

**INSTRUCTIONAL GUIDANCE FOR LITERACY TEACHING IN LIMPOPO, SOUTH
AFRICA: A CASE STUDY OF THE FOUNDATION PHASE POLICY AND
PRACTICE**

By

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DECLARATION

I, **Nkhensani Brenda Mbhalati** (Student Number 2013000035), declare that the publishable manuscripts entitled “**Instructional guidance for literacy teaching in Limpopo, South Africa: A case of the foundation phase policy and practice**”, which I herewith submit for the doctoral degree at the University of the Free State, is my own independent work, and that I have not previously submitted it for a qualification at another institution of higher education. All sources I have used or quoted have been acknowledged by means of complete references.

I further declare that I am aware that the copyright of this work is vested in the University of the Free State. I declare that all royalties regarding intellectual property developed during the course of and/or in connection with the study at the University of Free State will accrue to the university.

SIGNATURE OF STUDENT.....

DATE.....

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my caring and loving husband, Joe, for your support, motivation and understanding throughout this journey, you are the best.

To our two daughters, Nkabelo and Ubuntu, for your patience and understanding.

To my mother-in-law: Nyabane Sannie Mbhalati, for taking care of the kids and the house chores.

To my late parents Tsatsawane Luceth and Yingwani John Chauke, and my late sister Emelinah; my siblings Sannie, Sarah, Sophy, Salphinah and Dr Lawrence: for always believing in me.

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SUMMARY OF THE STUDY

Over the years, the Department of Basic Education (DBE) in South Africa tried different instruments through which to provide support and guidance to change classroom practice. At the heart of all these initiatives is the desire to improve learner performance, especially in grades 1 to 6 and 9 (where the National Assessments in literacy and mathematics are administered). Unfortunately, evidence from the national and international assessments continues to be disappointing, pointing to the fact that learners in South Africa perform at levels below the benchmarks set for mathematics and literacy. The major challenge is the observed decline in the reading levels of learners in primary schools.

The provision of guidance and support for literacy teachers by instructional leaders has become a highly prioritised activity in the entire education system. This study reports on the findings of an investigation into the practices of selected instructional leaders in support of literacy instruction in three districts of Limpopo in South Africa. The mixed methods study used questionnaires and semi-structured interviews to understand the realities of providing subject leadership for literacy instruction in selected schools in Limpopo, South Africa. The findings are reported in five articles that address different research questions.

The first set of findings suggests that in most schools, heads of department (HODs) play a prominent role in supporting literacy instruction compared to other school-based instructional leaders. This could suggest that HODs carry the heaviest workload in terms of the expectations to provide the support needed to change literacy instruction in the classrooms. The second set of findings point out that the practices of curriculum advisors and school-based instructional leaders do not have significant effects on literacy instruction and learner performance. Some of the reasons include a shortage or lack of the following: curriculum advisors, a clear goal communication, collaboration among instructional leaders and capacity-building workshops. This might begin to explain the persistent poor performance of learners in literacy.

The third set of findings suggests that provision of support for literacy instruction by curriculum advisors specifically is rather limited, in part because of the shortage of

circuit-based curriculum advisors, literacy lead teachers and a lack of DBE accountability with regard to the Annual National Assessment (ANA) administration and the lack of teachers' guides to complement the DBE workbooks.

The fourth set of findings suggests that school-based instructional leaders are negatively affected by a lack of the following: support from curriculum advisors, cooperation among literacy teachers, training, collaboration and role clarification. Misplacement of school-based instructional leaders also presented itself as a serious challenge.

The final set of findings reflects that some of the school-based instructional leaders have limited capacity to lead literacy instruction. In the current structure, there are four subjects in the foundation phase in which school-based instructional leaders are expected to monitor, support and provide guidance. This task proved to be a challenge for them to achieve.

The study concludes with a discussion of the circumstances surrounding the provision of guidance and support for literacy instruction in the foundation phase, identifying the lack of teamwork among school-based instructional leaders as the major drawback in the effort to provide support for literacy instruction in the foundation phase.

