PREDICTORS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP PRACTICES: LESSONS LEARNT FROM BUSHBUCKRIDGE, SOUTH AFRICA

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to examine the instructional leadership practices of school principals that would enhance management and leadership. Structured questionnaires (n=228) completed by deputy principals and departmental heads, showed that instructional leadership was composed of four sub-dimensions, which could be used to identify areas for possible improvement. Using multiple regression analysis, the sub-dimension of "Monitoring and providing feedback on the teaching and learning process" was the best predictor of instructional leadership. Furthermore, self-confidence of the principal and knowledge of current developments in the curriculum regarding instructional leadership, attending and participating in curriculum-related workshops, and communicating curriculum goals to teachers were considered crucial to ensure that principals become instructional leaders.

Keywords: curriculum management; development appraisal; effective school leadership; instructional leadership; leadership practices

Introduction

The concept of instructional leadership had its origins in the 19th century inspection system that existed in North America, England and Australia. It rose to prominence again in the United States of America in the 1970s when the instructional dimension of the role of the principal was emphasised. From the 1960s onwards, the definitions of this concept ranged from "any activity in which the principal engaged in order to improve instruction, to certain types of activities or actions, such as classroom observation" (Gurr, Drysdale and Mulford, 2006). Smith and Andrews (1989), quoted in Enueme and Egwunyenga (2008:13), viewed instructional leadership as a blend of supervision, staff development and curriculum development that facilitates school improvement. According to Masumoto and Brown-Welty (2009: 3), instructional leadership focuses on the leader's (principal's) influence on student achievement, namely, how he or she positively affects teachers and the outcomes of teaching, and advances student performance. Research by Leithwood, Seashore, Anderson, and Wahlstron (2004) and Waters, Marzano and MacNulty (2003) emphasises the role of the principal as the instructional leader in setting directions, developing the educators on matters of instruction, and ensuring the success of the school.

Both 20th and 21st century views of instructional leadership emphasise the idea that instructional leadership encompasses those actions that a principal takes, or delegates to others, in order to promote growth in student learning. A principal must be able to define the purpose of schooling, set school-wide goals, and implement strategies in order to achieve those goals. He or she must provide the educators and learners with all the resources necessary for effective learning to occur; supervise and evaluate teachers in line with the performance of their learners; initiate and coordinate in-house staff development programmes; and create and nurture collegial relationships with and among teachers (Wildy and Dimmock 1993:144).

In South Africa, instructional leadership could be the answer for challenges currently faced by school principals. Mestry and Grobler (2004:4) point out that "principals in South Africa are faced with a huge task in creating an effective learning environment". Some of the challenges that principals face include, among others:

(1)   establishing a culture of teaching and learning;
(2).   maintaining high educational standards and improving learner performance;
(3)   working with parents and dealing with multicultural school populations;
(4)   managing change and conflict;
(5)   coping with limited resources; and
(6)   ensuring greater accountability to their respective communities

Steyn 2008; Mestry & Grobler 2004; Vick 2004). However, in order to face these challenges, measurable predictors of success for South African principals must be found.

What are the most important predictors of instructional school leadership when preparing principals to become effective leaders? Elmore (2000) and Daresh (2007) share the view that all primary activities undertaken by school leaders should be tightly coupled with the purpose of schooling, which is teaching and learning. This view implies that a principal's primary concern should be instructional leadership. Leithwood and Riehl (2003) maintain that in any excellent school, you are likely to find an excellent principal, whereas in a failing school you will find weak leadership. The implication of this contention is that principals need to be effectively prepared to create good schools. Instructional leadership is a key component of the duties of a school principal.

Considering the above, for the purpose of this study, the following four dimensions of instructional leadership (Hallinger & Heck, 1996) were selected for the researchers to formulate questions for deputy principals and Heads of Department (HoDs) for use in a structured questionnaire.

