

CHAPTER 3

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

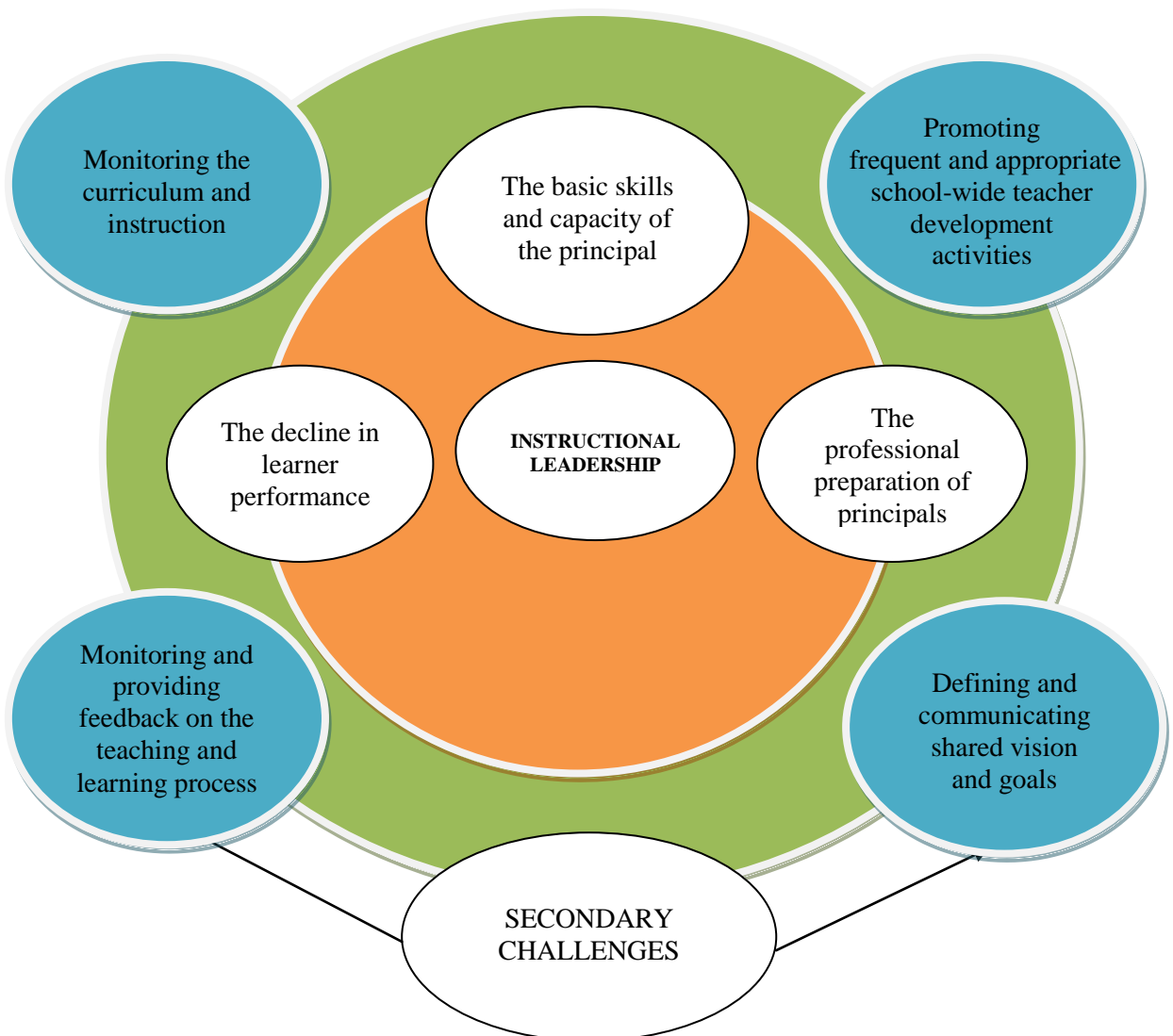
3.1 INTRODUCTION

By definition, a conceptual framework is a consistent and comprehensive theoretical framework emerging from an inductive integration of previous literature, theories, and other pertinent information. It is usually the basis for reframing the research questions and formulating hypotheses, or making informal tentative predictions about the possible outcome of a study (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). According to Shields and Hassan (2006:315), a conceptual framework is used in research to outline possible courses of action, or to present a preferred approach to an idea or thought. It can also act like a map to provide coherence for an empirical inquiry.

