Potential Threats to Implementing Instructional Leadership in Western Cape Township Secondary Schools

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Abstract: This empirical study examines the factors that pose challenges to the implementation of instructional leadership in township secondary schools in the Western Cape province of South Africa. The study adopts Critical Emancipatory Research (CER), which promotes peace, hope, freedom, and social justice, as its theoretical framework. Participatory action research (PAR), utilising focus group interviews, is employed to collect data. PAR is situated within a transformative paradigm, and a qualitative research approach is chosen to align with this paradigm. Data is collected through focus group discussions with the school management team (SMT), consisting of the principal, two deputy principals, and six heads of department. These discussions aim to gather information on threats to instructional leadership and strategies to mitigate these threats. The findings reveal that the local community and its dynamics, along with the prevalence of violence in the neighbourhood, are external factors that significantly impede the smooth operation of the school and negatively affect the implementation of effective instructional leadership. Conversely, factors such as limited interference from the local community, reduced workload, adherence to compliance guidelines and requirements set by the Department of Education, and an unimpeded leadership role for the management team may contribute to the successful implementation of instructional leadership. Therefore, the study recommends promoting effective and transparent communication as well as open engagement among all stakeholders within the school.

Keywords: Instructional leadership, learner achievement, critical emancipatory research, participatory action research, external interference.

1. Introduction

The paper discusses the challenges faced by secondary schools in township settings due to external interferences that hinder the effective implementation of instructional leadership. These interferences impact the curriculum delivery and lead to poor performance of learners in the National Senior Certificate (NSC), which is widely used as a measure of secondary school quality. While previous studies have examined the challenges faced by principals in instructional leadership, little research has explored the external forces that impede leadership in township schools. Kilag et al. (2023), in their study on the relationship between instructional leadership and school effectiveness in the Philippines, found that principals should prioritise instructional leadership that promotes positive relationships and supports ongoing professional development for educators, ultimately improving students' learning outcomes. Stelmach et al. (2021), in their exploration of how moral distress affects principals in Canada, argue that principals experience stress due to the expectations of district and education offices as well as parents. Holmes et al. (2019), when addressing educator retention in the USA, discussed the expectations placed on schools by district offices. Rodela et al. (2019) found in their research in the US that principals are often judged by the community, which can be influenced by factors such as gender or language. Chance (2021) also highlights the impact of race, gender, age, identity, cultural diversity, and belonging on the leadership of black women in higher education. Kanwal and Waheed (2023) suggest that principals in Pakistan continually face external threats in

their day-to-day work. Another study by McMahon et al. (2023) in the US associated external threats with instances of parent aggression towards schools based on student grades.

For a school to be effective, there should be effective leadership. Instructional leadership is educational leadership that focuses on the core responsibility of the school, namely teaching and learning. This concept of instructional leadership was brought forth by many researchers, but the most popular one was brought up by Hallinger and Murphy in 1985. They came up with three dimensions of instructional leadership: (i) defining the school mission, (ii) managing the instructional program, and (iii) promoting a positive learning climate. If a school is operating normally, the goals should be set and communicated to all stakeholders while the principal monitors and enforces school policies for the benefit of the learners. At the same time, the atmosphere at school should be such that teaching and learning are able to take place unhindered.

The duty of a principal includes prioritising instructional leadership that fosters good relationships and can provide ongoing educators' professional development. While all the above studies are desirable and bound to contribute to an ideal situation where there is normal teaching and learning, they can only be disturbed by the mentioned threats. However, although all these studies on threats have contributed to knowledge about the threats that schools experience, none have focused on the threats experienced by secondary principals in the township contexts, especially in the Western Cape. This study is, however, unique because it uses locally available knowledge and circumstances to identify and address the threats that are experienced by school principals and school management teams in implementing instructional leadership. Hence, the research focuses on identifying major threats to the implementation of instructional leadership in township secondary schools and offering recommendations for circumventing these threats.

1.1 Research questions

Based on the above problem, the following research questions were raised to guide the study:

- RQ1: What are the major external threats that the school in a township setting must deal with for the benefit of effective implementation of instructional leadership?
- RQ2: How can a school overcome these threats, thus enabling it to implement effective instructional leadership?

