Exploring the complex interplay between instructional leadership, teacher well-being and systemic challenges

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Abstract

This study explores the complex interplay between instructional leadership, teacher well-being and systemic challenges. Data was collected through interview schedule, field notes and open-ended questionnaire. Criterion purposeful sampling technique was used to select ten principals from ten schools. Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis, typological analysis, content analysis and Atlas.ti. The findings have established the complex interplay between instructional leadership, teacher well-being and the systemic challenges, instructional leadership strategies used and the complex interplay between them. Principals need to study and learn the application of instructional leadership, apply instructional leadership strategies to optimise their success and to enhance schools academic performance which results on students' academic performance. Principals should integrate elements of instructional leadership to support teacher wellbeing, enhance job satisfaction, and promote student success. Instructional leadership has complex interplay on schools performance which affects schools, teacher performance which could result in positive or negative student academic performance.

Keywords: Instructional leadership, schools performance, teacher well-being

1. Introduction

Studies have identified that improved academic performance does not occur immediately but accrues over a time. School context and leadership practices account for the variation in progress among schools and for the context and practices, respectively. Continued study is warranted to systematically and more concretely identify specific leadership practices that impact academic progress over a time (Bluestein & Goldschmidt, 2021).

It is very crucial to reorient education in order to improve student learning outcomes and to offer instruction in sustainable development. This reorientation should particularly focus on updating educational concepts and behaviours of principals and teachers. It is a common practice to see principals' instructional leadership as a pivotal aspect that may facilitate the development of teaching and learning in a sustainable manner. Several studies have identified the influence path of principals' instructional leadership on the student academic achievement through teachers' teaching practice (Wieczorek & Manard, 2018). Principal instructional leadership alone does not have direct positive effect on students' academic achievement. Principals can promote students' academic achievement by encouraging teacher cooperation and/or communication to improve teaching strategies (Muyunda, 2022). Researchers have shown that effective teacher professional development includes teacher cooperation and communication but not the professional guidance, innovation and/or individual teaching reflection. Principals should shift their attention from the administrative matters to the sustainable development of teaching and learning. Studies posit that for providing sustainable and high-quality education, not all teachers' professional developments are effective for school teachers (Li et al., 2023).

Studies have reported on leadership learning experiences of novice, rural public school principals on how novice principals interpreted instructional leadership challenges in the context of rural school leadership. Novice principals have worked to balance their professional and private lives and were challenged to meet their community's expectations to be visible and engaged. To meet districts' constrained budgetary circumstances, novice principals maintained overlapping district- and building-level responsibilities, focused heavily on developing relationships and trust among teachers, students, and/or parents. This has demonstrated urgent need to develop new leaders' understanding of rural school community expectations, to develop skills to fulfil

expanding job responsibilities and supplement leadership preparation, mentoring, and professional development programs regarding the specialised needs of rural school leaders (Wieczorek & Manard, 2018).

Principal's leadership is a globally debated concept in education sector and by the governments. Instructional leadership has gained popularity worldwide among many other leadership styles. It plays an important role in quality education and/or school effectiveness. However, instructional leadership of the principals have been found to be inadequate; principals have been concentrating on managerial roles and delegating supervisory responsibilities to staff. Topping the list includes numerous roles and responsibilities given to the principals, shortage of highly qualified teachers, inadequate instructional responsibilities, and lack of time and leadership training (Lhabu, 2021). Currently, there is a noticeable lack of leadership roles of the principal coupled with considerable levels of stress and burnout reported by the principals and teachers alike (Muyunda, 2022).

Notwithstanding the growing scholarly interest in the complex interplay of principal instructional leadership on student achievement, empirical evidence in developing countries from the African context, including Namibia, concerning the complex interplay between the principal instructional leadership, teacher wellbeing and/or systemic challenges has been limited. Hence, this study aim to explore complex interplay between principals' instructional leadership, teacher-wellbeing and systemic challenges and determines which specific instructional leadership dimensions have the most important role.

The overarching primary research questions the study explored were:
What complex interplay exists between instructional leadership, teacher well-being and systemic challenges in Oshana Region?
Which instructional leadership strategies do principals use in Oshana Region?
Which existing instructional leadership strategies that enhance school performance?
What existing school performance which associates with instructional leadership strategies?
What challenges associate with the application of instructional leadership strategies?
Which existing support mechanisms used to address these challenges?