Promoting frequent and appropriate school-wide teacher development activities (Rogus & Wildenhaus ,1992:133 in Keefe & Jenkins, 2000)

Defining and communicating shared vision and goals (Caldwell, 2002: 26)
Monitoring and providing feedback on teaching and learning processes

(Lashway, 2001; Gamage, Adams & McCormack, 2009; Chang, 2001:1; DuFour, 2002; National Association of Elementary School Principals, 2002; Blase & Blasé, 2000; Rosenblaum, 1994:1 in Lahui-Ako, 2000: 234, Darling-Hammond, Wise & Pease,1983; Al-ghanabousi & Idris, 2010: 3840).

Monitoring curriculum delivery and instruction (Erlandson & Witters-Churchill, 1990; Marlow & Minehira, 1996:1; DuFour, 2002; Hallinger, 2002: 3; Jenkins, 2009:36; Hallinger ,2002; 2003)

The aim of this study was to identify the predictors of instructional leadership practices that will enhance and improve management and leadership in schools in Bushbuckridge, South Africa and – hopefully – other rural schools with similar conditions elsewhere in the world. Examining the instructional leadership practices of school principals may imply improving learner performance and educational outcomes which will ultimately lead to school effectiveness and school improvement. In presenting our argument, we discuss the challenges faced by South African principals, the setting in which this research study was carried out, the concept of instructional leadership and the four components of instructional leadership, as well as their subcomponents or factors.

Methodology

Participants and sample area
In the sample, 114 heads of departments (HoDs) and 114 deputy principals from the 114 secondary schools in Bushbuckridge, Mpumalanga signed the consent forms and filled in questionnaires about the leadership practices of their principals. According to the national census conducted in September 2001, Bushbuckridge in Mpumalanga has the highest level of unemployment and the highest illiteracy rate in the country. The circumstances in Bushbuckridge, which manifest in the poor performance of learners in the matriculation examinations, were exacerbated by its incorporation into a province that already had service delivery challenges emanating from its re-demarcation. Bushbuckridge was chosen as the study area as it is an example of schools that operate in extreme challenging situations.

Procedure

Structured questionnaires were developed, with the assistance of the statistical department, to collect data from deputy principals and heads of department (HODs) regarding their perceptions of instructional leadership practices in their schools. The 114 secondary schools identified for this research project had similar backgrounds regarding their geographical location, school facilities, funding models, and performance patterns. The necessary permission to conduct the research project was obtained from the Regional Head of the Mpumalanga Department of Education and all ethical requirements were fulfilled. One of the researchers, who works in Bushbuckridge, distributed and collected of the questionnaires. He phoned schools, made appointments with the participants and briefly explained the questionnaire in the distribution phase. In this way 228 questionnaires were distributed to be completed by a deputy principal and one HOD in each of the schools selected.

Measures

As self-perceptions are prone to inflated values it was decided to use the perceptions of persons other than the school principal but who work closely with him/her. The questionnaire was divided into four sections and each item asked respondents to provide their perception as to the extent that a particular aspect related to the instructional leadership abilities of the principal of their school. A six-point interval scale was used, where 1 indicated no extent and 6 indicated a very large extent. Consent forms requiring permission and the option of withdrawal was brought to the attention of all respondents. A total of 228 completed questionnaires which were useable were collected by one of the researchers. This high return rate (100%) can be ascribed to the personal school visits by one of the researchers.

Plan of analysis

SPSS 21.0 was utilised to show factor loadings and mean scores. The items in the 4 first-order factors are provided in tables i, ii, iii and iv.

Section A of the questionnaire contains seven items grouped around promoting frequent and appropriate school-wide teacher development activities associated with instructional leadership practices. The data was subjected to a factor analytic process (Principle Components Analysis [PCA] with varimax rotation). The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) value of 0.874 and a significant Bartlett's sphericity value (p=0.000) indicated that a smaller grouping of items was feasible. The factor that emerged from this analysis and was named "Promoting frequent and appropriate school-wide teacher development activities" (Factor A).

Section B of the questionnaire contained seven items grouped around defining and communicating a shared vision and goals. The data was subjected to a factor analytic process (PCA with varimax rotation).The KMO value of 0.908 and a significant Bartlett's sphericity value (p=0.000) indicated that a smaller grouping of items was

feasible. This factor was named "Defining and communicating shared vision and goals".