The investigation has established that there is an urgent need to enhance collaborative teamwork among school-based instructional leaders, curriculum advisors and literacy teachers. Therefore, the study recommends that the DBE should consider proper staffing of schools and districts with appropriate instructional leaders and providing capacity-building workshops to strengthen the capacity of the district and school-based instructional leaders to lead literacy instruction in the foundation phase.

Keywords: literacy instruction; foundation phase; school-based instructional leaders; district curriculum advisors; instructional leadership; literacy coach

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ACRONYMS

ANA	ANNUAL NATIONAL ASSESSMENT
CAPS	CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT POLICY STATEMENTS
CEA	CENTRE FOR EVALUATION AND ASSESSMENT
DBE	DEPARTMENT OF BASIC EDUCATION
DoE	DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
ENGFAL	ENGLISH FIRST ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE
ERA	INTERNATIONAL READING ASSOCIATION
HOD	HEAD OF DEPARTMENT
ILA	INTERNATIONAL LITERACY ASSOCIATION
LEAP	LEARN ENGLISH AUDIO PROJECT
LoLT	LANGUAGE OF LEARNING AND TEACHING
NCS	NATIONAL CURRICULUM STATEMENT
NCATE	NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR ACCREDITATION OF TEACHER EDUCATION
OBE	OUTCOMES-BASED EDUCATION
PIRLS	PROGRESS INTERNATIONAL READING LITERACY STUDY
SACMEQ	SOUTHERN AND EASTERN AFRICA CONSORTIUM FOR MONITORING EDUCATIONAL QUALITY
SMT	SCHOOL MANAGEMENT TEAM

SECTION 1: ORIENTATION AND INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The political breakthrough achieved in 1994 in South Africa set in motion a transformation trajectory on many facets of our education system. Twenty-three years into this dispensation, opened our country to the realisation of compelling challenges that called for urgent responses. The positioning and prioritisation of education as a core ingredient for the country's growth, stability and success cannot be disputed. A nexus of strategies encapsulating programmes and action plans were adopted as means of responding to the challenges for transforming and democratising the education system (Department of Basic Education [DBE], 2012). This called for the development of a curriculum framework that could improve the quality of schooling outcomes and ensure that young people are better prepared for life and work opportunities beyond schooling years (National Development Plan, 2013). The year 1997 saw the introduction of a new curriculum called Outcomes-Based Education (OBE) which went through different processes of review (Lemmer & Van Wyk, 2010) until it was recently reviewed and renamed the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) in 2012.

The generally low levels of language and mathematics competencies attained in the foundation phase (grade R-3) are viewed as barriers to the provision of quality public education (National Education Evaluation and Development Unit [NEEDU]) (DBE, 2013). Most teachers who went through the educational transformation process reported observing a downward spiralling decline in the reading and writing competences of learners in literacy (Martin, Mullis & Kennedy, 2007).

Several international and local studies suggest that South African learners perform far below the benchmarks set in literacy, a challenge manifested in the entire schooling system, with more emphasis on primary schools (DBE, 2011). Goal 1 of the education sector, a component of the National Development plan 2030, asserts that it envisions

1 Section 1 and 3 are referenced according to the Harvard method (The faculty's preferred referencing method); each article is referenced according to its method as per its chosen journal's specification.

an increase in the number of learners in grade 3, who by the end of the year, would have mastered the minimum language and numeracy competencies in grade 3 (National Planning Commission, 2013: 19). It is argued that in order to address this challenge, there is a need to fix the overall functioning of the school and implement interventions aimed at changing teaching practices in the classrooms (National Planning Commission, 2013). Addressing the learners' poor literacy skills is crucial as Baruthram (2012) contends that the duo of reading and writing plays a critical role in the development of a learner, as reading is a vehicle through which learning occurs and that the two aspects determine the academic performance of learners. The compelling view that learners' possession of well-developed reading and writing skills is a prerequisite for participating in the academic field presented an excruciating setback to policymakers and teachers. This is because literacy constitutes the foundation in terms of laying the base for future accomplishments and the attainment of whatever goal or purpose one intends to achieve (Baruthram, 2012).