1.2 Theoretical framework

This study adopted Critical Emancipatory Research (CER) as the theoretical framework to analyse the study. CER's origins are from the critical theory of the Frankfurt School, which arose in Germany in the 1920s. The theory of CER was developed by Jurgen Habermas, a member of the Frankfurt School that represented a left-wing group aiming to address the contested terrain in Europe and find a solution to it (Dube & Hlalele, 2018; Noel, 2016; Ndaba & Dube, 2021). It emerged from a group of men who witnessed the atrocities inflicted by humans on humans (Noel, 2016). The idea of CER was to dismantle the structures that oppressed people and ensure that the oppressed can identify what is oppressing them and emancipate themselves from it (Dube & Hlalele, 2018; Ndaba & Dube, 2021; Noel, 2016). It empowers those who are marginalised. The major assumptions of CER are based on advancing the agenda of equity, social justice, peace, freedom, and hope (Mahlomaholo, 2009; Hlalele, 2013), requiring that its objectives become participatory and collaborative. Through CER, those who are oppressed are liberated from the conditions of domination, powerlessness, and oppression (Mahlomaholo, 2009) as it is geared towards social justice and enhances the principles of democracy. CER is relevant for this paper because it promotes social justice and inclusion, involving the affected people in a secondary school to identify and address threats to their school that negatively affect the implementation of instructional leadership, thus impacting learner performance in the NSC (Ndaba & Dube, 2021). With CER, we aim to empower the affected people to find

solutions to the challenges of implementing effective instructional leadership. The following section discusses participatory action research (PAR), which is the methodology of the study.

2. Materials and Methods

The study is situated within the transformative paradigm. It used a qualitative study design and Participatory Action Research (PAR). The transformative paradigm is a methodology that promotes social justice by analysing social inequalities and power dynamics in society and bringing about significant changes by mitigating the disparities (Jackson et al., 2018; Omodan, 2022; Romm, 2018). Qualitative research was chosen as appropriate for this transformative paradigm. Qualitative researchers are able to capture the complexities and nuances of social phenomena and provide in-depth and detailed insights into people's experiences, perspectives, and behaviours (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). It values the lived experiences of people and is inherently subjective and sensitive to the biases of all participants, including the researcher (Tomaszewski et al., 2020). Qualitative research attempts to understand and explore the process instead of explaining and manipulating variables (Nassaji, 2020). Making use of the transformative paradigm, the researchers challenged and undertook to understand the circumstances in secondary schools in township settings. The transformative paradigm allowed the researchers to do so, and they were able to make use of focus groups, where participants were able to air their views on the threats that impeded their implementation of instructional leadership. The relevance of the transformative paradigm and qualitative research allowed researchers to understand the situation that the school found itself in regarding its inability to implement instructional leadership effectively. This was enabled by qualitative research, which allowed the emergence of mechanisms to focus on the matter at hand. Through the use of focus groups, those who were affected by the problem at hand were given a voice and their experiences and perspectives were documented (Carey & Asbury, 2016). This is because focus group interviews, being a semi-structured discussion with a small group of about 4-12 people, allow the researchers to request additional information to clarify the responses of the participants (Hung et al., 2024).

2.1 Research paradigm

The study is situated within a transformative paradigm. The transformative paradigm was chosen as it attempts to positively change the situation of those who experience discrimination and oppression, as it addresses the inequalities and injustices that manifest themselves in a school community (Cram and Mertens, 2016; Mertens, 2007). It is more relevant because it situates research work within a social justice agenda in education and requires those affected to envision and activate possibilities for improving the educational quality of the school (Romm, 2014; Hurtado, 2022), thus ensuring that the school is not dominated by the community in which it is situated. The aim was to change the diverse cultural approaches and attitudes of the educators and the wider community in which the school is situated (Mertens, 2008). By making use of the transformative paradigm, the researchers, in conjunction with those affected, were able to understand the circumstances in secondary schools in the township setting, as well as the situation that schools found themselves in regarding their inability to effectively implement instructional leadership. Through the use of the transformative paradigm, the researchers were able to conduct a focus group where participants were able to express their views on the issue of threats that impeded their implementation of instructional leadership. This enabled them to come up with mechanisms to circumvent the threats to the effective implementation of instructional leadership.

2.2 Research approach

Qualitative research was selected as the most suitable approach for this transformative paradigm. By utilising qualitative research, the researchers were able to capture the intricacies of social phenomena and gain extensive and detailed insights into school experiences, perspectives, and behaviours

(Merrian & Grenier, 2019). This approach values the lived experiences of individuals and acknowledges their inherent subjectivity, as well as the potential biases of all participants (Tomaszewski et al., 2020). Rather than seeking to explain what should be done and manipulate variables, the aim is to comprehend and explore the process at hand (Nassaji, 2020). The researchers set out to comprehend the circumstances in secondary schools within the township setting. Through the use of focus groups, those directly affected by the issue in question were given an opportunity to voice their perspectives and experiences, which were then documented (Carey & Asbury, 2016). Focus group interviews, involving a semi-structured discussion with a small group of approximately 4-12 individuals, enabled the researchers to request additional information, thereby clarifying the participants' responses (Hung et al., 2024). Therefore, the qualitative approach was deemed more appropriate as it facilitated the utilisation of focus groups, which allowed for a more thorough exploration of the experiences, perspectives, and behaviours of all parties involved. By documenting these experiences and perspectives of affected school members, the researchers were able to identify the factors that pose challenges to the implementation of effective instructional leadership and analyse the school's strategies for addressing these challenges.