2. Literature review
2.1 Instructional leadership practice
In 1979, Ronald Edmonds launched effective schools movement with publication of a seminal article on instructionally effective schools in educational leadership. In this article, he articulated importance of principal instructional leadership as a factor contributing to school effectiveness (Hallinger & Wang, 2015). Principals' instructional leadership has been found to have effects on teaching and learning practices; there is association between instructional leadership factors and teaching and learning practices of teachers (Iqbal et al., 2021). All four instructional leadership practices are strongly associated with academic performance namely defining the school mission, managing of the school instructional program, promoting a positive school learning climate and advancing teachers' interests. Several studies posit that a balanced instructional leadership by the principals enhance proper utilisation of all resources to realise good performance in examinations for their schools (Nellitawati et al., 2024).

Studies have identified the influence of principals' instructional resources management strategies on the students' academic achievements. Principals' instructional resources provision influences the students' educational success. There is a positive direct impact of the principals' instructional resources provision on the students' educational achievements (Elmi & Mugwe, 2024). Due to government initiative on hundred percent transition initiatives there has been upsurge of numbers of students in public secondary schools. However, despite being a positive thing on ensuring that students get their basic right to education it has really caused pleasures on instructional resources available for use by students especially in rural areas which seemed to be more affected unlike urban counterparts and boarding schools.

Studies have explored the impact of the principals' instructional leadership and digital literacy on teachers' effectiveness. Digital literacy has been proven to have a positive influence on teachers' performance. The ideal combination of instructional leadership and digital literacy had a positive relationship with teachers' performance. To enhance teacher effectiveness in the digital era, both robust instructional leadership and high digital literacy are crucial, highlighting the necessity for a comprehensive educational strategy (Nellitawati et al., 2024).

Instructional leadership is getting more attention these days because of its direct connection to the basic activities of schools. Instructional principals' duties of communicating the school goals, overseeing, assessing teaching, monitoring school achievement, protecting instructional time, maintaining high visibility, promoting and/or ongoing professional development are very crucial elements to schools success (Muyunda, 2022). Curriculum coordination, teacher incentives, and student incentives are very crucial elements too (Alemayehu, 2021). Even though the majority of studies agree that instructional leadership is important to the schools success, school principals typically neglect it.

Several studies posit that the school principals' instructional leadership role is a predictor of teachers' professional development. Studies reveal significant associations between instructional leadership and teacher professional development and growth. Ultimately, instructional leadership emerges as a significant predictor of teacher professional development. Studies emphasise the nexus between principal instructional leadership and teacher professional development, shedding light on the mediating role of principals' leadership practice in influencing teachers' professional development and instructional practices (He et al., 2024).

Studies have identified intricate relationship between principal instructional leadership practices and/or their effect on school culture, and the broader educational environment. Researchers have revealed the associations between principal instructional leadership practices and their effect on school culture, highlighting the influence of instructional leadership behaviours like providing feedback, setting clear educational objectives, and fostering collaborative learning environments (Elmi & Mugwe, 2024). Studies identify the impact of instructional leadership on organisational environment, with the principal instructional leadership practices positively correlating with the welcoming environments and a culture of continuous improvement (Li et al., 2023). Leadership development initiatives that focus on enhancing instructional leadership skills among principals can create conditions conducive to effective continuous teachers' professional development. These initiatives should prioritise fostering cooperation, providing constructive feedback, and establishing clear instructional objectives. Effective leadership is an ongoing process which encourages trust, collaboration, and/or adaptability in a rapidly evolving educational landscape (Tahir & Fatima, 2023).

2.2 Teacher well-being
Teachers' well-being is critical for the optimal functioning of schools and educational systems. Individual and contextual factors have influenced the teacher work-related well-being. Studies have examined the influence of school climate and job crafting to teacher well-being. Teachers who experience highest rates of school climate and the highest scores in job crafting experience the highest well-being. This highlights the importance of both school climate and job crafting in supporting teacher well-being (Dreer, 2022).

Teacher wellness is not only influenced by the conditions of workplace. It is also the teachers' behaviour to craft their job according to their values, goals and preferences that impacts their work-related well-being. Working towards the schools with excellent work climate and preparing teachers for effective job crafting could be measured to increase teacher well-being and improve schools as well as educational systems (Mawlood & HamadAmeen, 2023).