Over the years, the DBE in South Africa has tried different instruments through which to provide support and guidance to change classroom practice in primary schools. At the heart of all these innovations is the desire to improve learner performance, especially in the National Assessments for grades 1-6 and 9 (where the National Assessments in literacy and mathematics are administered). Unfortunately, evidence from the national and international assessments continue to show that learners in South Africa perform at levels below the benchmarks set for mathematics and literacy. A major challenge is a decline in the reading levels of learners in primary schools. This remains an unresolved puzzle for policymakers and researchers.

Numerous studies aimed at unravelling the causes of the decline in the reading and writing competencies of South African learners have been conducted. The findings of the Progress International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) in 2006 and the South Eastern African Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SAQMEC) in 2011 stood out in this regard. Both studies reflect that South African learners perform poorly compared to their counterparts elsewhere.

In an attempt to provide a response to this challenge, the DBE employed two forms of national assessments to account and report on learner performance in literacy (Spaull,

2013). The National Systematic Evaluations are conducted in a five-year cycle from samples drawn randomly from public schools involving either grade 3, 6 or 9. The Annual National Assessment (ANA), on the other hand, was developed and used as a barometer for learner attainment (DBE, 2014). The 2011, 2012 and 2013 ANA results revealed a slight improvement. The results reflected that urgent strategic innovations needed to be put in place in response to the challenge if South Africa is to meet the millennium development goals and the targets set by the National Development plan 2030 (NDP) on learner attainments. To reflect on the graveness of this challenge, Zimmerman (2014) points out that South Africa's subsequent participation in simplified versions of PIRLS, which was meant to assess grade 4 learners using lower cognitive levels of assessments, tailored to serve as a bridge for developing countries yielded yet another set of destitute outcomes. This yet again indicates that South African learners fail to improve their literacy performance when compared to their counterparts (Van Staden & Howie, 2012).

The outcomes of PIRLS 2011 could imply that based on the medium of instruction at each school, skills are nurtured during the foundation phase of schooling, employing home language readers where emphasis is made on teaching decoding skills in a haphazard, superficial manner and in a way not related to the context in which it takes place. In this regard, Currin and Pretorius (2010) assert that teachers may labour under the impression that learners will be able to develop understanding while they engage in decoding and then give insufficient attention to reading comprehension. This makes it difficult for learners to change from decoding syllables and words on a chalkboard to meaningful reading activities using extended text. Klapwijk (2012) believes that in the South African context, teachers seldom impart reading strategies and perhaps may not be adept at teaching comprehension. These sentiments in part provide reasons why South African learners have low competency skills in reading, writing and counting; a situation that begs for urgent attention.

In an attempt to address this literacy problem, the Department of Education (DoE) introduced a series of policies and intervention strategies which include amongst others, the *Ithuteng* campaign in 1996, the African National Literacy Initiative in 1999, the *Masifunde Sonke* (Let us read together) campaign in 2000, The Foundations for

Learning Campaign (FFLC) and the National Reading Strategy in 2008. In spite of all these campaigns, the literacy levels of South African learners remain very low.

1. Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS)

CAPS was introduced as part of broader set of responses to address the challenges that serve as barriers to learning. It was first introduced in the foundation phase and grade 10 in 2012, followed by the intermediate phase (grade 4-6) and grade 11 in 2013 and finally introduced in the senior phase (grade 7-9) and grade 12 in 2014. Through this CAPS framework, the DoE provides teachers with guidelines on content, assessment and pedagogy. Determining to what extent this intervention has succeeded in providing solutions to the noted challenges in literacy remains a question that needs to be explored.

2. Language framework

The fact that South Africa has eleven recognised official languages poses a serious challenge. The National Curriculum Statement acknowledges all of these languages as languages of teaching and learning and recommends the use of Home Language for teaching and learning where possible. This requirement is difficult in multilingual and multicultural environments where learners and teachers in the same school may speak various languages and dialects. The language of teaching and learning also contribute to poor performance of learners in literacy. Language is central to our lives; we communicate and understand our world through language and it is the means of access to all study materials (Neman & Monyai, 2011). Extensive research on the acquisition of language was conducted and it revealed that most black African learners in South Africa are disadvantaged by the medium of instruction because they cannot study in their first language. English dominates the economy, politics and education and is used as a medium of communication between people from different cultures. The high status enjoyed by English as an international language and the fact that it is associated with upward mobility, access to the global world and economic well-being in the western world means that English has gained more advantage above other languages (Neman & Monyai, 2011). English is the preferred medium of instruction in

schools because some indigenous languages do not have the linguistic complexity to enable them to be used in technical and scientific contexts. Moreover, many parents choose English as the language of teaching and learning because they perceive it as having a cultural capital that will ensure jobs for their children. The elevated status of English has a detrimental effect on indigenous languages as they subsequently lose their status, identity and role (Neman & Monyai, 2011).

