. Notes were taken during the recording to highlight non-verbal communication and observations in order to make sense of the spoken word.

Creswell (2005) further maintains that in order to best understand the phenomenon, the researcher must purposefully or intentionally select individuals and sites. Principals were interviewed at times that suited them and in their schools. Permission and consent were sought for from both the provincial Department of Education (PDE) and school principals. The purpose of the research was clearly spelt out and indicated in letters directed to them (see Appendices A, B and C).

3.3.1 Sampling

Paine (2002:273) maintains that the selection of participants is very important for the effectiveness of the research. All empirical research involves sampling. The selection of participants is dependent on the research question and the design adopted. Miles and Huberman (1994:27) concede that “You cannot study everyone, everywhere, doing every thing”. Burgess (1984:72 in Paine, 2002) calls these participants *key informants* since, in the researcher’s opinion, they have specialised knowledge and concerns in a social setting, which may complement the researcher’s observation.

In qualitative research, there is need for greater access to the site. Researchers typically go to the sites and interview people (Creswell, 2005:212). My research relied on general interviews so as to avoid restricting the views of the participants.

Based on the above-argument, I purposefully selected participants according to the following criteria:

- They must be principals of primary schools in the deep rural areas of Limpopo Province and they must belong to the same circuit;
- They must either be good, average or poor performing according to ANA results;
- The principals must share the same administrative and operational circumstances, including educational programmes; and
- Schools must share the same background, that is, socio-economic status, parental engagements, level of poverty, etc.

The logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases that will be studied in depth (Patton, 1990:169). McMillan and Schumacher (1997:397) claim that in purposive sampling, samples are chosen because they are likely to be knowledgeable and informative about the phenomenon under investigation. Primary school principals were the main focus of this study because they were directly involved in the provision of instructional leadership in schools. They have the ability to provide “thick” and “lived” experiences in this regard. The researcher strongly believed that principals would give the best information about the research topic.

For this study, I intentionally and purposively selected six primary school principals in the deep rural area, according to their performance in the 2010 Annual National Assessment (ANA) and on a voluntary basis. It is typical in qualitative research to study a few individuals to present the complexity of information and data needed to answer the research question.

Collecting qualitative data and analysing it takes considerable time, so the number of sampled principals was limited to six (6) to avoid superficial perspectives and to best understand their perceptions and experiences as instructional leaders. Of the six selected principals, one could not be interviewed because of reasons ranging from work commitments to urgent school governance meetings.

3.3.2 Preparing semi-structured interviews

To prepare for the interviews, I asked the principals to determine the time and place so as to allow for a conducive and relaxed environment and not to tamper with the routine operational activities of the school. Before conducting one-on-one interviews, I prepared a voice recorder, arranged for extra batteries, and checked that it is functioning. I obtained consent from the sampled principals and let them complete consent forms prior to the interviews. As a school principal, I assured principals that the interviews were meant to be an experience-sharing process. This was meant to gain their trust and to establish rapport.

Semi-structured questions were prepared according to the conceptual framework that guided my study, that is, Weber's Instructional Leadership Model (1996) (see Annexure D). The interview schedule presented me with a line of questioning to follow rather than an exact set of questions. The schedule of questions was based on the literature review and it was intended to guide the interview. Although I had drafted the questions according to Weber's Instructional Leadership domains, I intended to be flexible and to probe participants to obtain additional information. The interview session did not follow a fixed pattern, but was rather a free-flowing exercise, which covered all the dimensions deemed necessary to answer the research question. The interview followed the participants' interests and concerns, and the ordering of questions was less important.

This informal, semi-structured approach allowed for flexibility and gave the informants an opportunity to develop their answers outside a structured format (Paine, 2002:271). Explaining this further, Cohen *et al.* (2000:268) argue that in less formal interviews, the interviewer is free to modify the sequence of questions, change the wording, explain them or add to them. To ensure that principals answered all research questions, interview questions were divided into five Instructional Leadership dimensions as modelled by Weber (1996). Below is a table to indicate the categories of questions and their purposes:

TABLE 3.1 CATEGORIES OF QUESTIONS AND PURPOSES

Category	Purpose
A	To understand principals' perceptions of their roles in the development of the school's mission and vision.
B.	To determine principals' roles in providing leadership and management in the delivery of the curriculum and instruction.
C	To determine how principals perceive their roles in the promotion of a positive learning climate in and around the school.
D	To understand principals' roles in the observation of teaching and learning and how they promote educator professional development.
E	To understand principals' roles in planning, designing, administering and the analysis of the instructional programme.

3.3.4 Ethical considerations

As described in chapter 1, the focus on qualitative research is on the selection of people and sites to get thick descriptions of the phenomenon under study (Creswell, 2005). Maree and van der Westhuizen (2007) indicate that it is important for one to familiarise oneself with the ethics policy of the relevant institution. It is necessary for researchers to understand the ethical and legal responsibilities since most research deals with human beings (Creswell, 2005).

Based on the rules and regulations of the University of Pretoria on the use of human beings in the research process, I followed the following ethical aspects:

- Applied for ethics clearance from the ethics committee of the university to conduct research (see Appendix A);
- Obtained written permission from the Head of Department in the province (see Appendix B);

- Handled the participants and their schools in a confidential manner through the use of pseudonyms;
- Explained in detail the purpose of my research and obtained informed consent from the principals. They were made to understand that they can withdraw from the research at any time with no penalty (see Appendix C);
- I assured and guaranteed them protection from physical and mental discomfort, harm, and danger (see Creswell 2005:183); and
- Information obtained from the study will be held confidentially unless otherwise agreed on.

Other ethical issues considered included refraining from deceptive practices, being respectful to the research sites, learners and personnel, and collaborating with participants. Principals were treated with respect and sensitivity as a way of creating rapport. I decided to be patient and tolerant, and to wait until the principals accepted me.

3.4 DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Analysing qualitative data requires understanding how to make sense of text and images so that one can form answers to one's research questions (Creswell, 2005: 243). Data analysis began as soon as the first set of data was gathered, and this ran parallel to data collection (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997). Data analysis took place throughout the data collection process. I reflected continuously on principals' perceptions, impressions, experiences, and connections while collecting data. Neuman (1994) (in Paine, 2002) argues that there is no one recommended method in data analysis; it is up to the researcher to choose from several options the most suitable method. This view is supported by Vithal and Jansen (2002) who argue that the actual steps taken in data analysis may differ according to the type of data and the nature of the research.

According to Vithal and Jansen (2002:27-28), the purpose of data analysis is to make sense of the accumulated information. This process is usually based on an interpretative philosophy aimed at examining meaningful and symbolic content of qualitative data. It tries to establish how participants make meaning of a specific phenomenon by analysing their perceptions, attitudes, understanding, knowledge, values, feelings and experiences in an attempt to approximate their construction of meaning (Nieuwenhuis in Maree, 2010).

To explore the overarching research question, “principals’ perceptions of their instructional leadership roles in the improvement of Literacy and Numeracy”, I collected data guided by the conceptual lens developed by Weber (1996). The manner in which I collected the data, how I ordered it and what I extracted from it, is the products of the lens through which I looked at the world (Maree, 2007:100), that is, Weber’s Instructional Leadership Framework. I applied the process of inductive analysis which involved organising the data into categories and identifying relationships among them (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997:461) in order to generate findings.

An inductive analysis of the raw data allowed principals’ perceptions to emerge from the frequent, dominant or significant themes inherent in the raw data. While collecting data, I kept Weber’s Instructional Leadership Model in mind and the objectives of the study. Data were collected through interviews which were tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim into hard copies to ensure that some valuable information was not distorted. Data collection and analysis are cyclic and iterative; they happen interactively to avoid playing “catch up” Silvermann, in (Nyambi, 2004:54).

