CHAPTER 6
PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF THE QUALITATIVE RESEARCH FINDINGS

6.1   INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents and discusses the findings from the focus group interviews and the structured interviews.

6.2   THE FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS

The sample for the focus group interviews consisted of sixty principals who were attending classes for the ACE School Leadership programme. This programme was specifically tailored by the national Department of Education to prepare serving principals for their leadership and management roles. The principals were arranged into fifteen groups of four members and each group was given a list of the four variables which were identified in this study as relating to instructional leadership. The groups were given ten minutes to brainstorm the variables and thereafter asked to report on the variable(s) which they considered to be the most important. The researcher then asked the principals the following questions:

- Which of the four variables do you think could have a marked impact on the improvement of learner performance in the matriculation examination?
- Give reasons to substantiate your choice of variables in the question above.

The following table represents the responses of the principals and the reasons that they advanced for each of the choices that they made.

TABLE 6.1: **Findings from the focus group interviews**

	Variables	Number of Responses	Reasons for the Choice
1.	**Defining and communicating shared vision and goals**	Twenty- four principals considered this variable as the most important for learner performance	The following reasons were given for their choice: Defining and communicating a shared vision and goals makes things easy to implement; this role cannot be delegated, only the principal can and must do it; if the principal is responsible for giving direction to the school, he must live the vision because the function of a vision is to give direction to the school.
2.	**Managing the curriculum and instruction**	Twenty principals viewed this variable as being important for learner performance	They argued that this is the core business of the school. One principal indicated that curriculum management is "the main dish and the others are side dishes". Curriculum is the only thing that appears on the time table and if the curriculum is not monitored, defining and communicating the vision and goals fails.
3.	**Monitoring and providing feedback on the teaching and learning process**	Eight principals regarded this variable as being important for the improvement of learner achievement	They argued that monitoring and providing feedback is imperative for effective learning. One principal indicated that media reports are about learner achievement and nobody reports about policies and visions. The principals who voted for this variable emphasized that feedback, which can be done from monthly or quarterly results, can have a marked impact on learner performance.
4.	**Promoting frequent and appropriate school-wide teacher development activities**	No principals voted for this variable	The reason advanced for not voting for this variable was that some principals did not view this variable as being relevant to them. They argued that this variable falls within the scope of the curriculum advisors.

The findings from the focus group interviews as indicated in the above table, served as a basis for the formulation of questions for the structured interviews. The next section focuses on a discussion of the findings from the structured interviews which was the second phase of the qualitative research.

6.3 DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS FROM THE STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

This part of the thesis reports on the findings from the structured interviews which were conducted with five principals who were purposely selected from the 78 principals who participated in the completion of the questionnaire for the quantitative part of this study. The following criteria were used to select the principals for the structured interviews:

- One principal who had a track record of a pass rate of 100% during the past three years; for the sake of confidentiality this principal has the pseudonym Mr Platinum;

- Two principals whose schools have maintained a pass rate of between 50% and 70% during the past three years; one of these principals is called Mr Gold and the other Mr Gold Dollar;

- Two principals whose schools have performed below 50% during the past three years; one is called Mr Silver and the other Mr Sylvester.

All the schools headed by the principals identified for the structured interviews have similar socio-economic backgrounds. Using this sample of principals with different learner performance levels over the years has enhanced this study in the following ways, based on the principals' responses to my interview questions:

- It was possible to identify best practices from the responses of the well performing principals, which could be used to develop the principals of the poor performing schools.

- It was possible to identify, from the responses of the different principals, those practices which are compatible with, and are able to contribute to the improvement of learner performance. This could form one of the unique contributions of this study in informing the type of content that should be included in principal preparation programmes.

An interview schedule was prepared for this part of the study, using information drawn from the literature review, the findings from the quantitative section, and information obtained from the focus group interviews. Firstly, the principals were requested to prioritize the four variables and provide reasons why they arranged the variables in the manner that they did. Secondly, the principals were requested to answer the following questions:

1. How much time do you devote to the enactment of your instructional leadership roles, e.g. time spent on teacher development activities?