The DBE formulated a language conceptualisation for home languages (HL), African languages (AL) and signed languages (SL) to enhance teaching and learning of languages as subjects together with the language of learning and teaching (LoLT). This was done through effecting various strategies and innovations, including the following:

1.1.3a. Strengthening the teaching and learning of English First Additional language

Given the extended use of English as the main language and medium of instruction and communication as well as a language in which most examinations are set, the need to enhance learners' proficiency and capacity was emphasised. The DoE wished to accelerate teachers' competencies and practices in teaching English First Additional Language (ENGFAL).

1.1.3b. Library provisioning

The DBE formulated two models to ensure that library information services are made accessible to learners in the deep rural provinces of the country (e.g. Eastern Cape and Limpopo) where learners had no access. In collaboration with the Department of Arts and Culture, the DBE provided mobile libraries and classroom libraries to secondary and primary schools respectively.

1.1.3c. Launch of book floods

During the commemoration of the Mandela Months, the DBE engaged in rigorous campaigns to conscientise the public about the importance of reading. It did this by donating books to the public in what is termed "Book Floods". This exercise was mainly held at DBE offices, and at Menlyn Park shopping centre (a major shopping centre in

the capital city of Pretoria). The DBE encouraged all provinces to work collaboratively with other key stakeholders to broaden the scope of this campaign.

1.1.3d. Implementation of Drop All and Read

The DBE initiated an activity where schools had to identify a certain period whereby at that specific time the school stops everything and engages in a reading activity for a particular time.

1.1.3e. Learn English Audio Project (LEAP)

In 2014, the British council, working with the DBE, launched LEAP. The project was first piloted in 159 schools in Mpumalanga, Eastern Cape and Limpopo. The project entailed using technology together with other resources to maximise the use of the DBE workbooks. Using technology, e.g. MP3s, infused the teaching of listening, speaking and writing ENGFAL.

Despite the myriad of activities introduced as responses to alleviate the poor learner performances, the problems remain not only in learners' underperformance in literacy but also in the entire schooling system. Continuous policy changes appear to be a weakness. It also has an effect on the manner in which policies are managed and the nature of support and guidance provided to literacy teachers. To probe the nature of the problem and challenges caused by continuous policy changes, some questions may need to be answered systematically regarding the relationship, if any, between learner performance, curriculum management and implementation as well as the impact of teacher support. In what ways could challenges of learner performance and curriculum implementation be related to the instructional guidance and curriculum management provided? How well are literacy teachers empowered and supported to engage with each policy intervention? This study sought to provide answers to these emerging questions with specific reference to Limpopo.

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

The study emerges from the growing concerns that the literacy competency level of South African learners at a particular age group cohort is far behind the set milestones (Fleisch, 2008). Findings from the foundation phase national systemic evaluation

conducted in 2008 revealed that only 14% were on par with set standards. On the other hand, 33% were slightly below the set requirement. The majority at 53% were trailing far below for their age group. These patterns are similar to the SACMEQ (2011) findings, which confirmed that the primary school learners' competencies in literacy are far behind their peers and grades.

The persistence of poor literacy performance, despite the new curricular innovations aimed at enhancing learners' outcomes through quality public education, remains a major concern. A question arises as to whether literacy teachers have the requisite skills, knowledge and capacity to change the current condition of poor learner performance in literacy. What role do school-based instructional leaders play to guide and support literacy instruction?

This study sought to explore curriculum guidance and support systems and instructional leadership practices for literacy in the foundation phase in Limpopo schools. It sought to explore the role and practices of selected instructional leaders in the provision of guidance and support for literacy instruction and to recommend practice-based strategies for effective instructional guidance.