According to Creswell (2005), the first step in data analysis is to explore the data. I read the transcribed data several times, read the notes and highlighted relevant themes that emerged in order to be familiar with the information. I used a-priori coding (preset codes) based on existing themes from Weber’s domains of instructional leadership (Weber, 1996). Vithal and Jansen sum up data analysis in three steps, namely:

- Scanning and cleaning the data;
- Organising the data; and
- Re-presenting the data

The last and final step was to analyse the data as a way of answering the research question.. According to De Vos (1998), data analysis is the process of bringing order, structure and meaning to the mass of collected data. I analysed the data by hand because this was convenient for me and I wanted to be as close to the data as possible (Creswell, 2005:247). During this process, I involved colour coding to mark parts of the text, to sort and locate words. I searched for emerging patterns, explanations and concepts of principals’ perceptions of instructional leadership and brought them into context with existing theory. I looked for patterns that gave meaning to the study by organising, reducing, describing the data and eliciting meaning (Nyambi, 2004). The main intellectual tool here was the comparison of principal’s responses. I identified similarities and differences between categories, in order to discover patterns

3.5 TRUSTWORTHINESS AND CREDIBILITY

As indicated in chapter 1, assessing trustworthiness is the acid test of the researcher's data analysis, findings and conclusions (Nieuwenhuis in Maree, 2010). Throughout the process of data collection and analysis, the researcher needs to determine the accuracy and credibility of the findings (Creswell, 2005). Qualitative enquiry focuses on meaning in context, and requires a data collection instrument that is sensitive to underlying meaning when gathering and interpreting meaning (Merriam, 1998:1 in Smit, 2001). Mertens in Smit (2001:130) maintains that "the credibility test asks if there is a correspondence between the way the participants actually perceive social constructs and the way the researcher portrays their viewpoints". To enhance the quality of data and to ensure rigour in my work, I decided to use Guba's criteria as employed by positivist investigators (Shenton: 2004) as follows:

3.5.1 Credibility

To ensure credibility and rapport I developed introductory questions which served to create a familiarity with the culture of principals and their schools before data collection. This further enabled me to establish a relationship of trust with the participants, a feature which is a prerequisite for fruitful interactions. Participants were made to understand that they can terminate their participation at any time without any penalty, to ensure honesty. The process of data collection and analysis is iterative. Therefore, when I conducted the interviews, I probed the principals' responses to confirm and verify their perceptions. Semi-structured interviews enabled me to probe and get the in-depth perceptions of principals.

The use of one-one-interviews ensured that data were collected at times convenient to the participants. This in a way, added to the credibility of the study. Principals provided thick descriptions, first hand information and their lived experiences unconstrained. The sampling of principals based on the three levels of achievement in ANA tasks, provided the diversity that underpins Dervin's concept of "circling reality" which provided a "better and more stable view of reality" (Shenton, 2004: 66).

3.5.2 Transferability

According to Merriam in Shenton (2004:69), external validity "is concerned with the extent to which the findings of one study can be applied to other situations". This means that all observations are defined by the specific contexts in which they occur.

It is the responsibility of the researcher to provide sufficient contextual circumstances and information that surround the phenomenon under investigation. Background information and all factors that impacted on principals' instructional leadership roles were indicated. (See Table 4.1).

There is a need “for a full description of all the contextual factors impinging on the enquiry” as recommended by Guba (Shenton: 2004). This means that the findings of qualitative enquiry must be understood within the context of the particular characteristics of the organisation and the geographical area in which the fieldwork was carried out. To ensure transferability, I conveyed the boundaries of the study by describing the background of the schools, the number of participants, the criteria for selection, data collection and analysis methods, the composition of schools and the length and period of the data collection sessions.

3.5.3 Dependability

Dependability is viewed as the fit between what is recorded as data and what has actually occurred in the setting under study (Smit, 2001). This means that the processes within the study should be reported in detail, thereby enabling a future researcher to repeat the work. To guarantee dependability, I have described the research design and methodologies applied in my study. I further explained the conceptual framework that guided my exploration and analysis. I described the setting, the participants and the dimensions of instructional leadership that guide my study. I explained how I arrived at findings through coding, categorising and linking data. This was aimed at creating, for the readers, statements that would produce the feeling that they have experienced, or could experience the events being described in the study (Mafuwane, 2011:94).

3.5.4 Confirmability

A researcher must be unbiased and open-minded rather than subjective (Smit, 2001). To reduce the effect of investigator bias, I detailed how data leading to the findings was gathered and processed during the course of the study. Reasons for favouring a qualitative approach when a quantitative or mixed approach could have been chosen were fully explained.

Mertens (in Smit, 2001) describes confirmability as the explicitness in the way that data (evidence) are collected, categorised, reconstructed and interpreted. I indicated how the data leading to the findings was gathered and processed. Draft reports were returned to principals

to check for accuracy and for crystallisation of captured information. This further limited subjective perceptions of the instructional leaders and, hence guaranteed the accuracy and authenticity of the findings by reducing bias and facilitating the crystallisation of principals' perceptions.

I listened to the tape and reviewed notes several times to identify gaps that had to be explored in follow-up interviews. Cohen *et al.* (2007) refer to this as triangulation, a verification procedure, whereby researchers search for convergence among multiple or different sources of information, to form themes or categories.

3.6 CONCLUSION

This chapter has discussed the design and methodology applied to answer my research question. The main focus was on the qualitative design used to explore principals' perceptions of instructional leadership. Also discussed were issues relating to sampling, preparations undertaken for interviews, ethical issues, categories of questions asked, data analysis and interpretation, and measures taken to ensure trustworthiness and credibility. The research findings are presented in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS, FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION

4.1. INTRODUCTION

The major task of the school remains the education of learners (Roe & Drake, 1980). For this task to be accomplished, the management and leadership role of the school principals becomes very important. In their quest for excellence in teaching and learning, instructional leaders are guided and informed by policies developed by the department. This exploration is, therefore, aimed at answering the research question formulated in Chapter 1, that is, “How do principals perceive their instructional leadership role in the improvement of Literacy and Numeracy in primary schools?”

The theoretical lens that guided my exploration and analysis of raw data is consistent with Weber’s (1996) Instructional Leadership Framework. The exact words of participants were used so as not to distort their meaning, and, therefore, minimal editing has been done. At the end of the chapter I will present findings and conclusions in tabular form as a way of making sense of accumulated information.

4.2. SETTING OF THE INTERVIEWS

As indicated in Chapter 3, principals were purposively sampled according to their schools’ performance in the (ANA) results as good, average and poor performing schools. According to Patton (1990:16), the purpose of purposeful sampling is to select information-rich cases whose study will illuminate the questions under study. The main source of data collection was semi-structured interviews because of their ability to provide thick descriptions of the phenomenon under study. Paine (2002:27) reiterates that semi-structured interviews allow for flexibility and accord respondents opportunities to develop their answers outside a structured format. Principals were informed that the researcher might request documents at the end of the interviews to support and confirm their responses.

All the selected principals were Pedis who headed schools situated in the deep rural villages of Limpopo Province. These villages shared the same socio-economic background. Ethics permission to conduct research was sought and granted by the University Ethics Committee, the provincial Head of Department and selected principals (See Appendices A, B and C). As indicated in my application for consent, I reminded principals about ethical issues, assured them of confidentiality, requested to tape-record the proceedings, told them that their participation was voluntary and explained the purpose of the research to them. Letters of the alphabet (such as A, B, C, D, and E) were used to guarantee principals' anonymity.

It is assumed that all principals were inducted and thus aware and informed about the laws, regulations and policies that apply to their leadership roles. Questions for the interviews were based on Weber's (1996) Instructional Leadership Framework which consisted of five dimensions. All the interviews were conducted in English, and the principals were interviewed at their respective schools at times determined by themselves.