2.3 Research design

Participatory Action Research (PAR) is a philosophical approach to research that recognises the need for the individuals being studied to participate in the design and conduct of all phases of research that involve them (Eruera, 2010). It is a research design that seeks to transform the lives of marginalised people in societies (Ndaba & Dube, 2021). It involves those who are concerned and affected by an issue at hand, where they take a leading role in coming up with and using knowledge about that issue. It is a design characterised by collaboration and active participation among the researchers and those affected by the problem at hand. It also provides an opportunity for participants to voice their concerns and contribute to the research process, ensuring that their perspectives are not overlooked or misrepresented. Its philosophy embodies the idea that those affected must have the right to determine their development and participate in their own development (Puri, 2023). The researchers and the participants collaborate to take action or change the situation being pursued. The participants remain co-researchers because they engage in the process from the beginning to the end of the research (Puri, 2023; Wallerstein et al., 2017). Participatory action research was relevant for this study because it allowed a more in-depth understanding of the experiences and perspectives of the participating school community. The participants were afforded an opportunity, through PAR, to voice their concerns, thus contributing to the research process. This ensured that their experiences and perspectives were not overlooked or misrepresented in any manner, especially in the context of a secondary school in a township setting.

2.4 Participants

The participants of the study consisted of nine members of the school management team (SMT) of a selected secondary school in one of the townships of Cape Town in the Western Cape province of South Africa. The SMT comprised the principal, two deputies, and six heads of departments (HODs). These are the people who are expected to implement and ensure the success of effective instructional leadership in a school. The HODs, who are at the forefront of teaching and learning, were included because they are responsible for delivering the school's curriculum and ensuring that educators are teaching and learners are learning. The SMT all play a critical role in the day-to-day running of the school, and the success of the school mostly depends on their leadership and expertise. They were deemed highly relevant to the study as they have the necessary perspectives and experiences in the implementation of instructional leadership in a school.

2.5 Sample and sampling procedure

To implement PAR and gather data for this research, we used purposive sampling and identified one secondary school in a township setting in one of the districts of the Western Cape Education Department. This school represented all township secondary schools in that district. Nine participants from the school were selected, specifically the SMT, comprising nine members for our focus group discussions. They were all selected as part of the school leadership and were best suited to provide insight into the major threats the school had to contend with in the implementation of effective instructional leadership, as well as come up with strategies on how to circumvent them. They were selected based on their significant knowledge and experience regarding the issue of instructional leadership in a school. Assembling such a team aimed to find the best solutions from those experiencing and affected by the problem. These participants were also selected using purposive sampling because they had significant knowledge and experience regarding issues of instructional leadership, making them best suited to provide more insight into the research questions investigated. The sampling method was deemed most appropriate to achieve the objectives of the research.

2.6 Data collection tool instrumentation

The research employed Focus Group Discussion as a method to elicit information in this study from the 9 selected participants. Focus group discussion involves bringing a group of 4–12 individuals together to discuss a specific topic of interest. This requires a trained moderator to facilitate the discussion. As soon as the participants are working together cooperatively, they can be assured of good results (Sendall et al., 2018). This method was deemed relevant to explore the threats to instructional leadership in a township setting. Focus group discussion was deemed consistent with the research design of participatory action research because it promotes collaboration and active participation among the participants. These discussions allowed participants to share their experiences and perspectives among themselves. It allowed and facilitated the development of a shared understanding of the threats to instructional leadership. This allowed the participants to challenge and build on each other's perspectives. The use of a focus group enabled the researchers to gather observational data among the participants based on how they interacted among themselves during the interview process (Hung et al., 2024).

