

Complex Interplay between Transformational, Instructional, Distributed Leadership and Student Performance

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Abstract

The current study explores complex interplay between transformational, instructional, distributed leadership and student performance. Qualitative single descriptive case study research design which emanated from constructivist worldview was employed to explore complex interplay between transformational, instructional, distributed leadership and student performance in Oshana Region in Namibia. Data was collected through the interview schedule, field notes and the open-ended questionnaire in which criterion purposeful sampling technique was used to select 20 educational leaders from 20 schools. Data analysis was conducted through thematic analysis, typological analysis, and content analysis using Atlas.ti. The current study has established the complex interplay between transformational, instructional, distributed leadership and student performance, prevail leadership strategies used and complex interplay between them. School leaders should study and learn application of leadership strategies, apply them to optimise student performance, enhancing teaching and learning which result on student performance. School leaders should integrate the elements of leadership strategies to support and promote student performance, use leadership strategies to strike the balance between leadership strategies and to avoid manipulation of one strategy against other one. Leadership strategies have intricate complex interplay on student performance which results in positive and negative student performance.

Keywords: Distributed, instructional, student performance, transformational

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1. Introduction

Relationship between educational leadership and student outcomes has acquired unprecedented attention among scholars, educators and policy makers in the past two decades on a global scale (Author, 2025a). More than six systematic and empirical analyses, among others, Paais and Pattiruhu (2020) have been conducted to estimate direct and indirect effects of educational leadership on the student achievement. Harris et al. (2022) posit that the increasing interest in educational leadership has stemmed from popularised belief that successful leadership produces better student outcomes. Case studies, qualitative research including Mastura et al. (2021) have presented many stories of falling schools which with the help of the right kind of leadership have transformed into successful educational institutions (Author., 2025b). Policy makers around the world have increasingly emphasised the roles of successful leaders in reducing achievement gaps amongst student populations (Bakker et al., 2021) whereas educational ministries, departments across industrial and developing worlds heavily investing in creation of educational leadership programs with realisation that leadership determines a significant portion of variation in range of student outcomes (Bernales-Turpo et al., 2022).

As Behravesht et al. (2020) noted, despite positive association narrative one gets from qualitative research, empirical results linking educational leadership and students outcomes are inconclusive at best. Gabr et al. (2021) also posit that the effect of leadership on student achievement indicates very little to no effect on student outcomes whereas Harris et al. (2022) posit that leadership has an average effect on the student achievement. This finding confirms previous findings indicating a positive relationship between educational leadership and student outcomes and/or achievement. As such, these findings contradict earlier studies indicating no association between leadership and students outcomes.

As De Mesa et al. (2023) put it this confusion of empirical findings leads interested researchers and policy makers with little to know clue regarding relationship between educational leadership and students outcomes. Chen (2020) also notes that the drastic differences in the findings of the quantitative scholarship on effect of leadership on student achievement are likely due to different methodological specifications whereas Pollock et al. (2020) posit that many studies used non-academic students' outcome measures: social, psychological and non-academic attributes, as the dependent variable. This specification is likely to increase the magnitude of leadership effects on students' non-academic outcomes given the larger role school leaders play in setting the mission, vision, management of schools rather than directly interact with students' teaching and learning on daily basis like others (Author, 2025c). Chen and Zhang (2022) note that many studies only included published

research, which decreased number of available investigations. As Bernales-Turpo et al. (2022) put it, the inclusion of unpublished literature is likely to increase sample of available studies thereby adding more robustness to estimates of leadership effects on students' outcomes. Various authors have selected type of leadership which generating different estimates (Harris et al., 2019) while others have used different instruments to measure leadership, as well as the students' achievement leading to varying empirical findings (Cai et al., 2020).

Karakose et al. (2023) have argued that this inconsistency in empirical research poses significant challenges to policy makers, as well as professional educators. Many empirical findings allude to weak indirect effect of leadership on students' outcomes which contradict policy makers' circles that concluding moderate to strong positive association between the two constructs (Chen, 2020). Kloutsiniotis and Mihail (2020) argue that the drastic variation of empirical findings with respect to type of leadership effect on students' achievement hinders policy change, as well as schools efforts in organisational change due to confusion surrounding what type best serves schools. As Smith and Holloway (2020) note, the absence of concrete knowledge on the effect of leadership on students' achievement impedes continuous process of schools improvement. Finding effects of leadership on students' achievement aids policy makers and education professionals with knowledge to proceed with meaningful changes which bring improved students' performance.

Rabkin and Frein (2021) have argued that educational leadership has a weak to moderate effect on students academic outcomes, however measured whereas Harris et al. (2022) have argued that instructional, transformational, distributed leadership practice has an average effect on students' academic outcomes. As Tortia et al. (20220) note, this indicates that the school leaders may not directly play a significant role in determining students' academic performance. Nevertheless, this evidence is indicative of role of school leaders in creating conducive environments for teaching and learning, constitute most robust predictor of students' achievement. For instance, Chen and Zhang (2022) have argued that distributed leadership has a stronger effect on students' academic achievement compared to instructional or transformational leadership. Simms et al. (2023) argue that this is likely due to the more involvement of school leaders with the business of teaching and learning since the distributed leadership entails the sharing of leadership responsibilities across all the leadership ranks in the school administration.

Buyukgoze et al. (2022) have noted that transformational leadership emphasises motivation of educators and students to do better through provision of vision whereas Tarro et al. (2020) posit that leadership which focuses more on instruction aims at improving the quality of teaching and learning and curriculum to improve students' performance. According to Behraves et al. (2020), distributed leadership means that leadership roles and responsibilities are spread across school members while supporting inclusive school community. Each of them has the capacity to create the positive change in an educational institution and it is in this light that their combined effort is highlighted. As such, Pollock et al. (2020) have argued that their applications are significant to develop dynamic organic centre for education to build on ideas and growth.