The interviews did not follow a predetermined pattern, but I had to ensure that all the questions included in the schedule were asked. I probed the respondents to cover all dimensions and categories of questions as per interview schedule. In order to create rapport, I established an early familiarity with the culture of selected principals through pre-interviews plenary meetings. My first questions during the interviews were meant to generate some background information on the schools and to ensure a common understanding of Instructional Leadership. Although six principals were targeted, one female principal could not be interviewed for reasons ranging from personal commitment to professional engagements. Of the five interviewed, four were males and one was a female.

4.3 DATA COLLECTION

4.3.1 Educational background

The educational background of principals and their schools was collected during the interviews as an introduction to the session (see Interview Schedule in Appendix D). This background plays an important role in determining how far principals can participate in instructional leadership roles because knowledge is power, and it is important that one understands one's roles (Nyambi, 2004:57). A semi-structured interview schedule was developed and it consisted of five dimensions of instructional leadership. To generate background information and to create rapport, I asked principals general questions about their schools. Shenton (2004:63) is of the view that defining the educational background of the phenomenon under scrutiny provides credibility and demonstrates a true picture of that phenomenon.

TABLE 4.1 BACKGROUND INFORMATION OF PRINCIPALS

Name of principal	<i>Principal A [average ANA results]</i>	<i>Principal B [good ANA results]</i>	<i>Principal C [good ANA results]</i>	<i>Principal D [average ANA results]</i>	<i>Principal E [poor performing]</i>
Gender of principal	Male	Male	Female	Male	Male
Ethnic background	Pedi	Pedi	Pedi	Pedi	Pedi
Number of deputy principals	None	1	None	1	1
Number of HODs	1	2	1	2	2
Number of educators	15	16	12	24	16
Number of learners	647	450	395	532	624
Audit of classrooms	More classrooms and others not occupied.	More classrooms and others not occupied.	Dilapidated classrooms, accommodation in mobile rooms and renovations in progress	Dilapidated classrooms, accommodation in mobile rooms and renovations in progress	Shortage of classrooms, dilapidated rooms
Number of senior educators	2	2	2	2	2
Administrative /operational issues	Shortage of textbooks, equity in work allocation, fewer educators, combined school(Gr. R-9), orphaned children, newly established school	Shortage of learner support materials, incompetent educators, child-headed families	Female principal, developing small school, shortage of textbooks on CAPS, music/noise from neighbouring residents, memorial services and union activities during school hours, child-headed families	No infrastructure, dilapidated classrooms, mobile classrooms, insufficient chalkboards,	Has admin clerk, shortage of classrooms and textbooks, equity in work allocation, dilapidated classrooms, newly appointed principal, noise from passing cars

The table provided above illustrates that the schools have much in common. They are primary schools situated in deep rural areas which share the same socio-economic and ethnic background. Of the five schools studied in this research, one is a newly-established combined school with ranging from Grade R to Grade 9. The rest comprise of the Foundation, Intermediate and Senior Phases (culminating in Grade 7)

The table further reveals that principals are operating under similar administrative and operational circumstances, that is, shortage of textbooks, dilapidated classrooms and insufficient departmental support. With the exception of the school headed by a female principal, four principals had deputy principals. It is important to note that although school A was a newly established institution, it had a large enrolment of learners, fewer educators, no deputy principal and one Head Of Department (HOD). This may have had an impact on the instructional leadership role of the principal as will be discussed later in the chapter.

Learners in school D [532] were temporarily accommodated in mobile classrooms while their school was undergoing total renovation. School B had ample classrooms with less enrolment of learners [450]. Given this background information, most principals understood their instructional leadership roles, but could not always carry them out due to factors ranging from infrastructural developments to administrative and operational issues. All principals, however, successfully attained major achievements in human relations, an internal factor that depended on them rather than in the core business of the schools (teaching and learning).

As a researcher, I had to be patient with postponements and extensions of scheduled times and dates for the interviews. Principal C postponed the interview twice due to ill-health and career-related commitments. Principal D rescheduled the interview three times for the following reasons:

Attending to a grievance between a parent and an educator;

- Fatigue as a result of preparations for examinations and School Governing Body matters; and
- Picking up his son from school.

4.3.2 Principals' understanding of instructional leadership

In response to introductory questions, I learnt that some principals had a distorted, impoverished and not-so-refined understanding of instructional leadership. Principal C defined instructional leadership as follows:

“I think an instructional leader is the one who..... I don't know how to put it. Mmmm.....”

Principal B had this to say:

“I think instructional leadership is whereby as a manager you must decentralize powers. You should involve all the stakeholders, deputy principal, HODs, teachers and even the parents as well as learners.”

Compared to the others, Principal A had a better understanding of instructional leadership and defined instructional leadership as follows:

“My understanding of instructional leadership is that wherein you exhibit your leadership with regard to carrying out the teaching and learning instruction. That is how you guide your staff with regard to, I mean, transferring what they have got to learners.”

In order to ensure that principals all had a similar understanding of instructional leadership, I decided to provide a definition of instructional leadership as follows:

In literature, school leadership is defined as “the decisions, strategies and actions that principals use to improve the teaching and learning in schools.” Given this definition, what strategies do you use to improve the effectiveness of teaching and learning in your school?”

I strongly believe that for principals to be able to perform and execute their instructional leadership roles and strategies, they should be able to define and understand them. To ensure and guarantee maximum participation by principals I decided to secure a common understanding of the phenomenon under study by defining it.

Even though some principals interviewed had little knowledge of instructional leadership strategies and operational policies, it did not mean that they did not engage in important instructional leadership strategies. In discussing their roles, the principals' understanding of instructional leadership roles became apparent, but there was no direct relationship between their understanding of instructional leadership and learners' performance in ANA tests.

Although Principal C who comes from a well-performing school could not define instructional leadership, she indicated the following strategies to improve teaching and learning: delegation of responsibilities, shared decision-making, collective analysis of results, establishment of subject committees and peer coaching.

Most principals understood their roles but could not carry them out due to lack of financial allocations, lack of textbooks and, operational and administrative issues (see Table 4.1). Principal D from an average performing school lamented as follow: *“What good is going to get out of such a situation? These are the challenges that we are facing. We don’t have facilities and they are the main hindrances. Just imagine teaching in a classroom without a proper chalkboard. It tells the whole story that really curriculum delivery is not going to be as is expected.”*

4.3.2.1. Defining the school’s mission

This set of questions was meant to find out the principals’ understanding and perceptions on to how and when the mission of the school is developed. From a theoretical perspective, principals should engage other stakeholders in the development and realisation of the mission. According to Smith and Andrews (1989:16), effective instructional leaders should strive to make the mission a reality. All of the five principals responded on the development and attainment of the mission as a succinct statement of what the school aspires to achieve.

Some of the responses by the principals were as follows:

Principal A: *Before we could develop the mission and vision I delegated some duties to educators. I said we are here to work and to make a difference. I asked them what they think they can do differently from other people. They sat down and discussed around it. They came down with the word “excellence”. That is how they came up with the mission and vision. That is why they own it. It is ours, and it is theirs because they are the ones who coined it*

Principal C: *The School Governing Body (SGB) and the educators sat together in 2010. We went to another lodge where we looked at the school as a whole, where we drafted the school development program, where we drafted this vision and mission. As a whole, the SGB and the educators, I think as I talk of the SGB, I am part of the SGB as an ex-officio member, I guided them.*

Principal D: *What I am saying is that teachers are involved, the School Management Team (SMT) is involved, the parents are involved, and the entire community is involved. We sit down, discuss and come to a common agreement about our vision and mission. So that even the parents must take ownership of that, to say: “We are part and parcel of the vision and mission of our school”.*

Principal B: *Oh! That is developed by us. We involved all the stakeholders, the educators and parents.*

From the data collected it is noted that most principals understood the process of developing the mission, that is, the involvement of all stakeholders to ensure collective ownership of the successes and failures of the institution. **Principal A**, however, did not involve the SGB and parents in the development and drawing of the mission. He delegated the function to the teachers.