2.7 Data analysis

Data was analysed using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which is a study of spoken and written language in relation to its social context. CDA is compatible with CER and PAR because it also emancipates marginalised individuals, allowing them to participate in a discourse that shapes their society. Tsotetsi (2013) postulated that critical discourse analysts study injustice with the aim of taking action to transform unsatisfactory situations. CDA helps members understand the messages they send to themselves and understand the meaning of spoken and written texts by others. CDA was used to gain a deeper understanding of the spoken words of the research participants because it is compatible with the theoretical framework of the study and allows for various ways of arriving at the truth. CDA aims to determine the relationship between the actual text and the processes involved in listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Mogashoa, 2014). It critically investigates the inequality among people as expressed, signalled, constituted, and legitimised by language use (or in discourse). It analyses the hidden and clear relationships that occur and manifest themselves in relationships of dominance, discrimination, power, and control as manifested in language (Rahimi & Riasati, 2011). This method is relevant to the study as it allows for the identification and exploration of factors and patterns related to the external impediments of instructional leadership at a township secondary school. Furthermore, it is regarded as appropriate because its focus is on the relationship between ways of thinking in the written and spoken words of the participants during the focus group discussions. CDA is viewed as non-partisan but rather political, with the end goal of mediation and

its own socially transformative motivation, shedding light on discursive parts of cultural variations and disparities. The text was analysed socially, politically, and culturally, taking into context the use of force, power, and relationships (Dieronitou, 2014). Through data analysis, the study was able to achieve all the objectives of CER, PAR, and CDA.

2.8 Ethical considerations

As soon as the study obtained ethical approval from the ethics committee of the Central University of Technology (RESOLUTION FRIC: 02/21/06), the consent of the participants was sought, and the necessary information about the study was provided to them. The participants were informed that their participation was voluntary and were informed about their right to withdraw from the study if they felt uncomfortable, without any consequences. They were also informed about the use of pseudonyms instead of real names, thus protecting their identities and that of their school. All participants provided their consent to participate. The pseudonyms were used as codes during data analysis. The data was returned to the participants for member checking. The participants agreed with the researchers that the themes for analysis reflected their ideas and reflections on the threats they were experiencing with the implementation of effective instructional leadership.

3. Presentation and Discussion of Findings

This section presents and discusses findings that address the research questions. The data analysis presented in this section focuses on uncovering the underlying meaning of the participants' spoken words, allowing the researchers to employ critical discourse analysis for data interpretation.

3.1 Possible threats that hinder the effective implementation of instructional leadership

In this section, we highlight the external threats as mentioned by the participants in response to the first question: What are the major threats that manifest themselves at a township secondary school, and how are these threats impeding effective implementation of instructional leadership at a school?

Question 1, Theme 1: Intrusion by the local community in the affairs of the school

The COVID-19 pandemic lockdown compelled schools to organise alternative ways of learning and teaching (Haller & Novita, 2021). This brought about the temporary closure of schools in 2020 and 2021 and posed a lot of threats to the implementation of instructional instruction in township secondary schools. When schools started dividing learners into groups and giving each group a certain time to be at school, parents began blaming schools for not being effective. Many parents expressed concerns about the changes that were implemented and their implications on the effectiveness of schools (Anderson et al., 2020). Kaufmann et al. (2022) mention that the unhappiness of the principal, based on the workload brought by the department, leads to educators being unhappy and can result in a lot of resignations on the part of educators. This was experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic. The participants brought up this matter in the discussion of threats to the school.

> DP1: *When COVID-19 broke out, we had to close our schools until the department asked us to reopen them. We had to do something so that learners are kept up to date with the requirements of the curriculum. When we divided learners into groups during that period, we were accused of not caring for the learners and wishing them to fail. Some parents did not want their children to come to school, while others would not accept that their children would only go to school on certain days of the week.*

> HD2: *We are treated with suspicion. When a learner does not do well and we suggest some interventions from the family to assist us, we are told that we are incompetent. We are sometimes informed that we do not belong to this community and we should go to our*

communities and teach there. They claim that if we belonged to their community, we would not let any child repeat a grade. They literally do not approve of us and trust us.

DP2: *If you remember, I had proposed to parents that learners get an additional two hours of contact time. It was not seen as a good proposal. They brought up many issues like safety of their children when they come earlier and when they leave later. They added that some of their children use transport to come to school and the transport would not wait for them. I am aware that we have an issue with the 'skollie element' in the community but I am sure they would not bother us when we let learners come an hour early and leave an hour later, especially the grade 12s.*

HD4: *The other major distraction, as far as I am concerned, is the department. They seem to make demands after demands from the school and we tend to spend more time on these compliance issues than we spend time on the implementation of the curriculum. They are aware that we do not have enough personnel to take care of all these administrative matters, but they continue to shower us with these demands.*

The participants in this discussion analyse how the local community is undesirably involved in the affairs of the school. DEP 1 felt that most parents were not impressed with how they approached the requirements of COVID-19 in relation to the attendance of learners at school. The school implemented these measures to observe the required protocol, but some parents were not impressed at all. Parents seem to oppose every initiative that the school takes and view it in a negative manner. This view was brought up by HOD 2 and supported by DEP 2, who felt that parents always look at their initiatives with pessimism.