2. What, in your opinion, is the purpose of supervision and do you view supervision of the teaching and learning process as part of your responsibilities as a principal?

3. As a principal, what type of support do you need in order to be a better instructional leader and to what extent does the department provide such support (if any) to your school and to you as a principal?

4. As a principal, how do you support your teachers with regard to their instructional obligations?

5. Comment on the following statements:

5.1 The higher the qualifications of the/a principal, the better the results of his/her school will be.

5.2 There is a degree of compatibility between the performance expectations of the principal and the support that the department gives to the principal.

5.3 The improvement/decline in the achievement of learners in the National Senior Certificate is influenced by the enactment of instructional leadership by the principal.

6. How do you distribute your leadership and management activities from Monday to Friday?

7. Do you conduct a weekly, monthly, or quarterly audit of your leadership/management activities and if you do, on which activity/activities do you spend most of your time in a week, month or quarter?

8. On the basis of your response to the above question, to what extent do you think that the activity/activities on which you spend most of your time contributes to the improvement of teacher effectiveness and learner performance?

With regard to the arrangement of the four variables and their impact on learner performance, the participating principals expressed the following opinions.

Mr Silver and Mr Gold were interviewed on the same day but at different times and venues. Mr Silver was interviewed in his office and Mr Gold, due to the travel distance to his school, proposed that we secure a private study room in the local community library which is where we conducted our interview.

Both principals prioritized the four variables as follows: defining and communicating a shared vision and goals; managing curriculum and instruction; monitoring and providing feedback on the teaching and learning process; and promoting frequent and appropriate school-wide teacher development activities. This is exactly the same priority given by the groups of principals during the focus group interviews. The following table represents the reasons provided by Mr Silver and Mr Gold for their choices:

TABLE 6.2: **Representation of the prioritized variables by two principals (Mr Silver and Mr Gold)**

Variables	Comments by the Principals
1. Defining and communicating a shared vision and goals	Mr Silver indicated that this variable is the most important in the sense that it gives focus to what one wants to achieve. Mr Gold indicated that the vision and goals of the school define what the school is about, which is providing quality teaching and learning, and where teachers and learners have to share a common understanding with regard to what shapes the school. With the vision and goals of the school in mind, the principal will be able to ensure that he/she plans the programmes of his/her school in line with the set vision and goals.
2. Managing the curriculum and instruction	Mr Silver ranked this variable second and indicated that curriculum management is the core business of the school. The principal of any school can only reach the vision and goals of the school through the curriculum. It is only through the curriculum that learners can achieve good results at the end of the year. Mr Gold indicated that the goals of the school are organized around the curriculum and achieved through the curriculum. When teachers plan their lessons, they should ensure that the implementation of these lessons will ensure the achievement of the school's vision and goals.
3. Monitoring and providing feedback on the teaching and learning process	Mr Silver ranked this variable third and indicated that this variable monitors the movement of the school towards the achievement of its vision and goals. He further indicated that while he may not personally do the monitoring, this is a responsibility that resides in the HODs and it enables the HODs to have a feel for the challenges faced by educators and the type of support that will assist them. Mr Gold emphasized a 'hands on approach' to monitoring where he personally, as a principal, monitors the

Variables	Comments by the Principals
	implementation of plans to achieve the vision and goals and provide feedback. This approach, according to Mr Gold, culminates in the identification of hindrances to the realization of the vision and goals and the identification of appropriate corrective measures.
4. Promoting frequent and appropriate school-wide teacher development activities	Mr Silver linked this variable to the monitoring and provision of feedback by indicating that the shortfalls identified during the monitoring process create opportunities for the development of educators. Mr Gold also indicated that challenges identified during the monitoring process can be resolved in the school through school-based teacher development workshops. Teachers can share findings from the monitoring process and wider encompassing workshops can be arranged.