Teacher well-being is important to offer sound education, and to increase academic and personal potential of the students. Teachers' perceptions are positive towards their wellbeing pertain to the collaborations, headship

treatment and environment. However, increasing teacher workload and stress decreases teachers' skills of management (Iqbal et al., 2021).

Teacher wellness has been examined through subjective vitality, behavioural engagement, and professional growth along with the teachers' sense of relatedness with students. Helping teachers begin the school term with high relatedness and well-being appears important (Collie & Martin, 2023).

The fact that individual feels comfortable in their own professional working environment is of considerable importance for their health, their performance and their success at work. This is especially true for teachers because they work in a profession with high social demands and are of immense importance for the development of their students. Principals need to understand what constitutes the well-being of prospective teachers and how it can be supported (Dreer, 2022).

2.3 Challenges associate with the application of the instructional leadership strategies

Studies have revealed that challenges in the realm of the instructional leadership encompass time constraints, financial insufficiency, limited stakeholder support, and other academic-related odds. Principals grapple with the intricate balance between the administrative responsibilities, resource allocation, and innovative initiatives to enhance the student outcomes (Groenewald et al., 2023).

Teachers grapple with challenges of addressing diverse learning needs and managing teaching time. Topping the list include presence of learners with learning disabilities, scarcity of learning resources, learning gaps, lack of specialised knowledge, collaboration to meet the diverse needs of students and to create an inclusive learning environment (Tañiza, 2024).

Other noticeable challenges of principals comprise administrative overload, policy proliferation, complexity and/or spread of their leadership roles (Hickey et al., 2024), managing curriculum, providing support, improving teaching and learning process, monitoring and evaluating students progress, and working on inclusive education (Feye, 2019).

School principals were not assertive, open to new ideas, energetic, and/or motivated; they did not provide an immediate feedback to teachers; they lack self esteem and analytical ability, and they didn't work with stakeholders to have the common vision in their institutions. School principals have failed to practice the expected instructional leadership roles. Teachers and principals alike were not satisfied with existing school climates (Lani & Pauzi, 2024).

Current challenges successful principals identify in developing schools are relating to principals' professional development, curriculum developments and community teaching (Tirri et al., 2021). Most principals have communication gap with stakeholders on issues related to vision, mission, goals of the schools and had problems in relation to lack of educational management profession. School principals have gap in taking measure to overcome problems (Feyisa & Edosa, 2023).

There is a gap in current practices involving supporting inclusive special education students in their achievement of their education in which major issues pertaining to time, staffing, structures, research data, instructional strategies, and/or applied philosophies were most noticeable. Social change implications include the possibility of improved achievement of students, which has the potential to increase literacy and improve quality of life (Bey, 2022). Impediments to principals' instructional leadership practices include inadequate educational infrastructure, big class sizes and/or overburdened teachers (Cherutoi et al., 2024) whereas other challenges identified include schools' limited budget, lack of teachers, students, and/or parents' involvement (Lani & Pauzi, 2024).

2.4 Existing support mechanisms used to address identified challenges

Several studies have suggested urgent need to develop a continuous professional development for staff through instructional leadership development which can contribute to increased students academic achievement (Marshall, 2024).

There exists a growing cohort of disadvantaged schools, which, despite of their socioeconomic challenges they have faced, display a great degree of resilience and perform better compared to advantaged schools. In these schools, a shared form of instructional leadership is prevalent, there is a strong emphasis on the students' academic success, instructional time is greatly valued and maximally utilised, and there is a strong focus on improving the quality of teaching and learning to ensure effective scholastic performance of students (Masina, 2020).

In these schools, principals have effectively demonstrated instructional leadership in the area of student success and/or progress, working with reluctant staff members, financial limitations, and accountability requirements. Policy-makers reduce the number and/or scope of accountability requirements. Trustees and community stakeholders provide training to ensure that the roles and responsibilities are understood, principals' preparation programs are established and mentoring and support mechanism is in place (Mason, 2013).

In ensuring schools achieving its excellence, externally, principals involve parents and teachers' contributions and other schools stakeholders. Internally, principals' experiences, knowledge and expertises of instructional leadership increase their roles as a resource person and as instructional leaders to all teachers and support staff (Rahman et al., 2020).

Both policymakers and stakeholders prioritise the cultivation of effective leadership pipelines and the support mechanisms to address the lack of established qualifications for school leaders, gender disparities to remedy leadership development and equity. Initiatives to promote gender equity and empowering women in leadership roles are also advocated (Groenewald et al., 2024).