The purpose of a mission or vision is to provide direction to the school in terms of its activities and strategies. This implies that schools should actively work towards achieving their mission or vision. Most of the activities of effective schools and principals, as seen in the collected data, were geared towards the attainment of the mission. Principals B and C of well-performing schools had their activities focused on the attainment of the vision and mission as articulated in the interviews. This observation is in support of Dweyer (in Hallinger *et al.*1996:533) who states that “instructional leadership roles are expressed in principals’ day-to-day actions”.

Effective principals should communicate clear goals and expectations to staff, parents, and learners. This view is supported by Principal B who had this to say: *“Mmm, ja, I see. I have to see to it that I put the school in a high position. I have to produce more and more. I mean, as I said earlier, that we have a problem of illiteracy, I must see to it that our learners are able to read and write, and to conduct these basic calculations.”*Principal C [well-performing school] had set high standards for the school on achievements in ANA by as indicated by her statement *“I am struggling to take the school somewhere and I think this year we will be among the top five”*

Principals of less performing schools were mostly concerned about human relations and bricks and mortar issues instead of focusing on children and learning and teaching. This is clearly indicated by Principal A’s response:

“I want to see this school within two years having buildings. I am the one who should guide the SGB in going out and resource for teachers and buildings so that the kids should....you see if you look at the fence around here is very old, very old. I can say we don’t have any fence. My contribution at this school since our arrival here speaks louder, but as for now what I am focusing on now is infrastructure within two years. Should I fail, no, say you have failed and I will quit.”

4.3.2.2 Leadership in the curriculum and instruction

All principals understood the importance of Numeracy and Literacy as the basis for students’ future learning. This set of questions was intended to explore principals’ perceptions of the impact of the new curriculum (CAPS) in the provision of instructional leadership. The questions were meant to get an understanding of how principals use instructional best practices and provide resources towards the attainment of the school’s mission. The following questions were asked:

1. How do you manage the implementation of the new CAPS curriculum in the school?
2. Do you make use of subject clusters? Tell me more about it in terms of your role in it.
3. Do you think that the new CAPS document would influence your role as a principal?

In response to the above-questions principals had this to say:

Principal D: Certainly yes. Even though the training was not so intensive, one could pick up some of the important aspects from the new curriculum. Well, basically it is not completely different from what we have been doing in the past. You know, change of names, reducing of subjects where now some subjects..... Up until this year we have about nine learning areas reduced to six as from 2013. And I think this is going to have a positive impact on the curriculum delivery in the sense that in a way teachers will feel a little bit relieved. You know, because they had so many learning areas and they are now reduced. Some have been combined to make one, I think even the duties of the principal and other SMT members will be somehow reduced to such an extent that we will be able.....

Principal C: Mmm, I first of all I [have] never [been] work shopped about this CAPS. I heard this, I just read on the papers. In 2011 the Foundation Phase educators were work shopped, and then they came back and reported. They gave reports of what was happening at the workshop. Then I take it from there, from the report. Then I will never say I am from the

workshop it was only an orientation like where they called the HODs and the principals. It's only the orientation, it's not a workshop. Then I took it from the Foundation Phase educators. In other words, I learnt something from them.

Principal A: Well, you know, it is still giving us problems. As principals we have not been trained in the management of CAPS. They took only educators in the Foundation Phase where it is being implemented. They have been trained, but school managers have not been trained. Nevertheless if you can drive and I bring a Uno (car) and put it there you can drive. What I do is that I consult with my HOD who is responsible for the Foundation Phase where CAPS is operating right now. The HOD then guides me as to what is expected of them and everything and then I look at the books and check what she is doing because she is the one who is monitoring progress in that phase. You see, in fact I am pushing her to push others. I am also motivating her to motivate those with whom she is working. That is how we are pushing, but I think the program (system) is good. The way I view it "it's back to the basics". Back to what we did in the past, reading the phonics and writing. Right now there is no writing as we knew it in the past. We used to write using cursive handwriting or in capital letters and all those. I think CAPS is bringing back those things that form the basis for learning and teaching. I think learners will benefit, very much from this project because they are going to be involved. They will know the phonics and thereafter they write.

Principal B: Ja, Eh, those are new things altogether. You find that educators are just workshopped for some few days. Eh, and then they have to sustain, imagine if you workshop a person for two days and expect competency in that particular person. So I think is one of the challenges which we face in this new dispensation unlike if a person can be, have a thorough knowledge, trained for a year or years, then we will have quality.

From the responses, it is evident that principals are concerned about the lack of departmental support in terms of training in the new curriculum. Training on the new curriculum has been provided to teachers and HODs, hence principals delegating curricular issues to HODs. Nonetheless, based on the interviews, it would appear that principals go an extra mile in making compromises to implement the new curriculum. Intervention strategies include, but are not limited to, monitoring, delegation of responsibilities, class visits, moderation of assessment tasks, assessing, evaluating, observation of lessons in practice, clustering, time management and the provision of post-observation feedback.

All principals warmly welcome the new curriculum. Principal E had this to say: *“I think this one is going to improve our learning, because it encourages learners to know, just like in the olden days wherein they were given exercises to do and the teachers had to mark. It gives a lot of explanations and as a result I think that one is going to be of value to the learners and educators. I think if that system can come in, I think we will improve a lot.”*

The same sentiments were echoed by Principal D when he reiterated as follows: *“And I think this is going to have a positive impact on the curriculum delivery in the sense that in a way teachers will feel a little bit relieved. You know, because they had so many learning areas and they are now reduced. Some have been combined to make one, I think even the duties of the principal and other SMT members will be somehow reduced to such an extent that we will be able.....”*

4.3.2.3 Promoting a positive learning climate

Lezotte, *et al.* (in Weber, 1987) defines a learning climate as “the norms, beliefs, and attitudes reflected in institutional patterns and behaviour that enhance or impede student learning”. The principal is the key to organisational success. To maintain an excellent learning climate, instructional leaders must raise teachers’ expectations of students, communicate high expectations to all students and establish an instructional programme that requires a mastery of objectives. It must be emphasised that the shortage of textbooks, dilapidated classrooms, and inadequate departmental support regarding the new curriculum discussed in Paragraph 4.2 will negatively impact on any learning climate in a school. From the research it became evident that these factors did not serve as excuses for principals in not carrying out their duties. Most principals went an extra-mile to ensure that there is effective and efficient teaching and learning. This is illustrated by some of their responses below:

Principal A: *Ja, you know firstly the issue of textbooks, we rely too much on photocopying. We have got fewer textbooks. In order for us to enable learners to read, we make photocopies so that each group may have something or each learner they have something to look at when they read. With regard to the issue of educators, you know it is just a matter of motivating them, because you can’t cut them into two. Just motivate them and say “Guys, one day is one day we will get some more staff and then things will be normal.”*

Principal A, however, either underestimated or had a poorly developed understanding of instructional leadership role of principals. When asked how the problems of overcrowding and shortage of finances should be resolved, he responded by indicating that *“no, there’s no way, because resolving this problem needs money”*.

In most instances he provided hypothetical responses in instances that warranted his capacity as an instructional leader, for example, *“Ja, sometimes it might happen although it has never happened for me. Should it happen, you must first do a study about that person.”*

Principal C [well-performing school] too, when asked how to resolve the problems of union activities and memorial services that are conducted during school hours, displayed some elements of poor understanding or under-estimation of instructional leadership. She had this to say: *“Memorial services and union activities as the principal I cannot do anything because is a circuit thing. They are beyond my control.”*

Contrary to this, other principals offered a different response.