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In view of the problem formulated in section 1.2 above, the questions below guided this study.

The central question for the study is:

What and how, in terms of policy and practice, are curriculum guidance and support systems utilised to guide the practice of literacy instruction at the foundation phase level in South Africa?

The research question was investigated further through these sub-questions:

1.3.1. How do foundation phase literacy teachers perceive and make sense of the type of guidance and support they receive from school-based instructional leaders?

- 1.3.2. What is the relationship between gender, age and teaching experience and teachers' perceptions of the guidance and support provided by school-based instructional leaders, if any?
- 1.3.3. How do school-based instructional leaders enact their instructional leadership practices to improve literacy instruction in the foundation phase?
- 1.3.4. How do foundation phase literacy teachers understand the practices of school-based instructional leaders in supporting literacy instruction?
- 1.3.5. How do the leadership practices of school-based instructional leaders affect literacy instruction in the foundation phase?
- 1.3.6. What form of support does the district provide to ensure effective literacy instruction in the foundation phase and how do they provide such support?
- 1.3.7. What are the challenges faced by school-based instructional leaders while providing support for literacy instruction in the foundation phase?
- 1.3.8. How can the provision of instructional guidance for literacy in the foundation phase be understood and/or explained?

1.4 AIM OF THE STUDY

This study aimed to explore curriculum guidance, support systems and instructional leadership practices for literacy in the foundation phase in Limpopo schools. It sought to explore the role and practices of selected curriculum leaders in the provision of instructional guidance for literacy instruction. It also aimed to recommend practice-based strategies for effective instructional guidance.

The specific objectives addressed by the study were:

1. To explore how foundation phase literacy teachers perceive and make sense of the type of guidance and support they receive from school-based instructional leaders.
2. To explore if there is a relationship between gender, age, teaching experience and teachers' perceptions of the support provided by school-based instructional leaders for literacy instruction.

3. To establish how instructional leadership behaviours of school-based instructional leaders influence literacy instruction in the foundation phase.
4. To explore how the practices of school-based instructional leaders affect literacy instruction in the foundation phase.
5. To explore the practices of district leaders in improving literacy instruction in the foundation phase.
6. To explore challenges faced by school-based instructional leaders while supporting literacy instruction in the foundation phase.
7. To determine how the provision of instructional guidance for literacy in the foundation phase can be understood and/or explained.

1.5 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This study proposes collaborative instructional leadership, which encompasses distributed leadership as a possible framework for making sense of the nature and quality of the guidance and support that is provided to foundation phase literacy teachers in Limpopo, South Africa. According to Heck and Hallinger (2009), collaborative instructional leadership implies that all stakeholders in a school community work together as a team to ensure that the overall aims and goals of the school are achieved. This implies that leadership functions should be distributed among principals, deputy principals, HODs, senior teachers and curriculum advisors who would work collaboratively to improve literacy instruction as well as learner performance (Louis *et al.*, 2010).

The first component of the distributed perspective is the leader-plus aspect (Spillane & Diamond, 2007). In terms of this framework, the principal leads and manages literacy instruction with other formally designated leaders such as deputy principals, HODs, senior teachers and curriculum advisors (Spillane & Healey, 2010). The second aspect is the leadership-practice aspect. This is where the formally delegated leaders interact with literacy teachers and share ideas in the planning, organising, leading and controlling of literacy instruction (Spillane, 2006). This implies that all members of the staff can perform literacy instructional leadership functions such as the formulation and

implementation of pacesetters, assessing improvements made, supplying instructional resources, helping to conduct and coordinate staff in-service-training, advising and assisting teachers involved in instructional programmes, procuring funds required for instructional purposes and receiving community feedback about school programmes (Okumbe, 2007).