Question 1, Theme 2: Lack of respect for the principal by the community

A school that has a good principal is sure to have a positive climate and serious learning because educators are motivated and dedicated (Grissom et al., 2021). In some instances, when a principal is not male or not much is known about them, they face a lot of resistance and blame. Kaul et al. (2022) assert that the district office should guide the principal through the pre-existing school structures to enable them to confront crises that may arise in a school. Chance (2023) asserts that women in leadership positions experience a lot of adversity. The same happens in the community where the school is situated. This displays a lot of mistrust and lack of confidence by the community.

PR1: *I was once confronted by one parent who wanted to know how I was appointed. He told me that he doubted my qualifications and said that I am probably related to the official who appointed me. He was blunt and told me that a school like ours cannot be led by a 'woman'.* **"Asinazi nokunazi thina apha. Saninikwa. Asizange sibuzwe ukuba sinabo na thina apha ootitshala** *(We do not even know you. You were given to us. We were never even asked if we had our own educators"). These are the comments of the people we are supposed to serve.*

HD1: *I thought I was the only one who knew about this. I know the community we serve has no confidence in our principal just because she is a lady. Any efforts the school does, is never accepted without any negative comments. They only pay attention to something being proposed by DP1 because of his gender.*

PR1: *Do you people think that I am so bad that I cannot be a principal of a secondary school? What is it that makes these people think that I am not qualified? I am doing everything that all other principals do and in some cases I do it better than them, I think. Why are they so negative towards me? Is it perhaps my personality?*

HD3: *At least I know that we do not treat our principal as an ordinary female. We are led and we accept it. We do not show any disrespect towards her. We do as we all have agreed to.*

I do not know, where this came from, but a mention was that this is because the principal is a lady, and we only toe the line. I was not impressed by that attitude.

The school is under the leadership of the female principal and the management team, although the school serves the community. PR1 mentioned that the community does not approve of them because they do not come from that community. They also do not approve of the school being led by a woman. The community is not aware that the school may not satisfy them in every aspect of leadership. HD1 mentioned that the community is biased towards some members of the SMT because of their gender. This was also reiterated by HD3, who showed and mentioned how they, as the staff of the school, have respect for their principal regardless of gender but because of their position and capabilities. There are rules that the school must follow and adhere to, and these may not satisfy the community. The community should not resist some changes being implemented by the school because everything the school does is for the benefit of the learners. When the post of principal was advertised, everybody had an opportunity to apply and sell themselves in the interviews. If the men who applied did not do very well, it would be improper to nominate one of them, although a woman had outdone them. The management team of the school showed and displayed how much respect they have for their principal regardless of gender, as reiterated by HD1 and HD3. None of them had shown a negative attitude towards the utterances. This showed an element of unity and working together as a team. This was in line with the theoretical framework because the participants realised the value of being empowered and liberated from the conditions.

Question 1, Theme 3: How violence in the community impacts negatively to the school

The school is situated in an informal settlement. The population of the area is growing almost every day. The level of violence is increasing with the growth of the community. It is not safe to drive in the area at dusk and dawn, let alone walk on foot. The schools in the area become victims of this violence, which discourages the district officials from visiting the school due to fear of being hijacked and robbed. This has a negative effect on the implementation of instructional leadership and impacts learner performance because subject advisors do not want to visit the school out of fear of being hijacked or robbed of their belongings. Some of the materials that the school purchases to enrich teaching and learning get stolen, especially during school holidays.

HD1: *What should we do if we want to hold extra classes to support our learners? In my department, we were thinking of having additional time for our learners, but we are unable to come early as much as we cannot stay until late. Learners and educators are not safe and fearing for their lives, and this prohibits us from holding extra classes during the week. We are unable to improve the performance of learners.*

HD3: *To top this, the school itself is not safe. They have now decided to come in at night or during school holidays to break in and take whatever they need. We are obliged to lock everything although we will need it the following day, and this becomes a problem and affects the delivery of curriculum.*

PR1: *I have on numerous occasions, requested the intervention of the SAPS on this safety issue and they only come and take fingerprints after burglary, ask us how much we think is the cost of the lost items, and thereafter they leave. That would always be the last time we would ever hear from them on the matter. The same with the safety of the learners and educators. They always promise to do some patrol around the school, but we do not see them.*

HD3: *I am worried that these 'skollies' will one day enter the school during the day and rob us of everything we have at our possession. We all know that only last year that they did it at our neighbouring school. How are we supposed to teach when we fear for our lives? When these kids are exposed to the violence they live in fear and struggle to cope. This is affecting the visits by district officials. When they need to support the school they need to call us to the district office, and this is always after hours.*