Principal D: *It’s all about sacrifices and compromises. We cannot say we don’t have a proper chalkboard, and then we are not going to do anything. Teaching must just go on. Despite all these hindrances and problems that we are going through as far as I remember for the past five years, the overall performance of this school from the Foundation Phase up till Senior Phase we ranged between 90 and 95%.*

Although principals had different perceptions on how to promote a positive learning climate, Principal C, a female leader, showed much interest on learners’ academic interests and set higher expectations on student learning. This trend is confirmed by Hallinger *et al.* (1996). The participant in this study had this to say: *“First of all let me say that the first ANA was done in 2011 and our school was among the top ten even if the marks were low at forty-something. So I have achieved something. I think this year we will be among the top five.”*

Principal D (average school) addressed the promotion of a learning climate as follows: *“Eh! you know, teaching and learning is the core business of the school. But looking at the picture of our school, in particular, you can see that if I was not taking the lead, the morale of the educators would be very much low. I try by all means to encourage them, to motivate them that there’s no point in neglecting these poor kids on the basis that we don’t have one, two, and three.”*

Principal B held morning briefing sessions with colleagues to keep them abreast of daily events and to communicate goals and expectations.

A general observation is that principals did much to create, promote and maintain positive relations with the parents and the community at large. The following strategies were used:

- Delegation of responsibilities;
- Fostering of teamwork and sound relationships among stakeholders;
- Motivation, monitoring, coaching and encouragement of staff for professional efficacy;
- Fostering of respect;
- Involvement of stakeholders; and
- Academic emphasis and ensuring a clean and tidy environment.

4.3.2.4 *Observing and improving instruction*

This category of questions was intended to explore the principals' perceptions and understanding of their observational roles in a quest to improve instruction in schools. According to Hallinger and Murphy (1985), supervising and evaluating instruction comprises activities that provide instructional support to teachers, monitor classroom instruction through informal classroom visits and align classroom practice with school goals. All the interviewed principals illustrated the importance of observations and indicated their strategies as follows:

Principal E: *As have said, in the beginning of the year we draw a time-table. Each and every educator is given a learning area or his/her subject and then during the course of the time we've got what we call "period registers", even myself I move around to check as to whether there is effective teaching in the classroom or not. And then as I have said in my earlier report, I've got a program wherein each and every fortnight they bring the books so that I check whether what I heard in the classroom is what they were doing. So, therefore, I've got a time-table to check all the phases. I even got my HODs, but I don't rely on them. They give me the report and I also do the same to go and check those that they have checked.*

It was, however, surprising to find out that Principal E [poor performing school] had no trust in his subordinates and members of the school management team [SMT]. According to Tschannen-Maran (in Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008:482), trust allows for the school to manage its critical human resources more effectively. Increased mutual trust among teachers, management teams and stakeholders serves as a glue to bind instructional practices together and, thus, improves student learning. Rechecking implies that there is no trusting relationship which has a negative effect on the instructional leadership role of the principal.

Principal C (well performing): *Okay, first of all, let me say, I am trying by all means that the school looks like a family where there is team work. Then there is this thing of delegation of duties. Everybody is involved in the running of the school, but I am the manager and everybody is delegated with some work. And another thing is that there is this majority decision-making where we meet as a staff and do some strategies. Then, let's say, every quarter when we re-open, we just sit down and (I am giving an example) analyse the quarterly results. From there we have to come up with the strategies to help learners who have failed. Another thing is that I am encouraging phase SMTs to have some meetings with their colleagues (teachers) before we have a staff meeting. Then they meeting we have to combine those strategies and have a way-forward. Another thing is that we have some workshops sort of. We have this thing of subject committees where educators help one another.*

Principal D: *The process of evaluating and assessing learners can be done in many ways. In the first instance we have class visits. It is through class visits that you will be aware of the techniques that the teacher is applying and whether the learners go along with the teacher or he/she is talking alone or if he/she leaves the learners behind. After having class-visited any teacher you have observed many things in that classroom situation. So from the observations it's where now you will tell yourself that it's what I have observed, the good part of it and the bad part of it. The bad part of it is where the corrective measures need to come in. We also collect learners' books for different subjects just to see and check the progress which is being made in the classroom, to determine whether the written work is sufficient or what is the performance of the learners. You know, is their work properly checked and controlled by the teacher. You know, in doing such things you get to understand what is actually occurring in the classroom. Whether the teacher is doing according to the stipulations or the policies of the department or whether the teacher is lagging behind, you know, and things like that.*

Principal A: *Ja, I am doing something. There are lots of projects and programs offered to educators these days. I encourage them to enroll with some institutions, but mostly, you know, sometimes we as school managers we just tell our educators to enroll, but we don't check what they enroll for. You find that someone is doing law while teaching in a primary school. He/She says that I am doing law and I want to move out of education, and so on. You must check against such things. Motivate this person to study in line with what he/she is doing. If he/she is doing Mathematics encourage such person to register for Mathematics.*

The person will develop a love for Mathematics because he/she is studying it on a daily basis. Learners will also benefit. I encourage them to register and further their education through the learning areas that they are offering at school because I cannot chop and change them. They need to register and specialize so that I must be able to put them on special fields. That is how I motivate them.

Principal B: *Ja, we have a School Management Team (SMT) member in the Foundation Phase. She conducts class visits and submits the report. And also there are SMT members in the Intermediate and Senior Phases. They also conduct workshops and submit reports.*

The general picture portrayed by principals is that post-observation feedback is very important. This view is supported by Blasé and Blasé (1999b) who equates this to **“holding up a mirror”**. Some of the strategies employed by principals include school-based staff development programmes, observation of lessons in practice, clustering, monitoring, moderation to guarantee quality of assessment and evaluation, establishment of subject policies and encouraging educators to register with institutions of higher learning.

Principal A had this to say: *“I encourage them to enrol with some institutions, but mostly, you know, sometimes we as school managers we just tell our educators to enrol, but we don’t check what they enrol for. Motivate this person to study in line with what he/she is doing. If he/she is doing Mathematics encourage such person to register for Mathematics.”*

4.3.2.5 Assessing the instructional program

This set of questions was meant to understand the extent to which principals question the success and failure of the curriculum which, in the South African context, is not designed in schools. The new curriculum, CAPS, has been introduced in South Africa. As instructional leaders, principals have to come up with ways of following up the results of their planning and teaching in schools. The yardsticks for measuring the success and failure of primary school learners in South African schools are the results of the ANA and the FFLC. Principals are expected to use data (results in these tests) to inform their decisions relating to learner performance.

The following responses demonstrate how principals perceive the new curriculum and how it impacts on their leadership role:

Principal E: *Yes, though somewhere they are failing, they are trying their level best, because mmm, now we are attending CAPS workshops so that we are doing preparations for next year. I think they are doing their level best to improve the situation, but if maybe, the books won't be available that will be another problem. And the time for work shopping the educators, it's very much limited. I think it would be better if they add up some training next year by two or three days. It would also be advisable that they conduct some in-service training. I think that would also help.*

Principal C: *Mmm, I first of all I never work shopped about this CAPS. I heard this, I just read about it on the papers. In 2011, the Foundation Phase educators were work shopped, and then they came back and reported. They gave reports of what was happening at the workshop. Then I took it from there, from the report. Then I will never say I am from the workshop it was only an orientation like where they called the HODs and the principals. It's only the orientation, it's not a workshop. Then I took it from the Foundation Phase educators. In other words, I learnt something from them.*

Principal C: *Yes, this is a serious challenge for these books. Another one is for; even the teachers are not well equipped with this curriculum, because they were struggling with the OBE, the NSB, and the NCS and now come the CAPS. They are still struggling. They are struggling with the ever-changing curriculum.*

Principal D: *Certainly yes. Even though the training was not so intensive, one could pick up some of the important aspects from the new curriculum. Well, basically it is not completely different from what we have been doing in the past. You know, change of names, reducing of subjects where now some subjects.....*

Principal D: *Ja, but the government is letting us down. Today is the 18th of September 2012; tomorrow will be the 19th September 2012. Our learners in grade 6 were supposed to be writing ANA examinations for First Additional Language. The question papers are not there. Grade 1,2,3,4 and 5 learners are also expected to write these examinations, but the question papers are not yet delivered to centers. What else? What are we going to do in that case? That is the reason why I indicated earlier on that, you know, I feel the government or department is not doing enough.*

Principal A: *Yes, I think I need two years and not more. If I can't do it within two years then it means I can even go. If you say go I will go. I want to see this school within two years having buildings. I am the one who should guide the SGB in going out and resource for teachers and buildings so that the kids should.....you see if you look at the fence around here is very old, very old. I can say we don't have any fence. My contribution at this school since our arrival here speaks louder, but as for now what I am focusing on now is infrastructure within two years. Should I fail, no, say you have failed and I will quit.*

All the participants approved of the new curriculum but indicated that the training in the curriculum was inadequate. Only educators and HODs in the Foundation phase were trained on the new curriculum and this makes it difficult for principals to provide leadership in this area. These sentiments were echoed by Principal D who indicated that the department is not doing enough. It is indicated that the department should do more in developing and supporting principals as instructional leaders. Principal C is concerned about the ever-changing South African curriculum which does not foster curriculum mastery among educators. The introduction of the new curriculum is made difficult by the non-delivery of textbooks to implement it.