1.6. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Research design refers to the overall approach or strategy chosen to link different elements of a particular study to ensure that research problems are addressed effectively (Cohen *et. al.*, 2013). It directs the researcher on steps to be followed while undertaking a study. It gives information about the sample, sites to be visited and the duration of the study. This study utilised an explanatory sequential mixed method design to explore the provision of guidance and support for literacy instruction in the foundation phase. This is where quantitative data is first collected and analysed. The results then informed me in designing the qualitative instrument (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). A structured questionnaire was administered to 251 foundation phase literacy educators in three of the five districts of Limpopo. The questionnaires were complemented by interviews with three literacy teachers, 3 heads of departments and 4 primary school principals in two districts to gain additional and detailed information about the curriculum and instructional practices raised during the questionnaires.

1.6.1. Research population and sample

A population of a study entails a group of people the researcher aimed at obtaining information from in order to answer the research question (Van Rensburg, 2010). The population of this study were all literacy teachers in South Africa.

The research sample comprised 251 foundation phase literacy teachers (grades 1-3), foundation phase heads of departments and primary school principals in 3 of the 5 districts of Limpopo, namely Vhembe, Mopani and Sekhukhune. The study focused on establishing best instructional leadership practices that could improve literacy instruction in the foundation phase, hence, improving the reading and writing skills of learners. All participants were purposefully selected. This sampling method offers the following advantages:

1. It allowed the researchers to select participants and sites because they will be most useful or representative (Babbie, 2007).
2. It is less time consuming.

1.6.2. Data collection

Structured questionnaires were administered to 251 foundation phase literacy teachers. It comprised two sections. The first section asked questions on the demographic characteristics of participants while the second consisted of key questions regarding the provision of guidance and support for literacy teachers by instructional leaders at different levels of the entire education system. It consisted of twelve dimensions focusing on resource provision, modelling of lessons, provision of feedback, provision of literacy information through workshops, development of differentiated instructional methods and the development of strategies to improve learners' reading and writing skills. It also focused on the development of skills to use multiple forms of assessment, communication of clear district goals, support provision using and discussing video lessons, analysing students' performance data, provision of information about opportunities for professional development as well as strategies to improve literacy instructional methods. It provided participants with five literacy coaches against which they had to indicate with a cross whether that coach performed the function provided in the questionnaire. The sixth option allowed them to indicate that the support was *not* provided at their school. A questionnaire enabled the researchers to reach the sample easily, as it was large (Mason & Bramble, 1997). Semi-structured interviews then followed with foundation phase literacy teachers, HODs and primary school principals from Mopani and Vhembe districts to validate our quantitative findings (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). This assisted us with triangulation.

1.6.3. Data analysis, interpretation and reporting

Data analysis entails the procedure of scrutinising and elucidating data in order to make sense, obtain understanding and develop factual knowledge (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Data from the questionnaires were captured and analysed using descriptive statistics through the SAS/STAT 13.1 software (SAS, 2013). This program was preferred because of its directness and applicability to educational and social science research, its comparable simplicity of use and the comprehensive labelling that it provides. The descriptive statistics assisted the researchers to make sense of the frequency distribution as well as the main points in the data collected.

Data collected through the interviews was analysed by using the Tesch (1990) method of qualitative data analysis. Units, categories and themes were identified from the interviews.

1.7. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethics is a matter related to principles and ethical guidelines that form the basis for the investigation to assess one's behaviour (Babbie, 2007). After securing an ethical clearance certificate from the University of Free State and permission to conduct the study from the provincial Department of Education in Limpopo, letters of request were sent to circuit managers and primary school principals. Accordingly, potential research participants were well informed about the procedures and threats involved in this research and were requested to give their consent to participate. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) advise that participants be given the freedom to terminate whenever they wish. As such, participants were assured of their freedom to terminate their participation at any stage without any negative implications.

Creswell (2009) highlights the importance for researchers to protect all their study participants by ensuring that their identities are not disclosed. Therefore, prospective participants were assured of their confidentiality. They were assured that only the researcher and her supervisor would have access to their personal information in order to make it easier to do follow-ups in phase 2 (interviews).

Finer details of all ethical considerations were included in the ethics application, which was approved by the Faculty of Education's Ethics Committee (Ethics clearance certificate number is UFS-EDU-2014-007).

1.8. DEFINITION OF CONCEPTS

This section provides brief definitions of key concepts constituting the core of the study.