The purpose of this study is to address these gaps in existing empirical findings by exploring the complex interplay between transformational, instructional, distributed leadership and the student performance. This study expands on the previous efforts of quantitatively estimating the effects of leadership on student outcomes by considering the previously neglected leaderships, namely instructional, transformational and distributed leadership (Chen, 2020). Several studies such as Jabeen and Rahim (2021) have specified educational leadership effects on students' outcomes. According to Bakker and de Vries (2021), non-academic writing and policymaking efforts have been intensified trying to link different types of leadership to students' achievement. Therefore, the need for empirically investigation of leadership effects on student performance is warranted. Considering the above, this study sees an urgent need to investigate complex interplay between transformational, instructional, distributed leadership and student performance aiming to explore the complex interplay between transformational, instructional, distributed leadership and student performance in Oshana Region in Namibia.

The overarching primary research questions the study explored were:

- What complex interplay exists between transformational, instructional, distributed leadership and student performance in Oshana Region?
- Which leadership strategies do school leaders use in Oshana Region?
- Which existing leadership strategies that enhance student performance?
- What existing student performance which associates with leadership strategies?

2. Literature review

2.1 Instructional leadership practice

Several studies among others, Cai et al. (2020) have found that setting clear objectives, learning environment free from noise, high expectations for teachers and smart goals for school outcomes may lead to the school success whereas Rabkin and Frein (2021) have found that an educational leadership entails active empowerment of educational leaders within school leadership to achieve acceptable student academic outcome. For example, Li et al. (2019) have found that educational leaders can generate a positive effect on student academic performance when they interact with teaching and learning processes, devise best leadership practices to be disseminated at schools.

Various studies including Saleem et al. (2021), Joseph et al. (2025) have noted that instructional leadership remains dominant leadership, with numerous studies such as Rabkin and Frein (2021) and Zhou et al. (2021) underscoring its direct effect on curriculum development, teaching quality and student outcomes. For instance, Mohamed et al. (2023) have noted that instructional leaders can prioritise the improvement of the teaching and learning process, placing strong emphasis on the development of curriculum, effective instructional strategies, and the continuous assessment of student performance. As such, Sharif and Ghodoosi (2022) argue that instructional leaders are often very deeply involved in teacher continuous professional development, equipping them with skills necessary to improve instructional quality and student engagement. Research study by Hines et al. (2021) has indicated that instructional leaders who are actively involved in teacher training, classroom observations, instructional decision-making contribute to improved student performance. Karakose et al. (2023) argue that this is evident in the schools where instructional leaders have demonstrated a strong leadership in guiding curriculum changes and/or fostering a collaborative teaching environment (Mastura et al., 2021).

In Namibian educational context, instructional leadership has direct effect on student outcomes since it enhances teaching and/or curriculum delivery by providing clear guidance and support to teachers (Author., 2025d). As Harris et al. (2019) clearly put it instructional leaders are deeply involved in developing pedagogical practices and ensuring that teaching methods align with the student academic needs. However, a study by Smith and Holloway (2020) clearly have indicated that instructional leadership is often constrained by administrative duties, which leave little time for instructional leaders direct involvement with teaching practice. Authors such as Simms et al. (2023) caution that while this leadership practice is effective in improving students' outcomes, in terms of academic achievement, it is very crucial that leaders are not overwhelmed by the non-educational administrative tasks and responsibilities. Instructional leaders who maintain focus on instructional improvement lead to better student engagement and performance.

In Namibian educational context, a primary difficulty faced by instructional leaders is to balance demands of instructional leadership with administrative responsibilities which often accompany the roles of school leaders (Author., 2025a). As Sharif and Ghodoosi (2022) have noted in many schools, especially those facing resource shortages, leaders are required to perform a wide range of duties such as managing of school finances, overseeing infrastructure projects, coordinating extracurricular activities. According to Karakose et al. (2023), these additional responsibilities make it difficult for leaders to focus fully on improving teaching and learning processes. In some cases, this imbalance between leadership duties leads to role conflict and burnout, which in turn impacts the overall effectiveness of instructional leadership. Cai et al. (2020) warn that high job demands, without adequate resources and support may lead to stress decreasing job performance. Similarly, Mastura et al. (2021) have cautioned that overstretched leaders may have struggled to implement instructional leadership practices, as they may be unable to devote sufficient time and/or attention to core educational mission of the school.

As Li et al. (2019) argue, in schools with few resources, educational leaders may find it difficult to implement high-quality professional development programs or provide teachers with the tools, materials needed for effective instruction. Mohamed et al. (2023) also argue that the absence of adequate funding, coupled with lack of teacher training opportunities exacerbate these, making it harder for leaders to drive the meaningful improvements in teaching and learning. Despite these, Paais and Pattiruhu (2020), among others, posit that instructional leadership is still effective in schools where instructional leaders leverage community support and collaborate with teachers to overcome resource limitations.

2.2 Distributed leadership practice

The existing literature (Arnold et al., 2021; Torres et al., 2024) have acknowledged growing interest in distributed leadership as a powerful educational leadership, with increasing number of schools adopt to share leadership roles and empowers teachers, other school staff, enabling them to share leadership tasks, and decision-making processes, ultimately fostering more collaborative and/or participatory school culture. Gabr et

al. (2021) and Zheng et al. (2023) argue that when leadership is distributed across the school, it enhances teacher participation, improve decision-making, impact overall school climate.

One of main advantages of distributed leadership is its potential to increase teacher engagement. As it has been pointed out by Yáñez-Araque et al. (2021), by decentralising decision-making and encouraging teachers to take active role in the school leadership, schools create sense of shared responsibility and/or ownership over educational outcomes, enhance job satisfaction, as teachers feel empowered and/or valued in their roles. Kloutsiniotis and Mihail (2020) further argue that a shared leadership foster a collaborative environment whereby teachers learn from one another, share best practices, and/or collectively solve problems. Karakose et al. (2023) further argue that this collaboratively not only improves the quality of teaching but also enhances the professional development of teachers, making it valuable tool for long-term school improvement.