Principal A is much concerned about the improvement of the school infrastructure than for children's learning and teaching. *"I want to see this school within two years having buildings. I am the one who should guide the SGB in going out and resource for teachers and buildings so that the kids should.....you see if you look at the fence around here is very old, very old. I can say we don't have any fence. My contribution at this school since our arrival here speaks louder, but as for now what I am focusing on now is infrastructure within two years. Should I fail, no, say you have failed and I will quit".*

Although the mission of the school is to strive for excellence in teaching and learning, little is done to that effect. Activities of the principal are not geared towards the attainment of the mission. He focused more on human relations, albeit important, than on teaching and learning. The administration of ANA examinations specifically, and the introduction of the new curriculum in general is a matter of deep concern to Principal D. At the time of the interviews, late in the afternoon, ANA question papers to be written the following morning were not yet delivered to schools as examination centres. It was interesting to note that all principals were optimistic about the future of their institutions.

4.4. CONCLUSION

In this chapter I presented the findings from interviews carried out with five primary school principals. The interviews sought to find out the principals perceptions of instructional leadership. The aim of the chapter was to explore and determine whether principals' understanding and perceptions of instructional leadership roles account for poor performance in both national and international tests, and, their execution of instructional leadership roles. The next chapter will give the recommendations and conclusion to the study. A summary of findings in tabular form is presented in Table 4.2 .

TABLE 4.2 SUMMARY OF PRINCIPALS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP ROLES

<i>Dimensions</i>	<i>Principal A</i>	<i>Principal B</i>	<i>Principal C</i>	<i>Principal D</i>	<i>Principal E</i>
Defining the school's mission	Striving for excellence in reading and writing, mission drawn by educators, overrated the importance of the mission	Teaching learners to read and write comprehensively, mission a long-term process, principal guided the development.	Involvement of SGB and parents. Principal guided, mission a long-term process	Producing technologically equipped learners, drawn collectively by stakeholders, principal facilitated, mission attainable, mission revisited and revised	Drawn by SGB, parents, educators and SMT. Attainable Principal gave direction
Leadership in the curriculum and instruction	Delegation of duties, leadership by wandering around, monitoring and modelling, English mastery as language of instruction, moderation of tasks to ensure quality, importance of literacy and numeracy	Numeracy and numeracy the basis of learning, modelling, guarantee contact time, school-based workshops, ensure CAPS implementation, delegation of duties.	Ever-changing curriculum, SMT and educators develop strategies, Num and Lit important, time tables and assessment plans, exemplary	Principal manages various areas but importantly the delivery of curriculum, monitoring, observation, evaluating, uses data to inform decision-making, collective leadership, time management clustering, importance of numeracy and literacy.	Num and Lit important. Shared leadership, class visits, motivation, involvement of stakeholders, period registers, management by wandering around
Promoting a positive learning climate	Administrative concerns, compromises, motivation, communicate high expectations, mixed reactions on parental involvement, underestimation of leadership roles.	Operational concerns, mixed reactions to parental involvement, teamwork, check learners' books, delegation of duties, communicate goals,	Operational concerns, human relations, delegation, interaction with stakeholders, academic emphasis,	Operational concerns, compromises and motivation of staff, cordial human relations, collective leadership.	Human relations, operational/administrative concerns,
Observing and improving instruction	Teamwork, post-observation feedback, extra lessons, moderation to ensure quality, clustering, upgrading qualifications	Moderation of tasks to guarantee quality, post-observation feedback, school-based workshops, motivation of teachers, seek departmental support	Team analysis of results and development of strategies	IQMS not a success, class visits and observation, feedback, monitoring, moderation of assessment, clustering, encourage educators to upgrade, seminars and school-based workshops.	Classroom observation, educator development, moderation and assessment, motivation, clustering, school-based workshops, monitoring
Assessing the instructional programme	CAPS good but inadequate training, major achievements in human relations, greater concerns for bricks and mortar than for teaching and learning, compromises	Inadequate training on CAPS, optimistic about the improvement of level of reading and writing as in mission statement[focused on attainment of vision and mission]	Optimistic about the future, CAPS good but inadequate training, needs departmental support.	Inadequate CAPS training and departmental support, optimistic about the future, concerned about teaching and learning as core business of the school.	CAPS good but inadequate training, optimistic about future.

CHAPTER 5

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The leadership of the principal is known to be a key factor in supporting student achievement, but how that leadership is experienced and instructionally enacted by principals is much less clear (Wahlstrom & Louis:2008). Increased knowledge about what leaders do and how they have an impact on the instructional behaviours of learners, teachers and the community will lead to improved student achievement. In my study, I set out to answer the following research question and sub-questions as indicated in Chapter 1:

Research question: How do primary school principals see and describe their instructional leadership role in the improvement of Numeracy and Literacy?

Sub-questions:

- According to international best practices, what are the instructional leadership roles of a primary school principal?
- What policies inform principals on their instructional leadership roles?
- How do school principals understand their leadership role in relation to teaching and learning?
- Can the perceptions of principals regarding their instructional role explain the poor performance of primary schools in both national and international tests?

The literature review in Chapter 2 highlighted the importance of instructional leadership in learner performance and provided me with a theoretical lens to conduct this study. Instructional leadership has been described as a process, a set of tasks or roles, or a specific focus of a school principal. In primary schools, principals are expected to lay a solid foundation for learners' future learning by ensuring that learners are able to read, write, grasp the phonics and do basic calculations. To ensure and guarantee effective and efficient teaching and learning, principals are expected to guide the day-to-day functioning of the school, uphold and maintain the school's mission, provide leadership in the curriculum and instruction, create a positive learning climate, and be actively and directly involved in the improvement of classroom circumstances.

The above questions were answered through the data collected and analysed in the previous chapter. This analysis was guided by Weber's (1996) Instructional Leadership Model. The chapter will provide recommendations for whoever has an interest in learner achievement in particular and education in general.

5.2 MAIN FINDINGS

The data revealed a number of important, but not new, strands in principals' perceptions of their instructional leadership roles. As a way of answering my research question, the following sub-topics have been used:

- The instructional leadership roles of a primary school principal;
- Policies that inform principals of their instructional leadership roles;
- Principals' perceptions of their instructional leadership role in consideration of performance in both national and international tests.

5.2.1. The instructional leadership roles of a primary school principal

The data revealed that some primary school principals had either a distorted, impoverished or little understanding of the concept "instructional leadership". This, however, did not mean that they did not engage in important instructional leadership practices. In probing their roles, it became apparent that they knew and applied instructional strategies such as delegation of responsibilities, shared decision-making, observation of lessons in practice, provision of leadership in the delivery of the curriculum and staff professional development.