It is still a puzzle to me, however, that principals considered promoting frequent and appropriate school-wide teacher development activities as the least important variable. According to Joubert and Van Rooyen (2008:17), principals must ensure that professional development activities are provided and that they are focused on teaching practice and learner activities. They further contend that a detailed professional development plan nurtures the growth of all individuals in the school community and for this purpose, the principal should engage in one-on-one discussions with staff members in order to identify teaching successes and concerns. The same authors (ibid.:18) conclude by indicating that the success of professional development activities should be measured not only on teaching practice changes, but also on whether learner performance increases. With the IQMS being implemented at schools in South Africa, the development of teachers has become crucial for successful curriculum delivery. The fractured apartheid system had led to unequal quality of teachers, and development of rural school teachers should be a top priority. I have come to realize that due to lack of departmental support, this important variable has been sadly neglected.

Assuming that the similar manner in which the two principals Mr Silver and Mr Gold evaluated the variables (shown in the table above) was not an accident, and that the similar reasons that they advanced for some of the variables were not first discussed between them, the following conclusion can be drawn from their responses:

The two principals have a good understanding of what each of the variables encompasses and how each of them applies in practice. The difference in the performance of their schools can be traced to the practical application of these variables in their actual practice as

instructional leaders. The good performance in Mr Gold's school indicates his ability to translate theory into practice, while Mr Silver may be incapable of applying his theoretical knowledge to the practice of instructional leadership. The inability to translate theory into practice becomes an intervening variable that can also be applied to the principals' qualification dilemma presented in table 5.6 above.

The following section represents the responses of Mr Sylvester, Mr Gold Dollar, and Mr Platinum. These principals' responses are tabled together because they prioritized their variables differently from Mr Gold and Mr Silver. Like Mr Silver and Mr Gold, these three principals were interviewed at places of their choice, where they felt comfortable. Mr Platinum and Mr Sylvester proposed that we conduct the interviews at their homes, and Mr Gold Dollar proposed that we conduct the interview in his office at school.

TABLE 6.3: **Responses of Mr Platinum, Mr Gold Dollar and Mr Sylvester to the four variables**

VARIABLES	COMMENTS BY THE PRINCIPALS		
	Mr Platinum	Mr Gold Dollar	Mr Sylvester
1. **Defining and communicating a shared vision and goals**	This variable is the most important to me. Teachers need to know what the goals of the school are and what the school needs to achieve.	This variable comes last for me. Defining and communicating a shared vision and goals leads to agreement about where people are getting to.	No comment.
2. **Managing the curriculum and instruction**	Curriculum management comes third for me. It follows after teacher development where the teachers are also developed in terms of curriculum management skills.	This is the core business of the school and therefore it becomes my priority number one. If the curriculum is not properly managed, people may miss the goals of the school.	To me, this is the main responsibility of the principal. We are at school because of the curriculum and therefore it comes first to me.
3. **Monitoring and providing feedback on the teaching and learning process**	This variable becomes my least priority in the sense that the management of the curriculum and teacher development activities culminate in the realization of the vision and goals of the school.	Monitoring and providing feedback becomes an instrument for the motivation of teachers. If properly done, this can lead to improvement in both teaching and learning. It is therefore second to curriculum management. Monitoring and providing feedback on learner achievement and teacher activities is all about 'tightening the screws'.	Monitoring and providing feedback on what happens with the curriculum is also key to my understanding. I therefore would classify this variable as my second priority.
4. **Promoting frequent and appropriate school-wide teacher development activities**	This variable is my second priority. When teachers are developed, they are able to move towards the right direction. Developing teachers by providing school-based development programmes helps them to work towards realizing the vision and goals of the school.	Building the capacity of the teachers to carry out their instructional obligations helps to improve the quality of what is taught. This variable comes third in terms of priority.	In my view, teacher development falls outside the scope of my responsibilities as an instructional leader. It is more the responsibility of the curriculum implementers from the regional office and head office of the department, than the principal.