Section C of the questionnaire asked respondents for their perceptions of the extent to which their principal monitors and provides feedback regarding the teaching and learning process in their school. Item C18 was removed from the factor analysis as it had a MSA value of less than 0.6. The resulting PCA with varimax rotation had a KMO value of 0.893 and a significant Bartlett's sphericity value (p<0.0005). This factor containing seven items with an Alpha Cronbach Reliability of 0.937. It explained 69.93% of variance present and was named "Monitoring and providing feedback on the teaching and learning process" (FC).

Section D of the questionnaire probed the perceptions of deputy principals and HODs regarding the management of the curriculum and instruction in their schools. The six items were subjected to a Principle Component Analysis (PCA) with varimax rotation, as the KMO value of 0.869 and a Bartlett's sphericity of p=0.000 indicated that such a procedure would be viable.

The items in the 4 first factors are provided in tables i, ii, iii and iv showing factor loadings and mean scores obtained using SPSS 21.0 and are discussed in the results. When the four first-order factors were subjected to a further factor analytic process (PCA with varimax rotation), the KMO of 0.842 and Bartlett's sphericity of p<0.0005 indicated that fewer factors could be formed. One second-order factor resulted which was named instructional leadership. Thereafter, multiple regression analysis was used to find the most significant predictor of instructional leadership.

Results

Factor A: Promoting frequent and appropriate school-wide teacher development activities

This factor explained 59.47% of the variance present and had an Alpha Cronbach Reliability coefficient of 0.886. The items contained in this factor, together with factor loadings and mean scores, are provided in Table i.

Insert Table i
The data in Table i indicates that the respondents agree with item A1 to the greatest extent. It is concerned with the principal's encouragement of teachers to attend professional development activities that are aligned with the goals of the school. However, the highest factor loading is on item A3, which is related to support for individualised professional development, and this item could be said to be the one

that is most representative of all of the items in this factor. The distribution of the data in this factor is provided in Figure i.

Insert Figure i

The mean score of 4.31 for FA indicates that respondents believe that their principal promotes frequent and appropriate school-wide teacher development activities to a moderate extent. The data is slightly negatively skewed, with respondents 27 and 31 indicating that the principals in their schools promote these activities to a very small extent only. The median was 4.43, which indicates that more than 50% of the respondents scored higher on this value and hence tend towards believing that these behaviours are performed to a moderate extent.

Factor B: Defining and communicating a shared vision and goal

This factor explained 70.93% of the variance present and had an Alpha Cronbach Reliability coefficient of 0.930. The items contained in this factor, together with factor loadings and mean scores, are provided in Table ii.

Insert Table ii

The data in Table ii indicates that respondents agreed to the largest extent with item B10, which was related to the extent that the principal communicates the school's academic goals to the teachers. Item B13 had the highest factor loading and was thus most representative of the items in this factor. The distribution of the data in this factor is given in Figure ii.

Insert Figure ii

The mean score of this factor indicates that the deputy principals and heads of department believe that the principals in their schools define and communicate a shared vision and goals regarding learner achievement to a moderate extent. The median value of 4.71 indicates that more than 50% of respondents tended towards the perception that principals in their schools perform these actions to a large extent. However, some respondents (see box plot) were in disagreement with the items in this factor and the data distribution is therefore slightly negatively skewed.

Factor C: Monitoring and providing feedback on the teaching and learning process

Table iii describes the factor loadings and mean scores of factor C.

Insert Table iii

Item C22 had the highest mean score, indicating that respondents agreed that principals provide feedback on learner effort to a moderate extent. Item C21, which asked about the provision of feedback about teacher effort, had the highest factor

loading and was the most representative of the items in this factor. The appropriate graphs to indicate the data distribution are given in Figure iii.

Insert Figure iii

The mean score of 4.03 for this factor indicates that respondents believe that their principals manage the monitoring and feedback function to a moderate extent. The median value of 4.14 could be interpreted in a similar way, namely that 50% of the respondents believe that their principals perform this management function to a moderate extent.

Factor D: Managing the curriculum and instruction

This factor which explained 69.32% of the variance present resulted. It had an Alpha Cronbach Reliability coefficient of 0.910 and was named "Managing the curriculum and instruction" (FD). The items, their factor loadings and mean scores are provided in Table iv.