3. Materials and Methods

3.1 Research design

Following interpretivist paradigm, this study explores complex interplay between instructional leadership practices, teacher well-being and systemic challenges as applied to learning theory in an interpretivist notion, represents untruth about ways individual learn (Ling & Ling, 2017). This study utilise case study to describe and clarify phenomenon under study (Dey, 2003). Case study was, therefore, used for in-depth exploration of actual case (Creswell & Creswell, 2017) and to explore the complex interplay between instructional leadership, teacher well-being and systemic challenges in Oshana Region, Namibia.

3.2 Participants

Using Oshana directorate of education's latest statistics of 2024, population of ten principals from ten schools in junior/senior primary, junior and senior secondary schools in Oshana Region were utilised. Based on Oshana regional directorate, many schools are poorly underperformed (Shapaka, 2024;; United Nations Children's Fund [UNICEF], 2015), which may lead to poor students academic outcomes.

3.3 Sampling

Criterion purposeful sampling was used, based on the researcher exposure to, engagement of ten principals from ten schools in Oshana Region. According to Oshana directorate of education's latest statistics of 2024, there are five Circuits in Oshana Region and they are Eheke, Oluno, Ompundja, Onamutai and Oshakati circuits. The researcher selected two principals per Circuit.

3.4 Data collection

Data was collected through the interview schedule, field notes and open-ended questionnaire to find participants' views on complex interplay between instructional leadership, teacher well-being and systemic challenges in

Oshana Region in Namibia. Data was collected using interview schedule in which the same interview schedule was used to find participants' views on the complex interplay between instructional leadership, teacher well-being and systemic challenges in Oshana Region in Namibia. The study used interview schedule with written list of questions which were covered during interview sessions and administered to participants. The same interview schedule was used for participants. However indication showed whether answers were given by participants in junior/senior primary, junior/senior secondary to give another dimension to research and possible findings and recommendations. For this purpose, open-ended questionnaire was presented in this regard. The more open-ended question, the better, as researcher listened carefully to what participants said or did in their life settings (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Field notes were taken during interview sessions.

3.5 Procedure
After all the required permission were sought and granted, all instruments were pilot tested and re-adjusted.

3.6 Data analysis
In this study, data were analysed using thematic analysis, typological analysis, content analysis and Atlas.ti (Leedy and Ormrod, 2023).

3.7 Ethical consideration
After all the required permission were sought and granted, researcher sent a letter to participants informing them about information concerning the study. This process was done to avoid the reality and the appearance of coercion. Confidentiality was maintained and participants were informed of the rationale, recording, transcriptions and safekeeping of audio-taped interviews. Ethical measures were done through making sure that the participants sign informed consent, ensuring privacy in subsequent interviews, guarding against manipulating the participants during data collection, reporting processes. Anonymity, confidentiality was observed when reporting on utterances, and narratives of participants. Participants' names were replaced by pseudonyms to protect participants' identity. Participation was voluntary.

4. Findings
This section presents findings on the complex interplay between instructional leadership practice, teacher well-being and systemic challenges. The section comprises the views of ten principals who participated in this study. Some participant responses were summarised and presented in descriptive forms, others were reported verbatim and presented in italics.

4.1 Instructional leadership practice, teacher well-being and systemic challenges
The theme presented in this section is derived from the thematically analysed data obtained from interviews, open-ended questionnaires and field notes, with selected ten principals from Oshana Region. The theme is on the complex interplay between instructional leadership practice, teacher well-being and systemic challenges. It is worth-noting that the theme relates to the manner in which interplay between instructional leadership practice, teacher well-being and the measures of systemic challenges could be constructed and developed to find the complex interplay between them. In this study, the researcher has to determine whether principals understand the interplay between instructional leadership practice, teacher well-being and systemic challenges. This was done to respond to the question: What complex interplay exists between instructional leadership, teacher well-being and systemic challenges in Oshana Region? Responses from principals showed that principals use instructional leadership to encourage teachers to improve the school academic performance. For example one principal at senior secondary phase said:
"Principals apply leadership practices to ensure teachers improve student learning outcomes."
Another principal at junior secondary phase said:
"Principals encourage teachers' cooperation; communicate to them to improve teaching."
One principal at senior primary phase, when asked on complex interplay between instructional leadership, teacher well-being and systemic challenges, said:
"It refers to principals' influence on students' academic achievement through teachers' teaching practice."