The fact that they knew what had to be done in terms of instructional leadership, was probably not based on some theoretical understanding of the concept, but rather on the fact that they have been in education for many years and that through experience realised what needed to be done.

It was interesting to observe and discover that although they knew their instructional leadership roles, they did not execute them effectively because of a variety of operational and administrative issues which included shortages of textbooks, dilapidated infrastructure and overcrowded classrooms.

Of the five participants, only one did not understand the process of developing a mission and vision for the school. He did not involve the governing body and parents, but instead delegated the responsibility to teachers. Data further revealed that activities of the two good

performing schools were geared towards the attainment of the mission and vision. It was, however, surprising to note that activities of the poor performing school too, were focused on the mission of excellence in mathematics, reading and writing.

All the participants understood the importance of Numeracy and Literacy as the basis for students' future learning and applauded the newly-introduced curriculum (CAPS). They indicated that it would reduce the educators' workload and impact positively on principals' instructional leadership roles. Unfortunately, principals were not trained on providing leadership in the new curriculum. Only subject teachers and Heads of Departments underwent the training, which was described as "inadequate" because it lasted for a few days. Principal C was concerned about the ever-changing South African curriculum. She claimed that this had a bearing on teachers' professional expertise, learner achievement and principals' leadership roles.

A general observation is that principals did much to create and promote positive relations with their communities to ensure a positive learning environment. There is a move from the traditionally conservative and authoritarian leadership style to a shared, collective and distributed leadership style. Data supported existing literature on the strategy of post-observation feedback. Principals used observations to build an open and honest culture of teaching and learning. In some instances, as indicated by Principal C, learners' test results were jointly analysed by members of staff. This view is supported by Herman and Herman (1998) who indicate that "effective instructional leaders are directly involved in monitoring student achievement and work with teachers to overcome achievement deficit".

Data further illustrated that some of the instructional leadership strategies applied by participants include, but are not limited to, fostering of teamwork, motivation, extra-lessons, moderation of tasks, clustering, school-based workshops and class visits.

5.2.2 Policies that inform principals of their instructional leadership roles

Responses from principals indicate that their roles are dependent on policies and the curriculum drawn by the department. The introduction of Curriculum and Policy Statements (CAPS) directly impacted and influenced principals' leadership roles. Although principals approved of the introduction of the new curriculum, they lamented that they were not trained on its management. Training was offered to Subject teachers and HODs. This, however, was inadequate and insufficient.

The core duties and responsibilities of school principals are outlined in the Employment of Educators Act (Act 76 of 1998) as follows:

- General/ administrative matters;
- Personnel (provision of professional leadership within the school);
- Engagement in teaching as per workload relevant to the post level and the needs of school;
- Extra and co-curricular activities; and
- Interaction with stake-holders.

The Integrated Quality Management System (IQMS, 2003) is a collective agreement between educator-unions and the Department of Education. Its purposes are to determine educator competence, to assess strengths and areas of development, to provide support and opportunities for development to assure continued growth, to promote accountability and to monitor an institution's overall effectiveness. This agreement, thus, impacted directly on principals' provision of leadership in schools. The overarching aim of this document is to offer educators the opportunity to develop themselves and finally to be rewarded for competency. The research indicated that schools and educators were not comfortable with the initiative, claiming that the department does not fulfil its promises of offering reward.

5.2.3 Principals' perceptions of their instructional leadership role against the poor performance in both national and international tests

According to accumulated data, principals' perceptions of their instructional leadership role does not account for poor performance in national and international tests. The view that principals in deep rural schools do not have knowledge of instructional leadership strategies did not hold true in this study. Even though they did not have a solid theoretical understanding of it, they know and understand their instructional roles. However, they cannot carry them out due to administrative and operational issues, such as inadequate training on CAPS, the ever-changing South African curriculum, shortage of resources and poor infrastructure. Some of the principals could not define and explain the phenomenon of instructional leadership, but it was apparent upon probing that they knew, understood and applied instructional strategies in their schools to enhance learner performance.

CAPS and ANA's success depends on the instructional leadership role of the school principal, but how schools translate them into learner performance is dependent on the department to provide both capital and human resources. How principals see and describe instructional leadership, will inform the department and interest parties as to what to do to improve learner performance.

Although the sample was not large enough to draw a firm conclusion, the data did reveal that school principals of poor performing schools were less agile in using instructional leadership to better their schools' performance. They tended to focus more on operational and administrative functions and on improving the infrastructure of the schools. Principals of the two well-performing schools had a much greater focus on instructional leadership. This is, however, something that needs to be studied on a much larger scale before one could conclude that instructional leadership does make a difference.

5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

On the basis of the outcomes of the study, I hereby make the following recommendations:

- Training on the new curriculum should commence with principals as instructional leaders who should ensure that its implementation is monitored and controlled;
- The Department should provide intensive training for teachers on the new curriculum [CAPS]. Curriculum advisors should regularly visit schools and provide support and monitor the implementation of the newly-introduced curriculum and how it should be managed;
- The Department should accelerate the procurement and delivery of textbooks in time, provide resources and renovate schools to become safe centres of teaching and learning;
- As instructional leaders, principals should never be satisfied with the current success or status of their schools. They should constantly articulate the school's mission and set high expectations among teachers and learners;
- Principals should be advised to direct the activities of the school towards the attainment of the vision and mission. Principals must remind teachers, learners and all stakeholders of the vision of the school;
- An award ceremony for primary school teachers and learners who performed well in ANA tests should be held as a way of motivating and inspiring them for excellence;

- The implementation of IQMS should be monitored according to the intended purposes. False departmental promises to educators, impact negatively on their morale. This further affects learner achievement; and
- Circuit managers should meet with teacher unions, stakeholders and interested parties to determine when union activities and memorial services should be conducted, and avoid tempering with learner contact time.

5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

This study, like many others carried out before, is focused on principals' perceptions of their instructional leadership role. As a domain of the principal's leadership and management role, reliance, thereof, might lead to a distorted and limited perception of the principal as a school leader and manager. I, therefore, recommend that further research be conducted on other domains of leadership. It would further be interesting to see what the findings would be if principals of urban primary schools were sampled for the same study.

The data revealed that principals of less-performing schools were less agile in using instructional leadership and tended to focus more on administrative and infrastructural innovations. Performing schools focussed more on instructional leadership. Based on these findings, I would recommend that a study be carried out to explore the impact of instructional leadership on learner performance.

5.5 CONCLUSION

The aim of the study was to explore primary school principals' perceptions of their instructional leadership role. To successfully carry out the study, sub-questions were asked and answered after the analysis of data (see chapter 1). Chapter 5 has consolidated the findings and provided recommendations for school leaders and the Department. The research concludes that principals in deep rural primary schools have an intuitive knowledge and understanding of instructional leadership strategies. Assisting them in developing a more theoretical understanding will help them to bridge the gap between theory and practice. This will in turn, enhance their deeper understanding of how to enhance their own school practice.

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Annexure A



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
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Faculty of Education

RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

DEGREE AND PROJECT

INVESTIGATOR(S)

DEPARTMENT

DATE CONSIDERED

DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE

CLEARANCE NUMBER :

EM 12/02/01

M.Ed

Principals' perceptions of their instructional leadership role in the improvement of numeracy and literacy in primary schools

Matome Edward Kgatla

Education Management and Policy Studies

12 September 2013

APPROVED

Please note:

For Masters applications, ethical clearance is valid for 2 years

For PhD applications, ethical clearance is valid for 3 years.

**CHAIRPERSON OF ETHICS
COMMITTEE**

Prof Liesel Ebersöhn

DATE

12 September 2013

CC

Jeannie Beukes
Liesel Ebersöhn
Prof FJ Nieuwenhuis

This ethical clearance certificate is issued subject to the following conditions:

1. A signed personal declaration of responsibility
2. If the research question changes significantly so as to alter the nature of the study, a new application for ethical clearance must be submitted
3. It remains the students' responsibility to ensure that all the necessary forms for informed consent are kept for future queries.