The most important variable prioritized by Mr Platinum, with a track record of 100% for the past three years, was defining and communicating shared vision and goals. His second priority displays an exciting revelation – promoting frequent and appropriate school-wide teacher development activities. Mr Platinum is aware that the curriculum has changed over the past 16 years and that the development of teachers is important in terms of the goals of the school. The principal of the worst performing school, Mr Sylvester, however, saw this responsibility as outside the scope of his duties. In Mr Sylvester's view the responsibility for developing teachers lies with the department of education.

These findings clarify the fact that when the principal is a good instructional leader, he/she will ensure the development of quality teachers by training them and being a role model classroom teacher as well. Principals need to accompany their subordinates in teacher development activities as this will build up professional expertise in the principal regarding curriculum, monitoring and evaluation.

6.4   SUMMARY   OF   THE   FINDINGS   FROM   THE   STRUCTURED   INTERVIEWS

This section reports on the responses of the principals to the structured interview questions. Seven themes were identified from the focus group, and structured interview questions and the responses of the principals are presented according to the seven themes, and how the individual principals touched on these themes in their responses to the questions (refer to Appendix I for the raw data on the principals' responses).

 For the purpose of analyzing and reporting the findings from the principals' responses, the following seven themes which include the four variables identified earlier in the study and three new themes are used: defining and communicating a shared vision and goals; managing the curriculum and instruction; monitoring and providing feedback on the teaching and learning process; promoting frequent and appropriate school-wide teacher development activities; principals' time allocation and impact on learner performance; qualifications of the principal and learner performance; and support from the department and learner performance. After presenting the findings according to these themes, there is a reflection on how these themes respond to the secondary research questions of this study.

Theme 1:

Defining and communicating a shared vision and goals and learner performance

Three out of the five principals who were interviewed ranked this variable as the most important. They supported this choice by indicating that *'a vision and goals of the school define what the school is about, which is providing quality teaching and learning, where teachers and learners have to share a common understanding with regard to what shapes the school'.* They further indicated that, with the vision and goals of the school in mind, principals will be able to ensure that planning of their schools' activities and programmes is in line with the vision and goals of their school. The principals hold the view that if the vision and goals of the schools are clearly defined and communicated to all parties in the school, and in particular the learners, then learner performance will improve.

Theme 2:

Managing the curriculum and instruction and learner performance

While the various principals ranked this theme differently from each other, all of them hold the view that this variable constitutes the core business of the school. It is the curriculum, which includes all the learning areas at school, that brings teachers and learners together. The principals further agree that the principal of any school can only realize the vision and goals of the school through the curriculum and it is only through the curriculum that learners achieve good results at the end of the year. One principal commented that: '*Curriculum management is the main dish and the others are side dishes.... curriculum is the only thing that appears on the time table, and if it is not monitored, defining and communicating the vision and goals of the school fails'.*

To sum up the responses of the principals on this variable, a principal who devotes much time on managing and monitoring the curriculum and instruction will achieve the vision and goals of the school and ultimately improved learner performance.

Theme 3:

Monitoring and providing feedback on the teaching and learning process and learner performance

The responses of the principals showed some degree of compatibility between this variable and the management of curriculum and instruction. The principals indicated that this

variable monitors movement in the direction of the vision and goals of the school. They further indicated that, while they may not be directly involved with the monitoring and provision of feedback, this is a responsibility that resides in the HODs and it enables them to appreciate the challenges which teachers experience and the type of support that will assist them.

Mr Gold emphasized a 'hands on' approach to monitoring, and that he personally monitors the implementation of plans to achieve the vision and goals of the school and provides feedback. In his view, this approach works well in boosting teacher confidence and also contributes to improved teacher and learner performance.