Moreover, principals said that the complex interplay between instructional leadership, teacher well-being and systemic challenges help principals to give instruction in a sustainable way. One principal at junior primary phase said:

"It refers to how principals facilitate teaching and learning in a sustainable manner."

One principal at junior secondary phase said:

"Principals use instructional leadership to advocate high academic performance."

Another principal at senior primary phase, when asked on the complex interplay between the instructional leadership, teacher well-being and systemic challenges, said:

"Instructional leadership is used to support teacher professional development programs."

One principal at senior secondary phase expressed this view as follows:

"Principals use instructional leadership to coordinate school programs and to provide resources to improve teaching and learning."

4.2 Instructional leadership strategies used by principals in Oshana Region

In order to determine instructional leadership strategies used by principals, the researcher asked question: Which instructional leadership strategies do principals use in Oshana Region? The responses of principals indicated that principals use many leadership strategies to monitor school programs. One principal at senior secondary phase said:

"Principals use instructional leadership strategies to define the school mission."

Another principal at senior primary phase said:

"Principals use instructional leadership strategies to manage the school instructional program."

Moreover, principals said that principals use leadership strategies to give instruction to teachers to implement curriculum. For example, one principal at junior primary phase said:

"Principals use instructional leadership strategies to promote positive school learning climate."

Another principal at junior secondary phase, when asked on prevailing instructional leadership strategies, said:

"They use instructional leadership strategies to advance teachers' interests."

One principal at junior primary phase expressed this view as follows:

"They use instructional leadership strategies to encourage collaboration, cooperation and trust among staff members."

Another principal at senior primary phase said:

"Principals use instructional leadership strategies to promote teacher professional development and teaching instructional practices."

4.3 Instructional leadership strategies which enhance school performance

In order to determine instructional leadership strategies which enhance school performance, the researcher asked question: Which existing instructional leadership strategies that enhance school performance? The responses from principals indicated that principals use varieties of leadership strategies to monitor teaching and learning process and to ensure learners academic performance are taking place. One principal at junior primary phase said:

"Principals act as agent influencing positive school performance, monitor teachers behaviour in working with students."

Another principal at junior secondary phase said:

"Principals make difference in schools through dialogue and embracing student learning."

One principal at senior secondary phase said:

"Principals learning behaviour influence higher academic performance."

Moreover, one principal at junior primary phase said:

"They monitor and evaluate progress towards goal achievement."

Another principal at senior secondary phase said:

"Principals intervene if progress is lacking, promote teachers professional growth and fostering teacher reflection."

One principal at senior primary phase said:

"They facilitate learning process in schools."

One principal at junior secondary phase said:

"Principals' influence is targeted at students learning via teachers."

Another principal at senior secondary phase said:

"Teachers together with parents are held responsible and accountable for non-progress."

4.4 School performance which associates with instructional leadership strategies

In order to establish existing school performance which associates with instructional leadership strategies, researcher asked question: What existing school performance which associates with instructional leadership strategies? One principal at junior primary phase said:

"Principals set tone, assume responsibility for instruction and/or allocate resources to reach the schools goals."

Another principal at senior primary phase said:

"Teachers receive more support from the principals; there is an atmosphere that is conducive to learning."

Moreover, principals in the study indicated that it depend on situation at school. One principal at junior secondary phase said:

"Principals take full responsibility for coordinating schools instructional program and learners' achievement."

Another principal at senior secondary phase said:

"Principals model through the power of example by role model to others."

One principal at junior secondary phase said:

"There is a regular monitoring process for learner progress and there is emphasis on academic achievement."

One principal at junior primary phase said:

"Principals show interest in teaching and learning and in classroom observation."

Another principal at senior primary phase said:

"Principals know more about teaching and learning and classroom atmosphere."

One principal at junior primary phase said:

"Principals mindset is changed to regard the process of teaching and learning as central to their roles rather than simply leaving such roles to teachers."

4.5 Challenges associate with the application of the instructional leadership strategies

In order to determine challenges associate with application of instructional leadership strategies, the researcher asked the question: What challenges associate with the application of instructional leadership strategies? One principal at senior secondary phase said:

"These challenges include low skill and/or capacity of the school principals, large class sizes."