Arnold et al. (2021) argues that in the teaching and/or learning process, distributed leadership holds a significant promise for improving student performance, enhancing teacher engagement, fostering a more collaborative and inclusive school culture. However, Tortia et al. (2022) argue that distributed leadership successful implementation requires full attention to organisational culture, effective communication, willingness of school leaders to share leadership authority. Bolton et al. (2021) further argue that while there are challenges to overcome like resistance to change and urgent need for adequate training, there are also opportunities for schools to leverage technology; integrate leadership development into teacher training, build a culture of trust and collaboration. Tarro et al. (2020) further argue that by addressing challenges and seizing opportunities, schools will realise the full potential of distributed leadership as a transformative force for educational improvement.

The foundational literature (Berberoglu, 2018; Clifton, 2017) acknowledges the growing interest in distributed leadership that involve the sharing of decision-making among various stakeholders within schools, its full potential to democratise school leadership and improve school climate. Li et al. (2019) argue that by empowering teachers and staff to take on leadership roles, distributed leadership can promote a greater collaboration. Zheng et al. (2023) have argued that distributed leadership has been very successful in schools where there is strong organisational culture values teamwork. However, Torres et al. (2024) argue that distributed leadership success is contingent on schools culture and the extent to which collaboration is supported at all levels of schools. The practice of distributed leadership depends more on organisational context and willingness of staff members to participate in shared decision-making (Simms et al., 2023). If collaboratively is implemented without a strong foundation of trust and/or support, it may lead to confusion and inefficiencies, undermining its potential benefits (Karakose et al., 2023).

In Namibian educational context, in schools where there is a history of top down management or lack of professional trust among staff members, it may be very difficult to establish cooperative relationships necessary for distributed leadership to thrive (Author., 2025b). Hines et al. (2021) further note that there is often insufficient training for school leaders to effectively implement distributed leadership practices which may hinder success of distributed leadership. Despite these anomalies, there are several opportunities for advancing of distributed leadership practice. Zhou et al. (2021) argue that one promising opportunity is integration of leadership development into teacher training programs. Bolton et al. (2021) further clarify that by equipping school teachers with the skills and knowledge to take on leadership roles, schools may create a pipeline of future leaders who are prepared to contribute to decision-making and school improvement. Smith and Holloway (2020) further clarify that such teacher training programs can focus on building skills in areas such as communication, collaboration, and problem-solving, all which are very essential for effective distributed leadership.

Studies, among others, Yáñez-Araque et al. (2021) have shown that distributed leadership can improve teacher morale leading to greater job satisfaction. Buyukgoze et al. (2022) explain that when teachers given more autonomy, they tend to be more committed to their roles and exhibit higher levels of engagement in their work (Joseph et al., 2025). Distributed leadership practice is observed in Namibian educational context where it contributes to a more open, communicative, and supportive environment for both staff and students (Author., 2025c).

Another opportunity is to utilise technology which bridges gaps in leadership capacity. Arnold et al. (2021) posits that digital utilisations facilitate communication, coordination, collaboration among teachers, school leaders. Berberoglu (2018) further argues that online platforms and collaborative software enable teachers to work together on projects, share resources, and provide feedback to one another in real time. According to Bakker and de Vries (2021), this may strengthen a sense of community within the schools and improve efficiency in decision-making processes. Clifton (2017) further clarifies that schools foster more collaborative

leadership by promoting culture of trust and transparency. Zheng et al. (2023) further argue that when school leaders communicate expectations, and support professional growth of staff, encourage feedback and input from teachers, school leaders create environment that is conducive to shared leadership (Jabeen & Rahim, 2021). In Namibian context, schools promote distributed leadership by recognising and rewarding teachers who take leadership roles, reinforcing idea that leadership is a shared responsibility rather than a top down function (Author., 2025d).

Bakker and de Vries (2021) argue that school leaders who encourage self-regulation and/or offer autonomy have been found to enhance job satisfaction and/or performance by reducing burnout and increasing motivation. Bernales-Turpo et al. (2022) further explain that workplace stress is a very significant determinant of job satisfaction and/or performance, particularly in high-pressure environments, impair cognitive functions, decision-making, leading to reduced job performance and burnout (Saleem et al., 2021). As highlighted by De Mesa et al. (2023), factors such as job satisfaction and/or organisational support are moderate negative effect of stress. As it has pointed out by Pollock et al. (2020), interventions like increasing social support, enhancing job resources have been found to improve employee performance and mental health.

Research by Torres et al. (2024) suggests that integrating leadership development into a broader organisational strategy enhance distributed leadership practice whereas research by Zhou et al. (2021) suggests that schools that invest in building culture of collaboration, ongoing professional development, and shared responsibility are more likely to see positive outcomes from distributed leadership. Yáñez-Araque et al. (2021) argue that distributed leadership has been aligned with high-performance work systems which emphasise development of organisational practices that foster employees' engagement, and/or satisfaction. Chen (2020) further explains that by adopting high-performance work systems, schools may create environment where distributed leadership is not only supported but actively promoted.

In Namibia, in some cases, delegation of distributed leadership roles may lead to confusion about roles responsibilities, with different staff members unclear about their specific roles, boundaries of their authority (Author., 2025a). Li et al. (2019) posit that this lack of clarity may undermine the effectiveness of distributed leadership resulting in fragmentation of decision-making. Saleem et al. (2021) caution that many school leaders accustomed to making decisions on their own very reluctant to adopt a more collaborative leadership practice. Mohamed et al. (2023) have clarified that this resistance is stemming from fear of losing authority or belief that centralising power is necessary for maintaining order and discipline within school. However, Berberoglu (2018) warns that a school culture which is not supportive of collaboration, open communication, and mutual trust may undermine effectiveness of distributed leadership.