Insert Table iv

The data in Table iv indicates that item D25 had the highest mean score and that respondents perceived that their principals managed to make it clear who is responsible for coordinating the curriculum across grade levels, to a moderate tending towards a large extent. Item D25 is more concerned with delegation and allocating responsibilities which, although associated with managing the curriculum, is probably more related to the control function of management. Item D28, which had the highest factor loading, seems more concerned with interpersonal skills, which are essential for effective team work. The data distribution of the items in this factor is provided in Figure iv.

Insert Figure iv

The mean score of 4.33 for this factor indicates that the respondents believe that their principals are able to manage the curriculum and instruction to a moderate extent. The median value of 4.50 indicates that 50% of the respondents shared this perception.

Second order factor: Instructional leadership

Cronbach Reliability coefficient was 0.971 and 26 items were involved in its composition. The data distribution of the items is given in Figure v.

Insert Figure v

The mean of 4.31 and median of 4.48 indicates that the respondents had the perception that their principals perform the actions in this factor to a moderate extent.

One can thus conclude that Instructional Leadership in the Bushbuckridge schools sampled is founded on "promoting frequent and appropriate school-wide teacher development activities" (FA), "defining and communicating a shared vision and goals" (FB), "monitoring and providing feedback on the teaching and learning process" (FC) and "managing the curriculum and instruction" (FD). If one arranges the factors using the means model, then "defining and communicating a shared vision and goals" ($\overline{X}_{FB} = 4.57$) is the factor in which respondents agreed with to the greatest extent, followed by "managing the curriculum and instruction" ($\overline{X}_{FD} = 4.33$) and "promoting frequent and appropriate school-wide teacher development activities" ($\overline{X}_{FA} = 4.31$). The factor "monitoring and providing feedback on the teaching and learning process" is placed last in this ranking ($\overline{X}_{FC} = 4.03$). However, the means model may not be the best fit of the observed data and a regression model, where the straight line which best fits the observed data is used, may provide a better fit for the observed data (Field, 2007: 202).

Discussion

Using multiple regression to find the most significant predictor of instructional leadership

The importance of the four first-order factors in predicting the outcome variable, namely instructional leadership, is probably best done using multiple regression. The model suggested by SPSS 21 had the following parameters $[R^2 - 0.995; \Delta F(4,132) = 6547.67; p = 0.000; r = 0.9]$.

These values suggest that this regression model is a better predictor than the means model where the factors were arranged according to their mean scores. The appropriate beta values indicate that FC ("Monitoring and providing feedback on the teaching and learning process") was the best predictor of instructional leadership as the outcome (β=+0.32), followed by "defining and communicating a shared vision and goals" (FB-β=+0.28), and "managing the curriculum and instruction" (FD-β=+0.27), with "promoting frequent and appropriate school-wide teacher development activities" (FA) in fourth place (β=+0.22).

Item 29 asked respondents to rate their principals regarding certain curriculum issues on a three-point interval scale. When testing the three ratings of principal groups against instructional leadership as an outcome using multiple regression analyses, the best predictor was variable 29.3, namely the "rating of the principal's communication of curriculum goals to teachers" (β=+0.34), followed by variable 29.1 (β=+0.24), which related to "the principal's knowledge of current developments in the curriculum". In the rating of "the principal's attendance and participation in curriculum-related workshops", variable 29.2 had a beta value of +0.17. Thus, all three variables are positively related to instructional leadership, and as each one of these ratings of the principal increases, so do perceptions of the success of his or her instructional leadership (Field, 2009: 240). This seems to be a logical finding, as the three variables are significantly correlated with instructional leadership.

Significance of differences between two independent groups

Item 29, which asked respondents to rate their principal regarding curriculum related issues, was collapsed to two categories namely poor to fair (1) and excellent (2). Levene's t-test can be used to search for possible significant statistical differences between the mean scores of two independent groups. If the significance of the test is greater than 0.05, then equality of variances is assumed. If it is less than 0.05, then inequality of variances is assumed.