Another principal at junior secondary phase said:

"They include administrative overload and breadth of principals' leadership roles."

One principal at senior primary phase said:

"Time constraints, lack of resources, financial insufficiency and limited stakeholder support."

Moreover, another principal at junior primary phase said:

"They include challenges of addressing diverse learning needs and diverse student needs."

One principal at senior secondary phase said:

"They include limited access to instant technology, schools' limited budget."

Another principal at junior secondary phase said:

"Many teachers are not properly trained or equipped to implement the curriculum."

Moreover, one principal at senior primary phase said:

"*They include lack of professional development for principals and teachers alike."*

Another principal at junior primary phase said:

"They include lack of specialised knowledge on how to working with inclusivity education."

Moreover, one principal at senior secondary phase said:

"They include students with learning difficulties, scarcity of their learning resources."

Another principal at senior primary phase expressed this view as follows:

"Inadequate educational infrastructure, overcrowded class and overburdened teachers."

4.6 Existing support mechanisms used to address identified challenges

In order to determine support mechanisms used to address identified challenges, the researcher asked question: Which support mechanisms used to address identified challenges? Responses from the principals indicated that principals use varieties of support mechanisms to address these challenges. One principal at junior primary phase said:

"Principals build relationships and model, and use distributed form of instructional leadership."

Another principal at senior secondary phase said:

"Principals use research data to support resources allocation."

Another principal at senior secondary phase said:

Principals use scholarships and fellowships initiatives to boost teacher professional development and continuous growth

One principal at junior secondary phase said:

"They collaborate to improve student achievement, create positive learning environments."

Moreover, one principal at junior primary phase said:

"They develop a continuous professional development curriculum for teachers."

Another principal at senior secondary phase said:

"Principals shape structures, cultures in response to the realities of the school community."

One principal at senior primary phase said:

"They deal with emergent issues, ensuring stakeholder input, develop a comprehensive strategic plan."

Another principal at senior secondary phase said:

"Principals cultivate effective leadership programs and their supporting systems."

One principal at senior primary phase said:

They involve parents and teachers' positive attitudes and monitoring from schools stakeholders

5. Discussion

This section discusses findings on complex interplay between instructional leadership practice, teacher well-being and systemic challenges. The discussion is based on views of ten principals participated in this study.

5.1 Instructional leadership practice, teacher well-being and systemic challenges

This study explored complex interplay between instructional leadership, teacher well-being and systemic challenges in Oshana Region in Namibia. The main question answered by study was: What complex interplay exists between instructional leadership, teacher well-being and systemic challenges in Oshana Region? The paramount issues that emanated from the findings were that there is a complex interplay between instructional leadership, teacher well-being and systemic challenges which have direct effects on schools performance, teachers' performance which could results in positive and/or negative students' academic performance. Researchers have found that establish a clear instructional goals, active monitoring, constructive feedback reveal a consistent positive engagement of the visionary leaders (Collie & Martin, 2023). Support for ongoing professional development is self-evident in fostering culture of continuous improvement and in influencing teacher efficacy. A collaborative professional learning environment, cultivated by instructional leaders emerges as a catalyst for improved teacher work performance. Opportunities for knowledge sharing contribute to positive school culture and shared responsibility for student success. (Mawlood & HamadAmeen, 2023)

Another crucial issue that emanated from findings were that leadership practice could promote and enhance teaching and learning. Studies have found that teacher morale and job satisfaction enhance performance outcomes, foster the overall teacher well-being and sustain commitment of the teaching workforce, optimise instructional leadership strategies, contribute to an environment conducive to enhance teachers professional growth and/or overall well-being in the educational institutions (Groenewald et al., 2023).

5.2 Instructional leadership strategies used by principals in Oshana Region

In this study, the primary issue encompassing these findings is that this complex interplay is attributed to how instructional leadership practice is used to monitor school programs. Principals' instructional leadership is

utilised to develop leadership concepts, planning, program execution, supervision, evaluation, and learning design. Coupled with these, school budget is optimised, staff, teachers, and stakeholder collaboration, bipartite cooperation, student-teach-student, role modelling, counselling, guidance, inspiring talks, and smart parenting utilised. Proper planning is created to coordinate the program and its implementation, whereas organising supervision and evaluation construct the learning implications, and identify challenges to secure solutions (Lani & Pauzi, 2024). There is a support call for collaborative action to cultivate inclusive, effective, visionary leadership practices to advance educational excellence and equity (Groenewald et al., 2024).