The conceptual framework for this study is in two parts. The first part details three major issues which impact directly on a principal. These are *the decline in learner performance in the matriculation examination; the basic skills and capacities of principals; and the professional preparation of principals*. These issues are referred to in the conceptual framework as the primary or major challenges because they form the basis of the entire study; that is, they encompass the issue that prompted me to engage in this study, namely, addressing the question of the decline in learner performance.

The second part of the conceptual framework provides an overview of some ways that instructional leadership, as suggested in the literature, in the form of the four variables, namely: promoting frequent and appropriate school-wide teacher development activities; defining and communicating shared vision and goals; monitoring and providing feedback on the teaching and learning process, and managing the curriculum and instruction may respond to the challenges faced by principals with regard to learner performance. These issues are referred to as secondary challenges because whilst their purpose is to address learner performance (as functions of IL), there is actually no compatibility between them and the traditional role of the principal. Based on this view, the enactment of these variables will always pose a challenge to the instructional leader.

FIGURE 3.1: Representation of the conceptual framework of the study



The above diagram represents the conceptual framework upon which the entire study is built. The two parts of the conceptual framework are now discussed in detail.

3.2 THE PRIMARY/MAJOR CHALLENGES

There are three major challenges which were identified through the literature review and are reflected in the conceptual framework of this study. They are discussed in detail below:

3.2.1 THE DECLINE IN LEARNER PERFORMANCE

The decline in learner performance in South African public secondary schools from 2004 to 2008 set the tone for my engagement with this study. Various education stakeholders began

to harbour expectations of school principals to bring about change in their schools. This situation required the principals to adopt a particular leadership style that would see them being “hands on” in the management of teaching and learning in their schools. Instructional leadership was identified as the most appropriate leadership style for this purpose. The literature review for this study has indicated that there is indeed a correlation between instructional leadership and learner performance.

3.2.2 THE BASIC SKILLS AND CAPACITY OF THE PRINCIPAL

The literature review reiterated the increasingly changing role of the principal from that of a traditional school manager and administrator to that of an instructional leader. This change of roles brings with it many expectations of principals, including inter alia, managing the curriculum and instruction, monitoring and providing feedback on the teaching and learning process, communicating a shared vision and goals for the school, and providing teacher development. This study sets out to investigate the extent to which the principal has the basic skills and capacity for engaging in all the above instructional leadership roles, and whether this brings about improvement in learner performance in the matriculation examination.

The literature review also emphasized the importance of skills that principals require with regard to their new role. This perspective prompted me to question whether there is any correlation between departmental expectations of principals in terms of their output as instructional leaders, and the amount of support that the department provides to principals with regard to new skills, particularly those related to instructional leadership. This aspect formed part of the questions included in the structured interviews.

3.2.3 THE PROFESSIONAL PREPARATION OF PRINCIPALS

The professional preparation of principals as instructional leaders can be regarded as a topic for further research in its own right. The increasingly changing role of the principal does not depend on the number of years that one has served as a principal to enable one to adapt to new challenges. The literature review has shown that the enactment of instructional leadership requires the principal to be equipped with multifaceted skills which form the prerequisites for instructional leadership (Vick, 2004:11). The literature has also indicated that there is a lack of instructional leadership, or in other words, the practice of instructional

leadership, especially in South African schools, is limited. A lack of depth in the training of principals for their role as instructional leaders and a time-consuming increase in paperwork which consumes much of the principal's time (Phillips, 2009:1), have been cited as two primary reasons for the lack of instructional leadership. The literature also links the problem of lack of professional preparation of principals to the recruitment and appointment of principals, and their development for their role as instructional leaders.

3.2.4 THE RECRUITMENT AND APPOINTMENT OF PRINCIPALS: THE CURRENT SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT

The current situation in South Africa with regard to the recruitment and appointment of principals is based on the following criteria: the potential principal must have been a teacher for a minimum of seven years; he/she must hold a REQV 13 qualification; and must be of sound character. The REQV (Relative Qualification Value) 13 is a teacher's diploma which requires the recipient to have been trained for three years to qualify to become a teacher. A question that emanates from this requirement is whether the teacher qualifications include a module, or modules, that prepare the person for an instructional leadership role, and if not, does any person holding such a qualification qualify to become a principal?

