

Jeremy Mark van Wyk
Promotor: Prof A Carl/ Prof L Le Grange

Primary school principals' lived experiences of their roles as instructional leaders in selected primary schools

1. BRIEF BACKGROUND/CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

The role played by the principal as instructional leader worldwide is crucial as a result of his/her direct and indirect influence on teaching and learning. The role of the principal as instructional leader in improving teaching and learning is a pressing issue in South African primary schools, as most South African primary school learners perform far below par in the Annual National Assessments. These assessments are determined by benchmarking carried out by the Department of Basic Education and international education assessment agencies with reference to curriculum goals and literacy and numeracy. This phenomenological study describes the lived experiences of principals with regard to their instructional leadership roles in primary schools in the South African context with specific reference to selected previously historically disadvantaged (poor) schools in the Paarl and Wellington areas in the Western Cape. The study was informed by a literature study related to theoretical perspectives of instructional leadership.

2. AIM OF THE STUDY

The primary aim of the study was to explore how principals experience their roles as instructional leaders in their professional lives.

3. HOW THE RESEARCH WAS CONDUCTED

The data were collected through the use of phenomenological interviews (qualitative data) and analysis comprised the use of the ATLAS.ti qualitative data (computer) analysis qualitative data analysis programme. In the study, purposive sampling was used to include participants who could provide a rich description of their lived experiences of their roles as instructional leaders.

4. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The findings in the study reveal that the primary school principals, who participated in this study, have little experience of their instructional roles due to a lack of appropriate

instructional practices to improve teaching and learning. They also tend to delegate most of their instructional leadership functions to their senior staff members.

5. CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY

In this study a conceptual framework was used and developed to underpin the research. This framework acted as a navigator to determine how primary school principals' from disadvantaged rural and urban communities perceive their instructional leadership roles in order to influence and enhance effective teaching and learning. This conceptual framework was based on literature reviewed, as well as the reported data from the phenomenological interviews conducted with the participants and used in an original way in a specific location within the South African context. From this study, it is clear that the contextualised challenges faced in specific schools have a direct bearing on instructional leadership roles of the participating principals and on how they view their leadership. The main focus of the study was on primary school principals and not on other possible instructional leaders in the school, for example, HODs, deputy principals or subject heads. New perspectives pertinent to the lived experiences of primary school principals with regard to instructional leadership, was thus established and revealed.

The primary research question of the study was: "What are primary school principals' lived experiences of their roles as instructional leaders?" This research question was thus answered. This study thus makes an original contribution to research conducted on the instructional leadership roles of primary school principals in a South African context. This study extends upon recent research conducted by several scholars on instructional leadership in South Africa.