Fostering a strong relationship with the stakeholders creates a supportive educational ecosystem whereas developing instructional leadership strategies, promoting effective leadership, resource management and inclusive teaching practices add values. Offering a foundation for research and development of initiatives improve educational practices and student outcomes (Tañiza, 2024) whereas engaging with instructional leadership aid principals' sustainability in their instructional roles to foster teacher well-being practices (Hickey et al., 2024). Literacy development provides a basis for policy improvement and educational practices (Safuri & Kurniasih, 2023).

The sample of this study revealed that principals use leadership to give instruction to teachers to implement the school programs. Learners are coached on how to answer examination questions. That said, it should be noted that concern in this study was on the interplay between instructional leadership, teacher well-being and systemic challenges not vise-versa (cf. Methodology Section). However, a possible interpretation for this finding could be that there are arrangements on the implementation of ministerial mission and vision statement within educational setting (MoEAC, 2023). As a result of the top-down cascades of ministerial mission, vision, and policies, many principals might have difficulty to adapt and/or change status quo. These anomalies might lead to instances where strategies might fail or have unintended consequences. However these anomalies need to be addressed by involving various stakeholders in planning and implementation process.

5.3 Instructional leadership strategies which enhance school performance

Another profound issue noteworthy from study is that principals use instructional leadership to monitor teaching and learning and to ensure that learner academic performance are taking place. Schools are provided with adequate teaching and learning resources, effort are made to construct classrooms to reduce big class sizes and overcrowding in the classrooms (Cherutoi et al., 2024), positive instructional leadership practices are utilised to improve students' achievement levels, improved instructional leadership result in higher school graduation rates, a common indicator used to measure the success of schools (Scott, 2017).

5.4 School performance which associates with instructional leadership strategies

Most obvious findings emerge from study is that this complex interplay is attributed to factors determine choice of leadership strategies. Principals' focuses go beyond building collegial teams, loyal and cohesive teachers and sharing an inspirational vision to focus such relationship on very specific pedagogical work of teaching and/or learning (Li et al., 2023). Teachers are perceived positively towards principals' leadership practices to enhance teaching and/or learning in schools (Muyunda, 2022).

5.5 Challenges associate with the application of the instructional leadership strategies

In this study, many challenges associate with application of instructional leadership strategies. Of particular noticeable includes panic in implementing school programs, lack of modern media in teaching, poor infrastructure, inequality education and/or the need of teachers to review these impediments. Other critical yet contextual factor includes implementation process (Tañiza, 2024). School programs components influence implementation process (Hickey et al., 2024). Topping the list include teachers' attitudes toward facilitating school programs, teachers' beliefs, changing attitudes and roles of principals (Lhabu, 2021). Potential pitfalls includes top-down cascades approach, digital literacy initiatives in resource-constrained environments, interact with broader systemic issues, and lack of the holistic view faced by teachers (Groenewald et al., 2023). These

anomalies might lead to instances where strategies might fail or have unintended consequences (Bluestein & Goldschmidt, 2021).

5.6 Existing support mechanisms used to address identified challenges

Finally, many existing support mechanisms used to address identified challenges. Stakeholders monitor and support principals on regular basis, creating experience, sharing programs on good practices, providing relevant continuous trainings on core dimensions of instructional leadership in collaboration with the nearby colleges and universities (Wasyhun & Teshome, 2019).

Framework of growth mindset pedagogy is used as educational approach to school leadership, attention is given to their mindset and their views on teaching and learning, which may have a strong impact on whole school community (Tirri et al., 2021). Ongoing training to instructional leaders is given to overcome leadership gaps in knowledge, skills; communication channels are created to overcome communication problems (Feyisa & Edosa, 2023).

Monitoring is applied through principals' involvement in visiting classrooms, observing teachers and provides feedback while dialogue is applied by creating opportunities for teachers to talk to colleagues and principals about teaching and learning ((Marshall, 2024; Masina, 2020).

This section presents the interplay between instructional leadership practice, teacher well-being and gives insights into systemic challenges faced by principals and seek potential solutions that could scaffold them in overcoming these systemic challenges. Instructional leadership practice and teacher well-being tends to shape school culture, faculty morale, and student outcomes, with context-specific implications on performance of schools in Oshana Region in Namibia.