Violence in the community has an adverse effect on the delivery of the curriculum. The participants addressed this matter vehemently. The area that bothered them most was the holding of extra classes for certain grades. HD1 mentioned that they had thought of holding extra classes for some learners, but they feared being robbed or mugged on the way to or from school at these times. This view was reiterated by HD3, who mentioned that even the school is not safe from "skollie" elements who break into the school, especially during school holidays. Everybody agreed that nobody is safe, especially because most educators do not live in close proximity to the school and are regarded as strangers to the community. HD3 mentioned that they are always worried when they see a few young boys walk through the school gate because they think that their possessions may be robbed. This really affects the delivery of the curriculum and may make educators want to leave the school for a better school where they may feel much safer.

3.2 Addressing the threats that impede instructional leadership at a school

In this section, we not only highlight the external threats that hinder the implementation of instructional leadership but also present possible solutions as discussed by the participants when responding to the second question: How can the external threats to the implementation of instructional leadership be dealt with for the benefit of the learners?

*Question **2**, Theme 1: Involving the community and parents constructively in affairs of the school*

The participating team went on to address how they can circumvent the negativity of the community towards the school, as well as address their intrusion in the affairs of the school. They had to bear in mind that some parents just aim to be included in the affairs of the school (Danielsen & Bendixsen, 2019). It was, therefore, incumbent upon them to make sure that they did not scare the parents away but let them be involved in a meaningful way in the affairs of their children's education.

> PR1: *I am of the opinion that some of these parents who like poking their noses into the affairs of our school are just seeking for attention so that they can be part of the decision-making in the running of the school. Why don't we identify them and invite them over to give them responsibilities?*

> HD1: *That would be a good move, PR1. We do the same thing to learners who are disruptive. We give them responsibilities and they just change. Such people just need attention and as soon as they are recognised, they change. Fortunately, my class is going on an excursion next week and one of these parents is a parent of one of my learners. I will invite her to accompany us and assist with the handling of learners on this excursion. That should make her feel happy and make her feel useful.*

> HD2: *I agree with you, PR1. We could actually invite them and co-opt them onto our SGB so that they can learn how things are supposed to be done as well as why they are done. In this way we will have proper control over them. They will assist us in making sure that teaching and learning occurs at the desired rate at the school because the educators will have less to worry about.*

> HD4: *The next thing we should do is to invite them to be part of the security to the learners when they attend extra classes. I am sure they will be able to see that we are doing everything we can to improve their children's academic performance. They can be helpful in keeping order while we tackle curriculum matters of the learners.*

> PR1: *Guys, I am so impressed with all these ideas. They are sound ideas, and I have never thought of them. This simply shows that if we work as a team, we can overcome this intrusion by parents to our school. I just cannot thank you more.*

The school should aim to include members of the community and collaborate with them on issues that matter to the learners. It is a fact that when parents are engaged and involved in the education

of their children, learners perform better. This is because parents show concern for the academic success of their children and the school as well. This also has an impact on the community, as it will have educated inhabitants. The school needs to understand that some parents simply want to be included and want to know what is happening in the school, rather than just being informed about the progress of their children (Danielsen & Bendixsen, 2019). However, they may not know how to ask to be involved. Some parents may only want this for their own egos and hope for recognition from other parents and community members, which can be seen as aiming for the politics of inclusion (Danielsen & Bendixsen, 2019) to be recognised in the community. This requires the school to be open to the parent community and communicate openly with them. Most importantly, the management team needs to work collaboratively as a team to overcome these obstacles.

Question 2, Theme 2: The position and mandate of a principal in a school

A school will always have a manager or someone who is tasked with taking the lead in all the school activities. The gender of the person appointed to take the lead is immaterial and should not intimidate anyone in the community. A female principal needs to be supported to be resilient, have strength, and withstand persecution by the community (Mantler et al., 2024). The participating team assured the principal that they would assist her in withstanding the negative perception that the community has about her being a principal.

> DP1: *I do not care what anybody thinks about you, principal. We will be next to you and support you all the way. The parents need to see that we are united, and we have not problems with your leadership. A school needs a principal and you have been appointed as one.*

> DP2: *We need to understand that the community we are serving comes from the rural areas where every leadership position is reserved for male persons. Here in the Western Cape, we do not have that mentality. They just have to accept that. At the same time, it is important that this information be channelled down to the parents so that they understand that things, here are not the same as in other provinces. Learners register during the first term of the preceding year so that they can be placed in the correct grade and class long before they start the new year. Not the way it is done out there, where parents only go to the school on reopening of the new year and start registering their children.*