Theme 4:

Promoting frequent and appropriate school-wide teacher development activities

The principals identified a link between this variable and the variable related to monitoring and provision of feedback on the teaching and learning process. One principal indicated that *'the shortfalls identified during the monitoring process create opportunities for the development of educators',* and another principal concurred, saying that *'challenges identified during the monitoring process can be resolved in the school through school-based teacher development workshops during which teachers can share findings from the monitoring process and wider encompassing workshops can be arranged'.*

The inference that can be drawn from the contributions of these principals is that teacher development activities need not be the responsibility of the department, but that principals should be empowered to conduct these activities in their schools. This view is also encapsulated in the principals' need for support from the department, since they indicated that the level of support from the department should be such that they are empowered and capacitated to carry out some of these activities by themselves. A conclusion that can be drawn from this finding is that when the principal's capacity is improved, such a principal should be able to build the capacity of his/her staff.

Theme 5:

The different leadership activities, including instructional leadership, on which the principals spend most of their time and the possible impact of these activities on the improvement of learner performance

The principals whose schools have performed below the 50% pass rate over the years spend a large percentage of their time on administrative and other activities rather than on instructional leadership. The inference that can be drawn from this finding is that these principals are aware of instructional leadership as a practice, but they do not necessarily regard it as their responsibility. This finding coincides with my concern expressed in the conceptual framework of this study that instructional leadership is not indicated as a prerequisite for principalship during recruitment − only the level of qualification and the years of experience are required criteria.

Three out of the five principals interviewed had clearly demarcated plans for their daily activities. It did, however, emerge during the interviews that these principals find it difficult to work according to their plans, due to the unplanned meetings called by the department from time to time. These principals hold the view that if their programmes could be implemented without interference from the department, their schools could improve learner performance. The value of spending more time on curriculum management featured prominently in their responses. This was however clouded by the outcry that their personal programmes are often stifled by interference of the department through its service meetings at short notice, which sometimes take the principals away from their schools for several days. It is evident from the interviews that four of the principals, with the exception of Mr Sylvester who prioritized administration more than the curriculum, view curriculum management as the vehicle for the improvement of learner performance.

Theme 6:

The qualifications of the principal and learner performance

The responding principals indicated that it is good for principals to have advanced qualifications, but such qualifications will not necessarily assist in the improvement of learner performance. They emphasized that qualities such as the principal's commitment to his work and his/her interest in learners' performance will make a difference. On the whole, the principals hold the view that it is not the qualifications of the principal that matter but

the character and orientation of the principal towards learner performance which is important. One principal noted that:

> *"A highly decorated principal in terms of qualifications will only contribute by way of motivating others to improve their teaching qualifications. With regard to the impact of such qualifications on learner achievement, the principal must be able to translate his acquired skills (academic skills) into practice."*

Learner performance is also highly dependent on good teaching and assessment activities. If the leader is not prepared to monitor and evaluate the teaching and learning in the classrooms, and does not worry about classroom assessment and teaching resources, then learner performance will suffer. Besides, the principal should be entrepreneurial in obtaining resources to support the instructional programme. The literature study (see sections 2.5.4 and 2.5.5) highlighted the fact that instructional leadership is defined as establishing the possibility of instructional innovation in schools which leads to the creation of culture.

An effective instructional leader creates a school culture based on high expectations, a school culture conducive to the success of all learners. He/she is responsible and accountable for his/her duties as a principal and sets a vision, lives the vision and ensures that all members in the school perform their duties and fulfil the vision; therefore, visionary leadership and the creation of culture are far more important than the qualifications of the principal.

Theme 7:
The level of support that the department provides to the principals and the compatibility between the performance expectations of the department and the amount of support provided

With regard to the level of support that the department provides to principals, all the principals indicated that the department is doing little to support them in the implementation of departmental policies. This makes it difficult for the principals to realize the goals of the department generally and those of their schools in particular. Support with regard to curriculum implementation featured prominently in the responses of the principals.

The level of support that the principals provide to their teachers is limited to the provision of resources such as Learner Teacher Support Materials (LTSM), policies, and ensuring that

the department provides the school with teachers when necessary. On the technical side of the support that teachers need, such as curriculum implementation, assessment, and instruction, the principals require the same support from the department. In the opinions of the principals, the curriculum implementers (CIs) who should provide this support to the schools are often not competent to offer such a service.