Instructional leadership underestimates pupil welfare, socialisation and the process of developing young ones into responsible adults citizens, de-emphasises sports, drama and music. It says little about the process by which it should be developed, focuses on the 'what' rather than the 'how' of school management. In some cases, the principal is not an educational expert; often have less expertise than teachers they supervise. Some principals perceive their role to be administrative; they purposely distance themselves from classroom environment and leave pedagogical issues to teachers. Principal's authority is severely limited as the principal occupies a middle management position in which ultimate authority exists with senior administrators in the region or head office (MoEAC, 2023).

In Namibian educational context, leadership approach such as instructional leadership affect staff and student performances. Fulfil holistic needs of Namibian schools, whereby staff development and/or wellbeing becoming a primary concern. Principals need to create a nurturing environment that enhances the staff morale and commitment, which positively influence teaching and learning outcomes, foster educational environment that encourages collaboration, innovation, and shared responsibility (Groenewald et al., 2024). These support mechanisms empower staff, support a sense of community, and lead to positive outcomes in terms of student engagement and learning. Thus, principals need to integrate various element of instructional leadership to support staff wellbeing, enhance job satisfaction, and promote student success. A more effective leadership should not be limited to one strategy, but rather a combination of strategic components that leverages strengths of each (Dreer, 2022).

In Namibia, integrative leadership strategies which encompass compassion of various elements of instructional leadership, inclusivity of teacher wellbeing could best address current emerging challenges faced by schools. These eclectic integrative leadership strategies align with nation's aspiration for a progressive, inclusive, and adaptable educational landscape that can thrive amidst rapid societal and digital changes (MoEAC, 2023).

6. Conclusion

Based on the analysis of findings, and the design used in this study, it can be concluded that instructional leadership has effect on academic performance of teachers that affect the schools and teachers' performances which result in positive or negative academic student outcomes. It was evident from this study that principals should take teachers well-being very seriously.

In view of the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made for practice: Firstly, principals should use instructional leadership to improve and enhance their performance, teachers' well-being, their academic performance and learner academic performance. Secondly, principals should use instructional leadership to strike the balance between leadership practice and teacher wellbeing to avoid manipulation of one particular construct against other one. This in turn will help them to strike the balance between authority of teacher expertise of the curriculum and positional authority of the principals. Lastly, the study recommends an urgent need for the principals to study and learn the application of instructional leadership practice; apply them to optimise success and enhance teaching and learning which result on student academic outcomes.

This study has several limitations that should be taken into consideration. Only ten principals were selected for interview sessions and open-ended questionnaire in which the complex interplay between instructional leadership, teacher well-being and systemic challenges was feature of interest. Researcher utilised criterion purposeful sampling technique and/or only principals with seven years of experience and/or above in principalship were selected. This selection may have influenced responses. Researcher attempted to explore complex interplay between instructional leadership, teacher well-being and systemic challenges in which principals were influential individuals in schools. Their responses might be affected by this. The sample size includes the public school principals who volunteered to participate in the study with exclusion of private school principals. Therefore, question of generalisability to private school principals is a limit. Its scope is confined to the Oshana Region in Namibia which narrows generalisability of its findings thus limits the broader applicability of its findings. Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made for future research: Firstly, future research should be undertaken to establish correlation between instructional leadership and teacher wellbeing since this was beyond the scope of this study. Secondly, future research should conduct comparative studies across different regions and exploring the complex interplay between instructional leadership, teacher well-being, and school performance.

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About the author

Born at Okanya Village, Ongandjera, Namibia in 1967, this author became an ordinal teacher in the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture in 1990, Head of Department in 2005 and school principal in 2007. Author's educational background include Doctor of Philosophy in Education in education management from University of South Africa, Pretoria, 2021, Master of Education in education management, leadership and policy studies from University of Namibia, Windhoek, 2017, Postgraduate Diploma in Education in education management from University of South Africa, Pretoria, 2007, Bachelor of Education in education management from the Rand Afrikaans University, Johannesburg, 2004, Further Diploma in Education in English language teaching from Rand Afrikaans University, Johannesburg, 2001 and Diploma in Education in English and Oshindonga from the Ongwediva College of Education, Ongwediva, 1996. Author's field of expertise and field of academic interests include education management, education leadership, and school governance and education law and policy studies.

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