> HD4: *Very true, DP2. These parents think that it is our principal who refuses to register their children at the beginning of the year. They do not know that it is the department that requires teaching to start on the first day. When we are busy registering children during the first week, when are we going to start teaching? When do they expect us to do baseline assessment and prepare us for the real teaching and learning? We have rules that have to be adhered to. It is not the principal who says that. If they have a problem, they should confront the department.*

> HD1: *We are categorically saying that we will support you, principal. They need to know that it is not you but all of us at this school who want things to be done the way we are doing them. There are many schools in the area and if they are not happy with ours, they should register their children at other schools and I am sure they will find the same treatment. Most importantly, we need to communicate with our parents and let them understand how things are done at school.*

The school principal needs to know that she is not the only female principal in the township community. She does not need to internalise the experience, but she should reach out to other female principals for support (Diekman, 2019). The recommendation is that the principal and the school should create a space to openly discuss the effect of this adversity on the progress of the learners and find means to mitigate this adversity with the help of other educators and community members. This requires open communication. Mantler et al. (2024) also suggest that these principals should seek career counseling and adopt a positive and hopeful mindset that will make them resolute in decision-making and have a resilient mentality when faced with doubt.

Question 2, Theme 3: Dealing with violence that threatens the smooth-running of the school

Learners in areas that are at a higher risk for exposure to community violence may not cope at the same rate as learners in more affluent areas that have no violence in their communities (Ramos-Salamanca et al., 2021). The educators themselves may face difficulty due to their limited knowledge and skills in assisting learners who are exposed to violence (Berger et al., 2021). This requires educators to have the knowledge, skills, and patience to support these learners. The school needs to develop mechanisms to assist educators, enabling them to handle and cope with the violence in the community. They also need to address this issue and inform the community about how it affects student achievement. The participants discussed potential solutions to the problem of violence and how they can turn this threat into an advantage.

> HD3: *I think we need to kick off this idea of violence that threatens the smooth-running of our school by making it a standing item in our next parent meeting. I am prepared to address the parents on this matter and inform them how it is affecting teaching and learning. I need to inform them that some of the learners are already showing signs of being involved in these nasty activities after school. This is so intimidating to some learners.*

> DP2: *Yes, HD3, I agree. However, we need to start in here at our school and call a special learner meeting and address this. We should be in a position to amend our Code of Conduct and accommodate this issue of unruliness of some learners and let everybody know the consequences of bad behaviour. We should, nevertheless, concentrate on the positives and show them the advantages of good behaviour at school. I think that will have an impact on them.*

> HD4: *The Code of Conduct is supposed to be drawn by the SGB, but we can draw it on their behalf and let them adopt it and thereafter we implement it. The break-inns can be lessened if we ask for the cooperation of parents in looking at the interests of the school. They should be the eyes of the school. Those that break into our school stay in this community and I am sure the parents know them.*

> HD5: *I am sure that we need to invite SAPS and address them. My feeling is that we should write them a letter that invites them to a special meeting where parents will be part of it. They need to commit to patrol the area around our school and assure us that they will look after the interests of the school. They need to give us their emergency number of their area so that everybody has it. This way we can be assured that violence that affects our teaching and learning is subdued, and we can concentrate on what we are supposed to concentrate on, for the benefit of the learners.*

The problem of violence that seems to be affecting the delivery of teaching and learning needs to be addressed seriously, and action should be taken to resolve it. The future of the learners lies in a school that is free from intimidation and violence. Learners should be able to use the school after hours, as it is the most convenient place to study. Their homes are noisy and not conducive to learning, with not a single quiet moment for them to focus on their books. The community needs to support these learners and educators. This is in line with CER, which is the theoretical framework for this study, as educators were involved in identifying and addressing the threats to their ability to implement effective instructional leadership.

4. Summary of Findings

The professional and leadership roles of school principals are also affected by factors outside the school (Botha, 2020:1). This was the case at the school as the participants were able to come up with a number of areas that needed their attention, and they ended up coming up with resolutions on how to circumvent these.

The study revealed that it is not acceptable for the community to involve itself very much in the affairs of the school. The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic required schools to observe a certain

protocol. When they decided to divide learners into groups so that there was always a limited number of people at school at a given time, the parents were not satisfied with that, claiming that the school wanted to fail their children. They vehemently opposed that move. In any school, there will be learners who are struggling. When a learner has been identified as such, the community would claim that the educators are incompetent and should be replaced by the educators of their choice. They never approved of the educators of the school, claiming that they are not from within their community and, therefore, do not have the interests of their children at heart. The Department of Education was not spared as it was mentioned that although they expect learners to perform better in the final examinations, they still shower the school with a lot of administrative and compliance issues at the expense of learner learning.