With regard to the compatibility between the performance expectations of the department and the support that the department provides to the principals, all the responding principals contended that they receive minimal support from the department. They further indicated that the department expects increased output from the principals while providing very little input in terms of support. The principals also indicated that if the department could provide them with the necessary support in the performance of their instructional obligations, learner performance could improve. Due to the current lack of support from the department, it was only through a "hit or miss" approach that some principals saw their schools achieving better results. The inference that may be drawn from this submission is that the practice of instructional leadership could influence learner performance provided that the department affords the necessary support to principals, who in turn would provide support to their educators.

Following from the analysis of the findings above, it is appropriate to explore the responses of the well-performing principal (Mr Platinum) and juxtapose these with those of the worst performing principals (Mr Silver and Mr Sylvester). This approach will help to uncover what it is that Mr Platinum does in his school to enable his school's outstanding performance, and what it is that Mr Silver and Mr Sylvester were not doing in their schools, that led to such poor performance. For this section, reference is made to the raw data of the structured interviews (Appendix I) to gain a better understanding of the type of leader Mr Platinum is and what made his school perform well, as compared to the schools of Mr Silver and Mr Sylvester.

Mr Platinum indicated what each variable was about and outlined his actions about each plan. He has a clear programme of interaction with all stakeholders in the school: teachers, learners, SMT, support staff, and the SGB. This shows that the outstanding performance of Mr Platinum's school is due to the coordinated effort by all stakeholders to ensure a productive teaching and learning experience. He has set expectations, and all the stakeholders work together to achieve goals to fulfil these expectations.

Mr Silver and Mr Sylvester, on the other hand, expressed their knowledge of the fact that curriculum and instruction are the core business of the school, but did not give a clear indication of how they go about engaging teachers and learners in this respect. Mr Sylvester referred to curriculum management as the main responsibility of the principal, but in terms of time spent on instructional leadership and management, he indicated that he spends 50% of his time on administration. Nowhere in his responses did he indicate the percentage of time that he spends on instructional leadership. Both Mr Silver and Mr Sylvester prioritize those issues that do not affect the learners directly (such as administration), and give very little time to instructional leadership. As the evidence shows, Mr Silver and Mr Sylvester's schools performed badly as compared to Mr Platinum's school. Mr Platinum showed evidence of the importance of cultural beliefs, values and actions. He believes that teacher development is important for quality education and that quality teachers will bring about quality teaching and learning.

Themes 1 to 4, which are the variables related to instructional leadership as identified for this study, are a response to the main research question of this study. The responses of the principals during the focus group and the structured interviews reveal a different perspective from that which emerged from the quantitative research. This aspect is dealt with in the synthesis of the quantitative and qualitative research findings in the next chapter.

6.6   SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This section reflects on the purpose of this chapter, provides a summary, and offers some concluding remarks. This chapter has focused on an analysis of the qualitative data. Important themes emerged from the analysis of the structured interview data, which assisted me to summarize and present the findings from the structured interview. The themes that emerged from the structured interviews also relate directly to the conceptual framework of this study and these are used to consolidate the concluding arguments of this study in the following chapter. The table below summarizes chapters four and five:

---oOo---

Table 6.4:   Phases in the data collection and analysis process

Data Collection Methods	Steps in the Process	Phases of Data Collection and Analysis
Phase 1: **Quantitative −** **Questionnaires**	Step 1	Identification of respondents to the questionnaires
	Step 2	Construction of the two questionnaires for the different groups of respondents as identified in step 1
	Step 3	Administration of the questionnaires and their retrieval
	Step 4	Analysis of the quantitative data
Phase 2: **Qualitative −** **Focus group interviews and structured interviews**	Step 5	Selection of participants for the focus group interviews and conducting the interviews
	Step 6	Selection of participants for the structured interviews and conducting the interviews
	Step 7	Analysis of both focus group and structured interviews

---oOo---