Significance of differences between the ratings of the principal's knowledge of current developments in the curriculum with respect to the instructional leadership factor (F2)

Those respondents who rated their principal as having excellent knowledge of current developments in the curriculum had a statistically significantly higher mean score than those who rated their principal's knowledge as poor to fair.

$$(\overline{X}_{Poor\,to\,fair} = 3.77; \overline{X}_{Excellent} = 4.75; t(109.44) = -7.38; p = 0.000, r = 0.58)$$

Significance of differences between the ratings of the principal's attendance and participation in curriculum-related workshops with respect to the instructional leadership factor (F2)

Respondents who rated their principal's attendance and participation in curriculum-related workshops as excellent had a statistically significantly higher mean score than those who rated such attendance and participation as poor to fair. $(\overline{X}_{Poor\,to\,fair} = 3.84; \overline{X}_{Excellent} = 4.64; t(94.41) = -.5.42; p = 0.000, r = 0.49)$.

The probable reasons for this response is that principals who attended and participated in curriculum related workshops showed interest and had a better

understanding of the new curriculum requirements. These principals also inspired and motivated their staff to implement changes in the new curriculum, thereby contributing to school effectiveness and school improvement.

Significance of differences between the ratings of the principal's communication of curriculum goals to teachers with respect to the instructional leadership factor (F2)

Respondents who rated their principal's communication of curriculum goals as excellent had a statistically significantly higher mean score than those who rated their principal's communication of curriculum goals as poor to fair.

$$(\overline{X}_{Poor\ to\ fair} = 3.77; \overline{X}_{Excellent} = 4.78; t(106.22) = -.7.74; p = 0.000; r = 0.60)$$

Arranging the three variables in order of their effect sizes shows that the principal's communication of curriculum goals to teachers (V29.3) is the most important variable with respect to instructional leadership (r=0.60), closely followed by the principal's knowledge of current developments in the curriculum (V29.1; r=0.58) and then by the principal's attendance and participation in curriculum-related workshops (V29.2; r=0.49). These values correlate with those found in the multiple regression analysis.

Conclusions and implications of the findings

Instructional leadership, according to the respondents in the sample from the Bushbuckridge area, is composed of four dimensions, namely promoting frequent and appropriate school-wide teacher development activities, defining and communicating a shared vision and goals, monitoring and providing feedback on the teaching and learning process, and managing the curriculum and instruction. As all four factors were found to have construct validity and high reliability coefficients, they could be used by principals to evaluate their instructional leadership activities. They could then compare their self-evaluation with their staff's evaluation of their activities, and thereby identify areas in which they might improve. The dimension "Monitoring and providing feedback on the teaching and learning process" was the best predictor of instructional leadership. It is therefore important for the principal to perform the developmental appraisal pillar in the Integrated Quality Management System (IQMS) process thoroughly.

"Monitoring and providing feedback on the teaching and learning process" can only be carried out effectively if the principal has curriculum expertise, hence the need for capacity building in curriculum related workshops and instructional leadership. The question remains: Does quality monitoring and evaluation lead to quality education?

Instructional leadership is about influencing teachers regarding the teaching and learning process in the classroom, and thus it is closely related to working with teachers. It is strongly associated with how the principal communicates the goals of the curriculum to his or her teachers. Attendance and participation in curriculum-related workshops is likely to provide the principal with knowledge of recent curriculum developments and allow him or her to act as a role model to staff when it comes to aspects such as attitude and commitment towards the implementation of the curriculum.

It is recommended that the content of principal preparation programme be amended to include instructional leadership practices and their implementation. This may motivate principals to attend curriculum workshops and training sessions so that they can become curriculum experts and role models for their subordinates. Monitoring, evaluating and developing educators are essential for school improvement. Due to the numerous challenges that principals in South Africa, and most parts of the world face, knowing these important predictors of instructional leadership practices will enhance the school improvement and school effectiveness challenge. Confidence, commitment and curriculum expertise would contribute to uplifting the current educational situation, thus uplifting the economy of the country as well.