The study revealed that the community of the school was still conservative and believed that a secondary school cannot be headed by a female principal. They even doubted if the principal was qualified enough to be a principal. This prompted them, as the community, to believe that if the school had approached them regarding the appointment of a principal, they would not have chosen a lady to lead a secondary school. They believed that those who nominated her did not have the interests of the community and should not have nominated somebody from outside their community.

The study revealed that because the school is in an informal settlement, there was constant migration and the population is increasing daily. This becomes a breeding ground for violence that negatively impacts the school. Educators and learners are not safe. The district officials are not able to fully support the school due to fear of being hijacked and mugged. During school holidays, the school falls victim to burglars, which affects normal teaching and learning. This behaviour is also observed in some of the learners, who display this kind of behaviour at school by intimidating other learners and some educators. They become very disrespectful. This intimidation causes some educators to not take any action against these learners. This seriously affects normal teaching and learning, leading some good educators to want to work outside this area where there is peace of mind.

The study found that the formulation of a strategy to involve parents productively in the affairs of the school is of paramount importance. According to PR1, parents who like poking their noses into the affairs of the school are only seeking attention and should be involved productively. They also felt that these disruptive parents could be co-opted by the SGB and be useful to the school, as they can help maintain order at school when available during the day. These were the ideas that the participating team thought of in order to circumvent the negative intrusion of parents in the affairs of the school. If these parents are positively involved in the affairs of the school, they can be valuable to the school, and the school will be able to pursue its mission of instructional leadership.

The study revealed that the participants are going to support the principal in her endeavours to implement instructional leadership at the school. They decided to educate the community about the appointment of a principal and the role they play as the representative of the Head of Education. Whatever the principal announces is in line with the requirements of the Head of Education in the province. Learners must be registered before the end of the first term of the preceding year, as mandated by the Head of Education. The principal is not only implementing her own initiatives but also adhering to the requirements of the department. Parents need to know that, according to the Bill of Rights, no person should be discriminated against based on gender. If a person meets all the requirements to be appointed as principal, then they should be appointed. The participating members agreed that teamwork and collaboration are important for the successful implementation of effective instructional leadership.

The study revealed that violence and its negative effects need to be addressed seriously as a standing item on the agenda of the parents' meeting. The participants felt the need to inform parents that their children, who are learners at this school, are involved in and intimidating other learners and

educators. They proposed revising the school's code of conduct to explicitly state the consequences of certain behaviours. However, they also felt that the approach should not be punitive but more corrective, and that learners who display positive behaviours should be publicly praised. The South African Police Services (SAPS) will be involved and invited to address learners' bad behavior and its consequences. This will enhance the effective implementation of instructional leadership at the school.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings of the study reveal that (i) the local community had a tendency to intrude in the affairs of the school, more importantly, in a very negative way; (ii) the community does not approve of a principal of a secondary school being a lady; and (iii) violence in the community sometimes spills over to the school and has a negative effect on the day-to-day running of the school. The principal and the SMT should take the lead in addressing the threats that disturb the normal running of the school day. All stakeholders should be involved in the resolution of these matters, and this should also include the district office. With proper channels of communication and openness, the matters can be averted. When all these matters have been addressed, proper teaching and learning should take place, and learners will have access to their school at any time without fear.

The community should be invited to assist educators so as to make teaching and learning possible. They should be brought on board and proper communication channels need to be opened. It is very important that the principal facilitates collaboration between the school and the wider community, thus affording educators the opportunity to develop professionally. This can lead to improved learning outcomes. The study recommends that the department should ascertain the capability of the school to handle the workload and come up with mechanisms to assist where they can. The community should be informed about the school's endeavours and what they lack, as well as how their involvement should be.

6. Implications for Theoretical Frameworks

The discussions of the study brought up a few implications for instructional leadership in township secondary schools. Critical emancipatory research promotes social justice, peace, freedom, and hope. The participants in the study understood the importance of promoting equity and inclusivity to address social inequalities in the implementation of instructional leadership at their school. By promoting open communication, inclusivity, and collaboration with the community, they can circumvent the challenges of implementing instructional leadership. The community has to be involved in every sphere of school decision-making to allow them to buy into the decisions and support them. The school belongs to all who work there and are served by it. This means that everybody connected to the school ought to be informed about every decision and invited to collaborate and cooperate. This can lead to a transformation of how some people view the school. The key to achieving this is proper communication. The participants stressed the importance of communication and open engagement, accompanied by trust, and involving all stakeholders in most matters of the school.

7. Declarations

Conflict of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Data Availability: Data for the study, while available in the body of the work, could be requested from the corresponding author at a reasonable request.

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