Whilst the REQV 13 qualification plus seven years experience which are laid down as requirements for a principalship post are very low when compared to the complexity of the role of the principal, it is questionable if a highly qualified person, with many years of experience, will necessarily make a good principal. This possibility is addressed in the questionnaire which was designed for the principals.

3.3 THE SECONDARY CHALLENGES

The secondary challenges in the conceptual framework are the four variables relating to instructional leadership which were identified in chapter 2. These four variables, as secondary challenges to the principal's role, are now discussed individually, with specific focus on the important concepts that develop from these variables.

3.3.1 PROMOTING FREQUENT AND APPROPRIATE SCHOOL-WIDE TEACHER DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES

The literature review which was conducted in support of this variable revealed that schools have become less in need of control and more in need of both support and capacity development. This implies that the department of education needs to support and build the capacity of principals. Principals, in turn, need to support and build the capacity of their teachers to enable them to carry out their teaching obligations. The principal can achieve this by attending teacher development workshops and seminars for all learning areas. The main concepts that developed from this variable are support and capacity development. Questions to establish the extent of support and the level of capacity building which the principals receive from the department were asked during the structured interviews.

3.3.2 DEFINING AND COMMUNICATING SHARED VISION AND GOALS

From the literature dealing with defining and communicating a shared vision and goals, the concepts of strategic leadership, and articulation of the vision and goals of the school into a plan of action emerged. The plan of action should allow all parties to participate and feel a sense of ownership that will enable quality learning to be realized. A further view that emerged from the literature review is that the principal must ensure that there is dialogue between him/her and the rest of the stakeholders. Such dialogue would promote alignment of all the stakeholders to the vision and goals of the school. During the structured interviews, the principals were questioned about the extent to which they engage the stakeholders on issues related to the strategic direction of their schools, and how much they engage their teachers in planning activities that might impact directly on learner performance in the matriculation examination.

3.3.3 MONITORING AND PROVIDING FEEDBACK ON TEACHING AND LEARNING

Some scholars in the IL paradigm have referred to the monitoring and provision of feedback on the teaching and learning process as “facilitative leadership”. This implies that they see the role of the principal as instructional leader as one of facilitating the provision of effective teaching and learning. The literature emphasizes the following activities in which the principal should engage during the monitoring and provision of feedback: provision of instructional leadership through discussion of instructional issues; observing classroom teaching and giving feedback on his/her observations as a way of providing and encouraging

best instructional practices; providing and supporting improvement through monitoring; using learner progress data for programme improvement; encouraging networking among teachers; and modelling effective instructional practices.

During the structured interviews, the principals were questioned as to how much they monitor and provide feedback on their teachers' instructional activities; and the extent to which they thought this facilitative leadership contributed to improved learner performance in the matriculation examination.

3.3.4 MANAGING THE CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

The final, but equally important, secondary challenge for the principal's instructional leadership activities is managing the curriculum and instruction. In practice, management of the curriculum is the competency of the HODs, but within the instructional leadership paradigm this variable also falls within the scope of the principal's core responsibilities. The literature has revealed that the principal must possess an array of skills and competencies in order to address the dynamic nature of this variable. He/she must have knowledge of curriculum, instruction and assessment. The literature further indicates that a principal needs to be a "head learner" by attending curriculum related seminars and workshops with his teachers. Such practice would go a long way to enabling the principal to assist his/her staff with regard to curriculum matters generally and learning related matters in particular.

3.4 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This chapter is premised on the view that principals' engagement with the four secondary challenges (variables) in the conceptual framework will assist them to deal decisively with the primary challenges which could otherwise be viewed as complications in terms of the principal's performance. In view of the different definitions of instructional leadership in the literature, its origins in the school effectiveness paradigm, and the changing role of the principal in an era of educational reform in South Africa, this chapter has emphasized the importance of the practice of instructional leadership.

While there is no evidence in the South African literature about the success of this leadership style, this study purports that it is only through the implementation of IL that principals, through their engagement with the four secondary challenges indicated in the

conceptual framework diagram above, will be able to translate their school visions into action. This in turn will enable improvement in the teaching and learning process, culminating in the improvement of learner performance in the matriculation examination. Both the primary and secondary challenges indicated in the conceptual framework have been utilized in this study to answer both the main research question and the subsidiary research questions. The next chapter focuses on the research design and methodology applied in this study.

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