2.3 Transformational leadership practice

Tarro et al. (2020) have found that transformational leadership energise, motivate, inspire, and/or change educators work morale whereas purpose, mission, and vision generate positive effect on student performance. Bernales-Turpo et al. (2022) further explain that the increasingly ability of a transformational leaders to connect to employees is believed to raise levels of communication, collaboration and performance, transform work in organisation, making organisation capable of achieving its goals and overcoming its impediments.

Various studies including Demirtaş et al. (2020) note that in transformational leadership, job satisfaction is linked to job performance; satisfied employees tend to exhibit higher levels of performance, as they are more motivated, and committed to work. Similarly, Buyukgoze et al. (2022) have found that work engagement has been posited as level of enthusiasm and dedication employee feels toward work: found to be strong predictor of job performance whereas burnout undermines work engagement, leading to poor performance and increased turnover intention. De Mesa et al. (2023) have found that effective leadership practices like providing opportunities for skill development and maintaining positive organisational climate enhance job satisfaction and engagement.

Several studies, among others, Buyukgoze et al. (2022) have been noting that transformational leadership's ability to reduce stress, and foster a sense of personal accomplishment, is central to increase job satisfaction and productivity in employees. According to Behravesht et al. (2020), in schools, these may translate into a more engaging faculty and dynamic learning environment for students. Bakker and de Vries (2021) clarify that adopting transformational leadership requires ongoing professional development for school leaders to develop necessary skills and/or mindsets. Zheng et al. (2023) clearly note that professional growth, especially in leadership competencies, is crucial for sustained success of this leadership. In education sector, Tarro et al.

(2020) posit that leadership training should focus on cultivating trust and competence, which is equally applicable to school settings.

Study by Bolton et al. (2021) consistently highlight positive effect of transformational leadership on teacher efficacy and student achievement, with leader demonstrating vision, motivation, and commitment to an ongoing teacher professional development. According to Tortia et al. (2022), transformational leadership in school settings is characterised by a leader who inspires teachers and students to exceed their expectations, fostering environment of collaboration and collective success. Jabeen and Rahim (2021) explain that these leaders are known for ability to articulate a compelling vision, motivate their staff through individualised consideration, and/or intellectually stimulate teachers and students to achieve more. Saleem et al. (2021) further clarify that school leaders improve school culture, promoting innovative teaching practices, creating positive school climate that values continuous improvement, focusing on nurturing professional growth, enhance both teaching quality, and strengthening overall educational environment.

Research by Zhou et al. (2021) underscore the importance of managing job demands, providing very adequate resources, fostering supportive leadership, and ensuring organisational climate in employees' performance and well-being. Torres et al. (2024) argue that as burnout, stress, and leadership practices emerge as key determinants of job performance, organisations should adopt target strategies to address these setbacks. According to Simms et al. (2023), high-performance work systems, implemented thoughtfully, enhance employees' commitment and/or performance, but their success depends on the broader organisational context and leadership practices.

In Namibian educational context, many leaders and teachers alike particularly in rural areas, lack necessary skills and resources to fully implement transformational leadership (Author., 2025b). Sharif and Ghodoosi (2022) warn that lack of preparation may result in ineffective leadership, hindering leaders' ability to maximise effects of leadership on students' outcomes. Simms et al. (2023) indicate that rural schools are faced additional obstacles like limited resources, inadequate access to professional development opportunities. According to Demirtaş et al. (2020), this exacerbates gaps between urban versus rural schools in terms of leadership quality and the resulting students' performance. Sharif and Ghodoosi (2022) suggest that addressing disparities requires target interventions which focus on capacity building and resource allocation for rural schools.

In Namibia, some school leaders may not have the necessary tools and/or supports to effectively implement transformational leadership practice (Author., 2025c). Berberoglu (2018) argues that varying levels of supports across regions, particularly in more remote or under-resourced areas, hinder the widespread success of transformational leadership. According to Bakker and de Vries (2021), ability of transformational leaders to drive meaningful change is constrained by systemic issues such as lack of funding, limited teacher professional development programs, insufficient administrative support for innovative initiatives. Chen (2020) has noted that as transformational leadership continues to gain recognition in educational setup, these barriers should be addressed to unlock its full potential. Paais and Pattiruhu (2020) observe that school leaders adopting this leadership engage in creating supportive environment that enhances both teacher motivation and student learning.

In school setting, research by Hines et al. (2021) highlight effectiveness of leadership practices in students' academic achievement, emphasising significant roles leadership plays in improving the students' outcomes. Current studies (Joseph et al., 2025; Torres et al., 2024) have posited that transformational, instructional, and distributed leadership practice, all offer distinct advantages, each contributing in different ways to overall school climate, teachers motivation and students performance. However, successful implementation of leadership practices requires a lot of effort from broader educational systems (Smith and Holloway, 2020). Transformational, instructional, distributed leadership each play a vital role in shaping teachers performance, teaching quality, student performance (Rabkin & Frein, 2021). However, as De Mesa et al. (2023) have put it, implementation of school leadership practices requires careful consideration of training, resource allocation, additional contextual issues, especially in rural areas.

3. Material and Methods

3.1 Research design

Emanates from qualitative research design, this study explores the complex interplay between transformational, instructional, distributed leadership and student performance (Dey, 2003). The theoretical underpinning constructivism as applied to learning theory is an interpretivist notion, it represents untruth about ways student learn (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Ling & Ling, 2017). This study employed qualitative single descriptive case

study to explore the complex interplay between transformational, instructional, distributed leadership and student performance in Oshana Region in Namibia.