Table i: Items in the factor "Promoting frequent and appropriate school-wide teacher development activities" (FA)

FA -Promoting frequent and appropriate school-wide teacher development activities			
Item	Description	Loading	Mean
A3	To what extent does he or she support individualised professional development?	.826	4.34
A4	To what extent does he or she plan professional development in-service with teachers?	.813	4.04
A2	Does he or she plan for professional development around teacher needs and wants?	.808	4.26
A6	To what extent does he or she provide for in-house professional development opportunities around instructional best practices?	.805	3.99
A7	To what extent does he or she schedule time on in-service collaboration among teachers?	.802	4.01
A5	To what extent does he or she provide professional materials and resources for teachers?	.710	4.49
A1	Does your principal encourage teachers to attend professional development activities that are aligned with school goals?	.609	5.05
Average			4.31

Table ii: Items in the factor "Defining and communicating a shared vision and goals" (FB)

FB-Defining and communicating a shared vision and goals			
Item	**Description**	**Loading**	**Mean**
B13	Does he or she develop school goals that promote high standards and expectations for all learners?	.882	4.66
B12	Does he or she use school goals when making decisions?	.863	4.47
B11	Does he or she work with teachers to interpret assessment data for instructional purposes?	.856	4.34
B10	Does your principal communicate the school's academic goals to teachers?	.840	4.86
B14	Does he or she set high but achievable standards for all learners?	.823	4.68
B9	Does he or she encourage teachers to use data analysis of learners' academic progress?	.817	4.53
B8	To what extent does your principal use data on learners' achievement to guide staff discussion on the instructional programme?	.811	4.45
Average			4.57

Table iii: Items in the factor "Monitoring and providing feedback on the teaching and learning process" (FC)

FC - Monitoring and providing feedback on the teaching and learning process		
Item	**Description**	**Loading**	**Mean**
C21	Does he or she provide feedback on teacher effort?	.887	4.3
C20	Does he or she evaluate teachers to improve instructional practice?	.872	3.9
C16	Does he or she monitor classroom practices for alignment with the regional curriculum?	.858	3.92
C19	Does he or she observe teachers for professional development instead of evaluation?	.834	3.98
C15	Does he or she conduct classroom visits to ensure that instruction aligns with school goals?	.821	3.72
C17	Does he or she work with learners on academic tasks?	.788	3.92
C22	Does he or she provide feedback on learner effort?	.788	4.48
Average			4.03

Table iv: Items in the factor "Managing the curriculum and instruction" (FD)

FD -Managing the curriculum and instruction		
Item	**Description**	**Loading**	**Mean**
D28	Does he or she work in consultation with teachers to assess and revise each grade's instructional program?	.878	4.25
D26	Does he or she participate actively in the review and/or	.875	4.27