Please quote the clearance number in all enquiries.

Annexure B

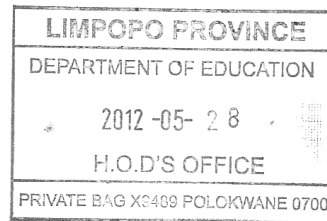


LIMPOPO
PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Enquiries: Mr. Makola MC, Tel No: 015 290 9448 .E-mail: MakolaMC@edu.limpopo.gov.za.

UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
FUCULTY OF EDUCATION



Dear Kgatle ME

RE: Request for permission to Conduct Research

1. The above bears reference.
2. The Department wishes to inform you that your request to conduct a research has been approved- **Title: "PRINCIPALS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP ROLE IN THE IMPROVEMENT OF NUMERACY AND LITERACY IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS."** i.e. District.
3. The following conditions should be considered:
 - 3.1 The research should not have any financial implications for Limpopo Department of Education.
 - 3.2 Arrangements should be made with both the Circuit Offices and the schools concerned.
 - 3.3 The conduct of research should not anyhow disrupt the academic programs at the schools.
 - 3.4 The research should not be conducted during the time of Examinations especially the forth term.
 - 3.5 During the study, the research ethics should be practiced, in particular the principle of voluntary participation (the people involved should be respected).

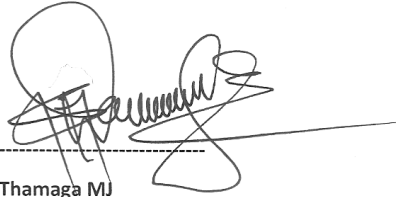
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The heartland of Southern Africa – Development is about people!

- 3.6 Upon completion of research study, the researcher shall share the final product of the research with the Department.
4. Furthermore, you are expected to produce this letter at Schools/ Offices where you intend conducting your research as an evidence that you are permitted to conduct the research.
5. The department appreciates the contribution that you wish to make and wishes you success in your investigation.

Best wishes.



Thamaga MJ



2018/05/23

Date



07 June 2012

Dear Principal

Request for permission to conduct research

I am a Master's degree student in the Faculty of Education (Department of Educational Management and Policy Studies) and wish to engage in a research study titled "*Principals' perceptions of their instructional leadership role in the improvement of Numeracy and Literacy in Primary schools.*"

Instructional leadership is often described as the actions and strategies used by school principals aimed at improving the teaching and learning in schools. Very little is known about how rural primary school principals view their instructional leadership role and for this reason the research seeks to learn more about school principals perceptions in this regards. A qualitative research design will be followed whereby school principals from your circuit will be interviewed.

You have been selected as a possible participant in the research. In terms of my research design, I will interview each school principal that is willing to participate on their instructional leadership role. These interviews will be conducted at a time and place convenient to the school principals outside of their normal teaching programme. All participants are assured of confidentiality and anonymity. Participation is voluntary and you are under no obligation to participate and such a decision will not in any way be held against you. Should you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw from participating at any time. You will also be given the opportunity to provide written or oral comments on the draft report of the findings.

In the final research report no names of schools, school principals or any other identifying information that could link the research to the research site will be revealed as the focus is on the perceptions of school principals.

In the final research report no names of schools, school principals or any other identifying information that could link the research to the research site will be revealed as the focus is on the perceptions of school principals.

Your kind consideration to participate in the research is appreciated.

Yours sincerely

ME Kgatla

MEd Candidate

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Prof. Jan Nieuwenhuis

Supervisor

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Consent Letter

I _____ agree to participate in a study conducted by Mr Kgatla on “*Principals' perceptions of their instructional leadership role in the improvement of Numeracy and Literacy in Primary schools.*” I am aware that I am free to withdraw my participation at any time should I wish to do so and my decision will not be held against me.

I understand that my principalship duties will not be influenced or neglected due to this study.

I understand that my identity and all tape-recorded interviews will remain anonymous and confidential.

I also understand that I will be expected to provide written or oral comments on the draft report.

I grant permission that the interviews may be recorded for research purposes and understand that these will be stored safely.

I have received contact details for the researcher and the supervisor should I need to contact them about matters related to this research.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Annexure D

Semi-structured interview schedule

Dear Sir/Madam

Thank you for the opportunity to talk to you about something that is dear to you. As I have explained in my letter, I am involved in a research project in which I look Principals' perceptions of their instructional leadership role in the improvement of Numeracy and Literacy in Primary schools. Since you are in a good position to share your ideas about the topic with me, I would like to learn how you see instructional leadership in your school. As I have pointed out in my letter, all information will be treated as confidential and no names of persons or schools will be revealed in the final report. You are also welcome at any stage to withdraw from the research and this will not be held against you. Are there any questions for clarifications that you would like to ask before we start our interview?

Would you mind if I record our interview to enable me to transcribe it at a later stage and to help me to capture your ideas more precisely?

1. Tell me a little about your school. How many learners and educators do you have?
2. If you think about your role as a school principal, what would you regard as your most important function?
3. What are some of the challenges that you face in the school?
4. Very often we read in the literature about “instructional leadership”. Have you heard about this? If yes, principals should describe their understanding of the term. If no, I will provide the following definition: In the literature, school leadership is defined as “*the decisions, strategies and actions that principals use to improve the teaching and learning in schools.*” Given this definition, what strategies do you use to improve the effectiveness of teaching and learning in your school? (I will probe the strategies given in terms of how and what)

A. Defining the school’s mission

1. Can you briefly describe your school’s vision and mission to me?
2. When and how was this mission and vision developed?
3. What was your role in the development of the mission and vision of the school?
4. Who else played a major role in the development of the mission and vision?

5. Do you think you can attain this mission and vision? Explain.
6. Did the mission and vision change over the last number of years, and if so, how and why? A mission and vision in general provide a school with an overall aim. What activities and roles have you engaged in to help educators to work towards this goal? Elaborate.

B. Managing the curriculum and instruction

1. How important is literacy and numeracy in primary schools? Explain.
2. Do you think that the new CAPS document would influence your role as a principal?
3. How do you manage the implementation of the new CAPS curriculum in the school?
4. Do you make use of subject clusters? Tell me more about it in terms of your role in it.
5. Do you conduct class visits? How often and why?
6. What role do you play in the assessment of learners' work?
7. Briefly describe how instruction is co-ordinated, monitored and supervised in your school.

C. Promoting a positive learning climate

1. Let us now look at some of the factors at school and in the community that may influence teaching and learning. Are you satisfied with the general teaching and learning environment in your school? If yes, elaborate. If no, what do you think needs to be done?
2. Briefly describe how you feel about the relationship that exists between you and your educators, learners, and parents
3. What factors in the school inhibits teaching and learning? In other words, what factors make it difficult to teach in your school? How do you deal with them?
4. What factors in the community inhibits teaching and learning? How do you deal with them?
5. Are parents involved in any way in the teaching and learning of their children? Describe.

D. Observing and improving instruction

1. According to your view, is there any relationship between what is taught to learners and what they are assessed about? Tell me more.
2. How do you deal with professional staff development in your school? Elaborate

3. Do you play any role in the professional development of educators? Describe in detail.
4. What actions do you take to improve the quality of teaching and learning in your school?
5. As a principal, what type of support do you need from the department in order to be a better instructional leader? To what extent does the department provide such support (if any)?

E. Assessing the instructional program

1. How is the curriculum developed within the school?
2. What do you see as the most important duties of a school principal? (I will then probe each duty and how principals describe and conceptualise each duty)
3. What do you regard as your duty regarding the implementation of the curriculum (Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement) within your school?
4. What significant achievement have you attained since being appointed as a school principal?
5. Do you think you can do more for the school in the future? Elaborate more on this.
6. Is there anything else that you think is important about teaching at your school that I should know about?

Thank you