In this study, position is taken that research paradigm takes prime position, meaning researchers should be certain about research paradigm in which research is carried out. This is important to make sure that all aspects of research endeavour are congruent (Ling & Ling, 2017), research exercise is coherent; outcomes are appropriate, defensible. Considering above, the interpretivist paradigm was used to provide evidenced, coherent and subjective insight into and understanding of complex interplay between transformational, instructional, distributed leadership and student performance in Oshana Region in Namibia.

Following interpretivist paradigm, the study employed qualitative, exploratory, single descriptive case study (Creswell & Creswell, 2017) to explore and to describe complex interplay between transformational, instructional, distributed leadership and student performance in Oshana Region in Namibia. Case studies focus on contemporary issues within the real-life contexts. The issues refer to the complex interplay between transformational, instructional, distributed leadership and student performance in Oshana Region in Namibia. Case study was chosen for this study because study's aim was to explore complex interplay between transformational, instructional, distributed leadership and student performance in Oshana Region in Namibia.

The emerging nature of this study is best suited to constructivist research design that can yield rich understanding of key issues by minimising distance between researcher and participants to develop practical and theoretical understanding; generate new and alternative understanding into concepts, issues under study (Leedy & Ormrod, 2023). The dominant positivist research design has adversely affected relevance of resulting research because the researcher needs not only to consider technical aspects but also social aspects and their continuous interaction concerning the study (Dey, 2003), research design to which constructivist worldview is suited.

When researcher is interested in immediate responses to particular situation, it may require that researcher uses subjective data since it is unlikely that objective data would have been collected at precisely right times, instances. This is not to devalue positivist research design but to suggest that alternative research design can supplement, strengthen this study since quantitative research design cannot reveal this study's completely detailed story.

Investigation of complex interplay between transformational, instructional, distributed leadership and student performance in Oshana Region in Namibia cannot be studied outside of its natural setting with its focus on this contemporary issue. The issue is that control and/or manipulations of complex interplay between transformational, instructional, distributed leadership and student performance is not possible. Theoretical knowledge on issue under investigation is limited and not yet mature. Case study method was thus suitable method for this study (Dey, 2003).

3.2 Participants

Using Oshana directorate of education latest statistics of 2025, researcher selected 20 educational leaders from 20 schools in junior and senior primary and junior and senior secondary schools in Oshana Region. Based on Oshana regional directorate, many students are poorly underperformed (Author, 2024; United Nations Children's Fund [UNICEF], 2015) leading to poor student academic performance. Educational leaders are chosen because they are the main pillars of student optimisation who directly involved in organising, managing, leading student academic performance, they are held responsible for spearhead student academic performance, they play integral, pivotal role in influencing quality education delivery.

Criterion purposeful sampling was used, based on researcher exposures to, engagement of 20 educational leaders from 20 schools in Oshana Region. The researcher used criterion purposeful sampling technique and only educational leaders with seven years of experience and/or above in management and leadership were selected. According to Oshana directorate of education's latest statistics of 2025, there are five circuits in Oshana Region; they are Eheke, Oluno, Ompundja, Onamutai and Oshakati circuits. Researcher selected four educational leaders per each circuit.

Data was collected through interview schedule, field notes and open-ended questionnaire to find out participants' views on complex interplay between transformational, instructional, distributed leadership and student performance in the Oshana Region. Data were collected using interview schedule in which same interview schedule was used to find participants' views on the complex interplay between transformational, instructional, distributed leadership and student performance 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. These questions include four questions mentioned in the introduction. The same interview schedule was used for participants; however indication showed whether answers given by participants in junior and senior primary and junior and senior secondary to give another dimension to research, possible findings and recommendations. For this purpose, open-ended questionnaire was used and/or was developed from questions, discussions from interview session. The researcher listened carefully to what participants said or did in own context and settings (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Data were only collected as response to open-ended questionnaire and were used to support qualitative data. Field notes were taken during the interview sessions and participants were interviewed individually because they came from different schools, and every participant was different. All instruments were pilot tested, re-adjusted to determine their reliability and appropriateness. Only slight changes were made in few parts of instruments.

Data were analysed using thematic analysis, typological analysis; content analysis using Atlas.ti (Leedy & Ormrod, 2023). Categories pertaining to complex interplay between transformational, instructional, distributed leadership and student performance were used to create patterned and thematic meaning from qualitative data. Major themes were derived from questions of the study, a description of each theme was done, analysed, interpreted critically and objectively.

Following advice of Creswell and Creswell (2018), Dey (2003), Leedy and Ormrod (2023) and Ling and Ling (2017), interview data analysed using five levels of analysis (Levels 1 through 5) with additional level which considers data collection and recording process itself as first level of analysis (Level 0) as discussed explicitly below. From the onset, it is imperative to note that data collection/analysis is iterative processes, researcher iterates between different levels of analysis throughout data collection processes even though they were discussed consecutively.

Firstly, researcher reviewed his notes immediately after each interview, added additional notes for clarity and detail. He then transcribed interviews in same order that they were conducted as soon as he returned from fieldwork using de-naturalistic transcription style where idiosyncratic elements of speech such as stutters, pauses, nonverbal, involuntary vocalisations were removed.

Secondly, case study narrative was both thematic and chronological because narrative explains the use of data, systems, information in relation to complex interplay between transformational, instructional, distributed leadership and student performance in Oshana Region in Namibia. The following are primary themes which were established as the key focal points for case narratives based on interview schedule, notes which were taken and open-ended questionnaire:

- Leadership strategies and student performance;
- Leadership strategies used by educational leaders;
- Leadership strategies which enhance student performance;
- Student performance which associates with leadership strategies

Researcher shared case narratives with participants using member checking, asked participants if there were any inaccuracies, misunderstanding, missing content that they were unhappy with for any reason that they kindly let him know within two weeks, after that he would assume that they agreed with write-up of interviews.