FD -Managing the curriculum and instruction			
Item	Description	Loading	Mean
	selection of curricular materials?		
D27	Does he or she encourage the use of program evaluation for future curriculum planning?	.855	4.18
D24	Does he or she evaluate teachers on academic objectives directly related to the approved national curriculum?	.847	4.19
D23	Does your principal ensure that the classroom objectives are consistent with the stated academic goals of the school?	.816	4.23
D25	Does your principal make it clear who is responsible for coordinating the curriculum across grade levels?	.711	4.84
Average			4.33
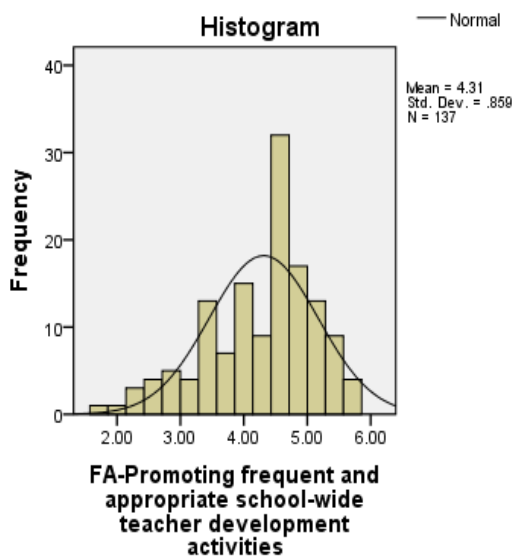
Figure i: Histogram and box plot showing the distribution of data in the factor "Promoting frequent and appropriate school-wide teacher development activities"
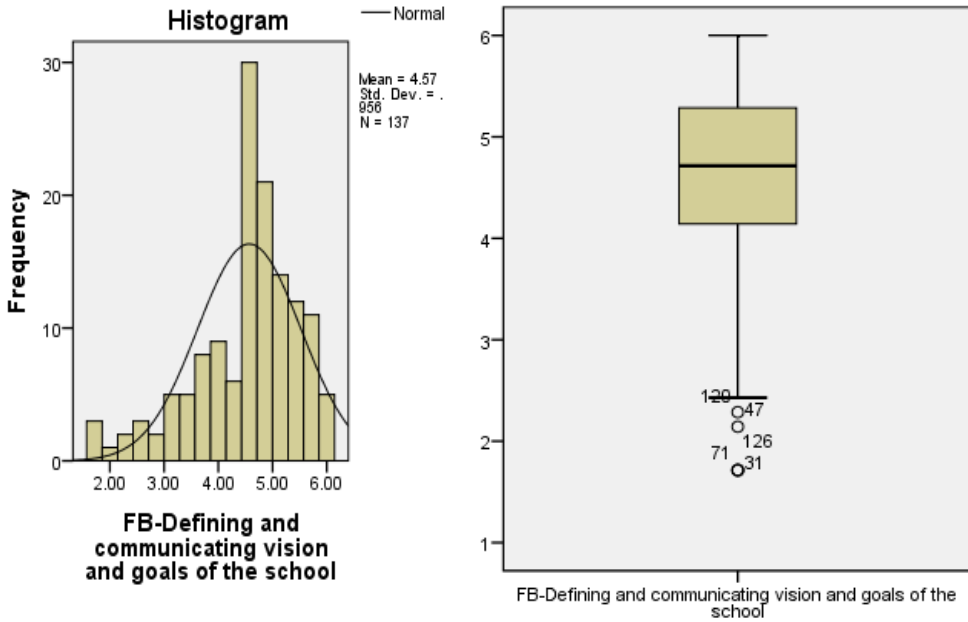
Figure ii: Histogram and box plot showing the distribution of data in the factor "Defining and communicating a shared vision and goals" (FB)
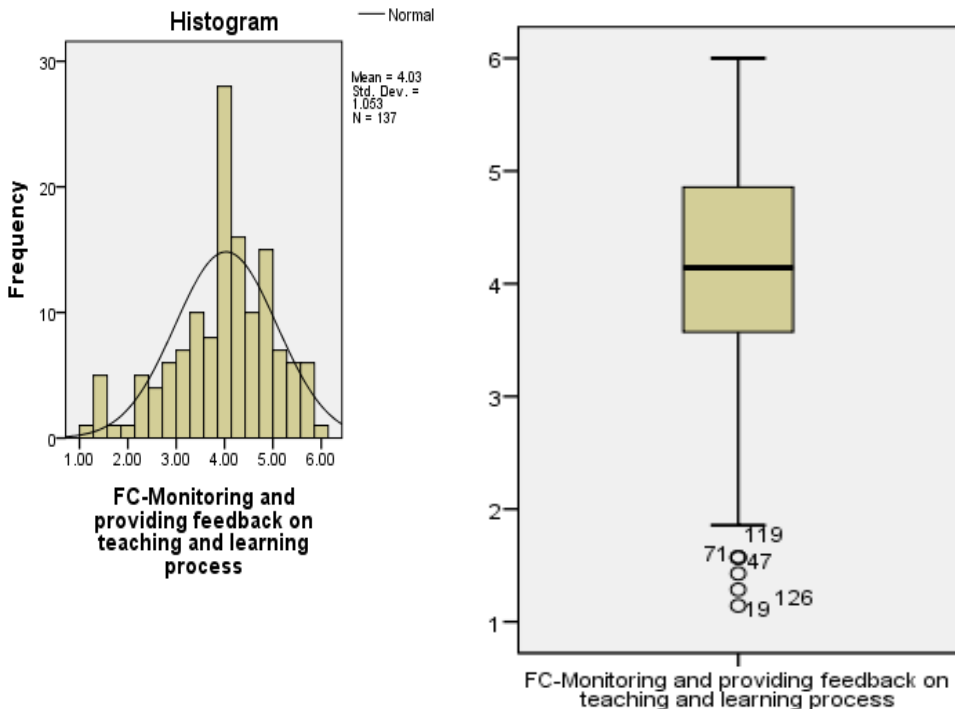