Thirdly, priori method was used with themes established before analysis based upon descriptors in complex interplay between transformational, instructional, distributed leadership and student performance in Oshana Region in Namibia.

Fourthly, the researcher compared findings from the previous level to what has been reported in empirical literature.

Lastly, researcher used identified themes and connections to explain his findings by considering what it all meant and what was necessary. Researcher developed list of key points and important findings while thinking about what he had learnt, what were major lessons, what things he learnt, what possible application to another setting was. Furthermore, researcher studied what those who used findings of the study would be most interested in knowing. In other words, the researcher interpreted data by attaching meaning, significance to analysis through developing list of critical points, essential findings that he discovered as result of categorising and sorting data. Researcher then used direct quotations and descriptive examples to illustrate his points, bringing data to life.

Finally, researcher opted to present case narratives from Level 1 of analysis as stories, compare cases in as much detail as possible in Level 2 of analysis and/or formalise his cross-case analysis findings in Level 3 of analysis. Furthermore, researcher compared findings to extant literature in Level 4 of analysis, included his description, commented and protected participants' anonymity by assigning numbers to cases, changed names and/or omitted them to identify details without sacrificing rich description. Researcher opted to present implications of findings on the complex interplay between transformational, instructional, distributed leadership and student performance in Oshana Region in Namibia.

Researcher triangulated different data sources of information from interview schedule, open-ended questionnaire and field notes to strengthen depth of its findings as data from one source supported by the data from another source (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).. Researcher examined each information source and found evidence to support themes, ensured that study was accurate. The researcher checked transcripts to ensure they did not contain apparent mistakes made during transcriptions, compared data with codes and wrote memos about codes and their definitions.

After all the required permission were sought and granted, researcher sent a letter to participants informing them about information concerning the study to avoid reality, appearance of coercion. Researcher informed participants of rationale, recording, transcriptions and safekeeping of audio-taped interviews to maintain confidentiality. Researcher assured that participant signed informed consent, ensuring privacy in subsequent interviews, guarding against manipulating participants during data collection, reporting processes. Researcher observed confidentiality when reporting on the utterances and narratives of participants. Participant names were replaced by pseudonyms to protect their identity. Participation was voluntary.

4. Findings

This section presents the findings on complex interplay between transformational, instructional, distributed leadership and student performance. The section comprises views of 20 educational leaders participated in this study. Some participant responses were summarised and presented in descriptive forms, others were reported verbatim and presented in italics.

4.1 Leadership strategies and student performance

The theme presented in this section is derived from the thematically analysed data obtained from the interviews, open-ended questionnaires and field notes, with 20 selected educational leaders from Oshana Region. The theme is on complex interplay between transformational, instructional, distributed leadership and student performance. It is worth-noting that the theme relates to the manner in which the interplay between transformational, instructional, distributed leadership and measures of student performance could be constructed and developed to find interplay between them. In this study, researcher has to determine whether educational leaders understand interplay between them. This was done to respond to the question: What complex interplay exists between transformational, instructional, distributed leadership and student performance in Oshana Region? Participant responses showed that educational leaders play critical roles in leadership of schools. The phrase *"with the help of dedicated leaders"* highlights the role educational leader play on school leadership. The participant mentioning of understanding the meaning of *"schools can be transformed"* suggests that leadership strategies facilitate the school leadership. One educational leader at senior secondary phase said:

"School leaders reduce achievement gaps among various populations. School leaders produce leadership programs for school leaders." (Educational leader#1)

Educational leader responses indicated that leadership strategies affect the teaching and learning process. The use of *"ensure students academic performance"* is noted key strategy in capturing attention, suggesting leadership strategy makes school leadership more dynamic and appealing. The phrase *"determine variation in students' outcomes."* indicates heightened of intrinsic motivation, as leader feels actively drawn into leadership process, This aligns with theories of engagements which emphasise role of aesthetically stimulating practice in sustaining attention. One educational leader at senior primary phase said:

"Educational leaders engage in business of teaching and learning of students. School leaders ensure academic performance of students is regularly monitored." (Educational leader#2)

The leader appreciates clear and integrated presentation of leadership strategies which include a combination of *"setting mission, vision and management."* This consolidates approach aligning with the preference of streamlining leadership, particularly for leadership preparation. The use of *"interact with student teaching and learning"* suggests that educational leaders create shared environments for teaching and/or learning. This reflects the principles of shared responsibilities across ranks, supporting inclusive school leadership. One educational leader at senior secondary phase said:

"School leaders engage in meaningful changes to improve students' performance. Educational leaders play a role in determining students' academic performance." (Educational leader#3)

"Educational leaders create conducive environments for teaching and learning. School leaders share responsibilities across ranks, support inclusive school community." (Educational leader#4)

Similar to Educational leader 3, these responses underscore how leader's leadership strategies mitigate overwhelm nature of traditional leader's leadership. The term *"motivate educators and students"* suggests that leader's leadership strategies create less stressful leadership environment, which is likely due to leadership distribution amongst stakeholders. The mentioning of *"leverage collective expertise of stakeholders"* indicates that leadership involves stakeholders in decision-making process. One educational leader at senior primary phase said:

"Educational leaders focus more on instructions to improve teaching, learning and curriculum delivery. School leaders spread leadership roles and responsibilities across school members." (Educational leader#5)

4.2 Leadership strategies used by educational leaders in Oshana Region

In order to determine leadership strategies used by educational leaders, the researcher asked the question: Which leadership strategies do school leaders use in Oshana Region? Educational leader responses indicated that educational leaders use leadership strategies to monitor school programs. The use of *"set objectives, smart goals, and instructional strategies"* is noted as a key strategy in capturing attention, suggesting that this strategy makes leadership more dynamic and appealing. The phrase *"set high expectations for teachers"* indicates heightened of the leadership role, as leader feels actively drawn into teaching and learning process. This aligns with theories of engagements which emphasise role of leadership motivation aspect in sustaining attention. One educational leader at senior secondary phase said:

"Educational leaders use leadership strategies to monitor implementation of curriculum. School leaders use leadership strategies to set teachers high expectations." (Educational leader#6)

The leader appreciates clear and integrated presentation of strategies that include a combination of *"empower administrators within school administration."* This consolidates strategy aligns with preference for streamlining leadership practices, particularly for the teaching and learning process. The phrases *"generate larger effect on students' academic performance"* suggest that leadership is used to monitor and to ensure that students' academic performance is taken care off. This reflects culture of continuous improvement and innovation. One educational leader at junior primary phase said:

"Educational leaders use leadership strategies to interact with teaching and learning processes. School leaders use strategies to devise the best leadership practices." (Educational leader#7)

Similar to Educational leader 7, these responses underscore how leader's leadership strategies mitigate overwhelming nature of traditional leader's strategies. The term *"shared responsibility, ownership over educational outcomes"* suggests that leader's leadership strategies create a less stressful learning environment likely due to shared leadership autonomy, collective responsibility leading to high level of ownership amongst stakeholders. The mention of *"foster a collaborative environment, enhance professional development"* indicates that school leader promotes greater collaboration, and a shared responsibility amongst stakeholders. One educational leader at junior secondary phase said:

"Educational leaders use strategies to direct continuous assessment, professional development. School leaders use strategies to prioritise curriculum development, teaching quality and student outcomes." (Educational leader#8)

4.3 Leadership strategies which enhance student performance

In order to determine existing leadership strategies that enhance student performance, researcher asked the question: Which existing leadership strategies that enhance student performance? The leader explicitly connects *"proper communication, action, and learning"* to increase motivation, enjoyment. The metaphor of *"generate student outcomes"* suggests that leader uses innovative strategies to promote positive climate. One educational leader at senior primary phase said:

"School leaders promote teaching, learning and student academic performance. School leaders ensure school administrators engage in teaching and learning process." (Educational leader#9)

The leader describes leadership strategies as shared vision which serves as a compass to promote professional growths, enhance and strengthen leadership quality. One educational leader at junior secondary phase said:

"School leaders administer financial, human, and structure. School leaders foster collaborative and participatory culture." (Educational leader#10)

Leader explicitly distributes leadership, decentralises decision-making process to *"create a sense of shared responsibility and ownership"* over educational outcomes. The metaphor of *"leverage of technology"* suggests that leader uses innovative strategies to promote positive school climate. One educational leader at senior secondary phase said:

“Educational leaders foster a collaborative environment. School leaders promote collaborative shared responsibility.” (Educational leader#11)

The leader highlights valuable insights leading to student learning, engagement, and well-being like *“integrate leadership development into teacher training.”* Improved focus on managing job demand, providing adequate resources foster teaching quality. One educational leader at senior primary phase said:

“Educational leaders empower teachers. School leaders give teachers autonomy.” (Educational leader#12)

4.4 Student performance which associates with leadership strategies

In order to establish existing student performance which associates with leadership strategies, the researcher asked question: What existing student performance which associates with leadership strategies? The leader emphasises the use of high-performance work systems to enhance teacher commitment and performance. One educational leader at junior secondary phase said:

“School leaders link job satisfaction to job performance. Educational leaders motivate teachers to exhibit higher levels of performance.” (Educational leader#13)

Educational leader highlights efficiency of *“skill development and mindset, positive climate”* in facilitation of *“job satisfaction and job engagement.”* The ability to use *“a sense of personal accomplishment”* suggests that leadership strategies leverage memory to enhance retention. The phrase of *“ongoing professional development.”* indicates that leadership strategies provide a condensed, high-impact way to review, reducing cognitive effort required for retrieval, reflect power of visual mnemonics in leadership learning. One educational leader at senior primary phase said:

“Educational leaders link strategies to teacher efficacy and student achievement. School leaders foster environment for collaboration and collective success.” (Educational leader#14)

Educational leader consistently indicated that a compelling vision motivates teachers and staff through individualised consideration. Educational leader emphasises linking leadership strategies to teacher confidence, motivation. The phrase *“innovative leadership strategies”* suggests that leadership strategies reduce cognitive, emotional strain, create positive leadership experience. The desire to *“strengthen teaching quality”* indicates that stress-free environment foster intrinsic motivation, encourages deeper engagement with leadership strategies. This aligns with theories of motivation; highlight role of positive self-efficacy in leadership. One educational leader at senior secondary phase said:

“School leaders promote teachers professional growth. School leaders manage job demands, provide adequate resources.” (Educational leader#15)

Educational leader contrasts *“organisational climate”* of leadership with *“teacher performance and well-being”* highlighting roles of visual aesthetics in leadership preference. One educational leader at junior primary phase said:

“School leaders create positive culture to support conducive environment. Leaders enhance teacher motivation, commitments, performance and student learning.” (Educational leader#16)

5. Discussion

This section discusses findings on the complex interplay between transformational, instructional, distributed leadership and student performance. Discussion is based on views of 20 educational leaders participated in this study.

5.1 Leadership strategies and student performance

This study explored the complex interplay between transformational, instructional, distributed leadership and student performance in Oshana Region in Namibia. The main question answered by study was: What complex interplay exists between transformational, instructional, distributed leadership and student performance in Oshana Region? The paramount issues which emanated from the findings were that there is a complex interplay between transformational, instructional, distributed leadership and student performance that have direct effects on student performance, teachers’ performance which could results in positive or negative student academic performance. Researchers like Hines et al. (2021) have found that use of leadership strategies allow learning-focused process which foster improvement in learning and/or teaching. Studies like Joseph et al. (2025) have found that leadership role of educational leaders is very crucial in advancing student academic achievement.

Another crucial issue which emanated from findings were that leadership strategies promote, enhance, and monitor teaching and learning. However, studies by Buyukgoze et al. (2022); Chen (2020) have found that while some teachers enjoy teaching and learning process, others are frustrated due to insufficient preparation, poor training workshops, unclear procedures, poor academic literacy skills, lack of commitment shown by some students. Nevertheless, findings of this study confirm that all four leadership practices associate with the

academic performance: defining school mission, managing school instructional program, promoting positive learning climate, advancing teachers' interests (Tortia et al., 2022).

5.2 Leadership strategies used by educational leaders in Oshana Region

In this study, the primary issue encompassing these findings is that this complex interplay is attributed to how leadership strategies are used to monitor the school programs, thus confirming similar findings of previous research study such as Buyukgoze et al. (2022) evidence to Li et al. (2019) argument that application of leadership strategies is possible to develop dynamic organic centre for education to build on ideas and growth.

Sample of this study revealed that educational leaders use leadership strategies to give command to school population. That said, it should be noted that concern in this study was on the complex interplay between transformational, instructional, distributed leadership and student performance not vice-versa (cf. Methodology Section). However, possible interpretation for this finding could be that there are arrangements on ministerial mission and/or vision statement within educational setting (Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture [MoEAC], 2024). As a result of the top-down cascades of ministerial mission, vision, policies, many educational leaders may have difficulty to adapt or change status quo. However, these anomalies should be addressed by involving various stakeholders in planning, implementation, and evaluation and reflection process.

5.3 Leadership strategies which enhance student performance

Another profound issue noteworthy from the study is that educational leaders use leadership strategies to ensure that student performance is taking care off. This finding is consistent with previous studies by Zhou et al. (2021) which assessed usefulness of leadership strategies which empower teachers, promote their well-being, provide learning opportunities and improve quality of student learning. Findings point that leadership strategies foster collaborative learning and/or continuous improvement. This finding correlates with the study by Rabkin and Frein (2021) on importance of effective communication, cooperation and trust within stakeholders. Similar study conducted by Bernales-Turpo et al. (2022) explored how leadership strategies influence student learning using four paths model: rational, emotional, organisational, family paths. These findings corroborate with recent studies (Arnold et al., 2021; Simms et al., 2023) that have demonstrated educational leader roles on teacher professional collaboration, job satisfaction and organisational commitment to improve student performance in the context of Namibia.

5.4 Student performance which associates with leadership strategies

Most obvious findings emerge from study is that this complex interplay is attributed to factors that determine choice of the leadership strategies. Study by Zhou et al. (2021) have indicated that leadership strategies play important part on student performance and welcoming organisational environment whereas Mohamed et al. (2023) have argued that leadership strategies positively associate with conducive environment, and a culture of continuous improvement. Studies such as Chen and Zhang (2022) and Karakose et al. (2023) have found a positive association between transformational, instructional, distributed leadership, and student performance and teaching and learning process.

This study has discussed intricate complex interplay between leadership strategies and student performance; gives insights into issues faced by educational leaders and seek potential solutions scaffold them in overcoming them. Leadership strategies shape culture, with context-specific implications on student performance in Oshana Region in Namibia.

In Namibian educational context, leadership strategies such as transformational, instructional, distributed leadership affect student performance, fosters environment, encourages collaboration, innovation, and/or shared responsibility, empower staff, support sense of community, and lead to positive student engagement and/or learning. Thus, school leaders should integrate elements of these leaderships to support staff, enhance their job satisfaction; promote student performance. A more effective leadership strategies should not limited to one strategy, but rather a combination of strategies components which leverage strengths of each (Joseph et al., 2024). In Namibia, an integrative leadership encompasses compassion of inclusivity of transformational, instructional, distributed leadership, could best address current and/or emerging issues faced by school leaders. These eclectic leadership strategies align with nation's aspiration for progressive, inclusive, and adaptable leadership strategies that can thrive amidst rapid societal and digital changes (MoEAC, 2024).

6. Conclusion

Based on analysis of findings, and design used in this study, it can be concluded that leadership strategies affect student academic performance that affect teachers' performance which result in positive, negative student

academic performance. It was evident from this study that educational leaders should take student academic performance very seriously.

In view of the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made for practice: First, educational leaders should use leadership strategies to improve student academic performance, and teacher performance. Second, educational leaders should use leadership strategies to strike balance between leadership strategies and avoid manipulation of one strategy against other one. This in turn will help them to strike balance between authority of teacher expertise of curriculum and positional authority of educational leaders. Last, the study recommends an urgent need for educational leaders to study and learn application of leadership strategies, apply them to optimise success and enhance teaching and learning which result on student academic performance.

This study has several limitations which should be taken into consideration. Only 20 educational leaders were selected for interview sessions and open-ended questionnaire in which the complex interplays between leadership strategies, student performance was feature of interest. Researcher utilised criterion purposeful sampling technique and only educational leaders with seven years of experience or above in principalship were selected. This selection may have influenced response. Researcher explored the complex interplay between leadership strategies, student performance in which educational leaders were influential leaders in schools. Their responses might be affected by this. Sample size includes public educational leaders volunteered to participate in the study with exclusion of private educational leaders. Question of generalisability to private educational leaders is a limit. Its scope is confined to Oshana Region which narrows generalisability of its findings thus limits broader applicability of its findings. However, study applied multi method whereby more than one data collection techniques and corresponding data analysis procedures utilised to strengthen analysis and possibly to enhance robustness of findings. Based on findings of the study, the following recommendation is made for future research: Future research should conduct longitudinal comparative studies across different regions and explore complex interplay between transformational, instructional, distributed leadership, and student performance.

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