Figure iii: Histogram and box plot showing the distribution of data in the factor "Monitoring and providing feedback on the teaching and learning process"
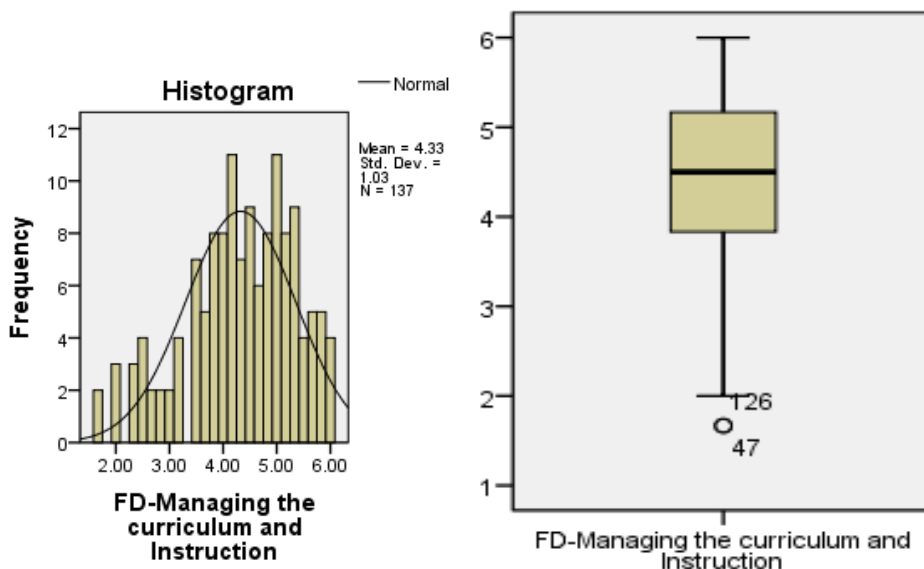
Figure iv: Histogram and box plot showing the distribution of data in the factor "Managing the curriculum and instruction"
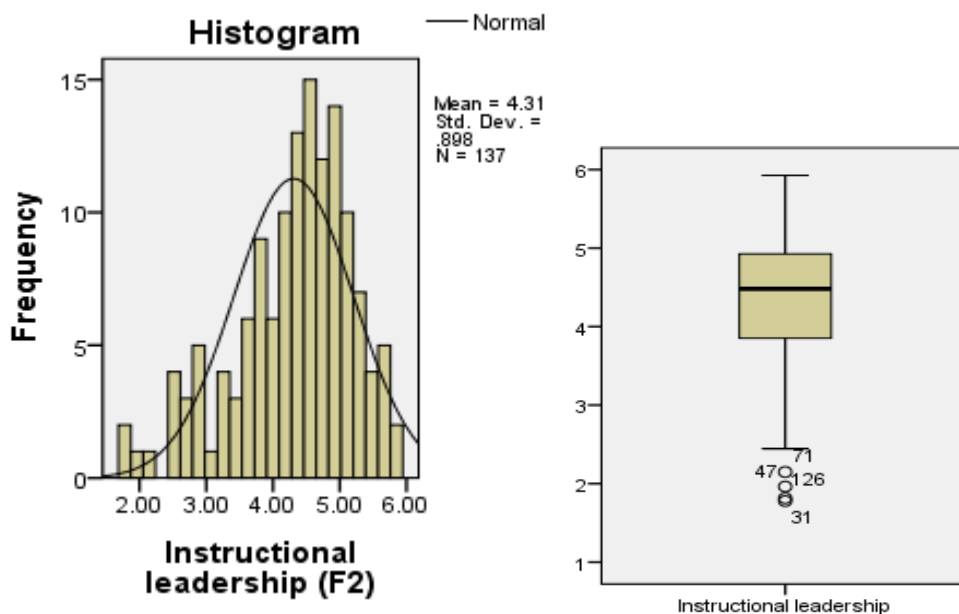

Figure v: Histogram and box plot showing the distribution of data in the factor "Instructional leadership"

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