1.8.1 Instruction

Niedo *et al.* (2014) define instruction as an activity whereby teachers provide learners with academic content that assists them in progressing towards set educational goals. It implies the act of teaching, educating, instructing, imparting and transferring knowledge or information (American Heritage Dictionary, 2016)

1.8.2 Literacy

Flood *et al.* (2015) define literacy as the capability to use symbols, numbers and images to understand and utilise the most common symbolic systems of a culture. This explanation reflects that literacy is a combination of many abilities, which enables a person to understand and use the common symbol system in a culture for their own development and for community development (UNESO, 2014). In the South African context, the literacy programme from grade R-12 aims to help learners acquire language and communication skills (DBE, 2011).

1.8.3 Instructional leadership

Neumerski (2013) defines instructional leadership as the responsibility carried out by the principal by providing clear, strong, directive leadership aimed at curriculum implementation. However, the principal can carry out the instructional leadership duties through delegation.

1.8.4 Curriculum

Billings and Halstead (2015) define curriculum as a plan or course of study or as an educational programme followed to cascade a particular set of information to achieve certain education goals.

1.8.5. Foundation phase

The foundation phase forms part of the education system structure in South Africa. It consists of grades R-3 classes.

1.8.6. School-based instructional leaders

These qualified teachers are formally appointed into leadership positions to provide support and guidance to teachers as well as to manage schools. Their tasks are clearly stipulated in the PAM document (DoE, 1999).

1.9. Titles of articles

This is an articles-based PhD thesis that involves the development of five publishable articles from the data. The layout of the research report is as follows:

1. Section 1: Introduction and orientation: This is the introductory part, which provides details of the study such as orientation and background, research problem, aim and objectives, literature and methodology.
2. Section 2: Five publishable articles are presented in the format that is required by the journals where each article will be sent for consideration.

Article 1: A survey of primary school teachers' perspectives on leadership and support for literacy instruction in South Africa

Article 2: The effects of instructional leadership on literacy instruction in the foundation phase in Limpopo, South Africa

Article 3: District instructional leadership practices for literacy instruction in the foundation phase in Limpopo, South Africa

Article 4: Challenges faced by school-based literacy instructional leaders in the foundation phase in Limpopo, South Africa

Article 5: School-based instructional leaders and their capacity to lead literacy instruction in the foundation phase in Limpopo, South Africa

- 3 Section 3: Final reflection: This section will summarise the key findings, draw conclusions and make recommendations for further research on this topic.

SECTION 2: THE FIVE “PUBLISHABLE” ARTICLES

The findings of this study are reported in five articles that addressed the different research questions.

1. The first article explores the foundation phase literacy teachers' perspectives on the guidance and support provided by school-based instructional leaders to improve literacy instruction in the foundation phase.
2. The second article examined the effects of instructional leadership on literacy instruction in the foundation phase.
3. The third article explores the practices of district leaders in supporting literacy instruction in the foundation phase.
4. The fourth article focuses on the challenges experienced by school-based instructional leaders while providing guidance and support for literacy instruction in the foundation phase.
5. The final article explores the capacity of school-based instructional leaders to lead literacy instruction in this phase. A discussion of the findings related to each research question is discussed in the following section.

Based on the analysis of the data, I attempted to describe the practices of school-based instructional leaders in support of literacy instruction, how these practices affect literacy instruction, the challenges they face while providing support and ways that district curriculum advisors support literacy teachers. Lastly, I discuss whether school-based instructional leaders have the capacity to lead literacy instruction in the foundation phase. The five articles are presented below.

ARTICLE 1

A survey of primary school teachers' perspectives on leadership and support for literacy instruction in South Africa

Abstract

Many international and local programmes have confirmed the observation that the literacy levels of many primary school learners in South Africa are below the international benchmarks. This is in spite of the many efforts to support literacy instruction, especially in the foundation phase grades (1–3). This paper reports on the findings of a study on how foundation phase teachers perceive and understand the support and guidance for literacy instruction provided by school-based instructional leaders. Two hundred and fifty-one foundation phase literacy teachers completed a structured questionnaire. The statistical analysis was carried out using the SAS/STAT 13.1 software. The findings revealed that gender has no influence on teachers' perceptions while age and teaching experience bears significant influence on it. Furthermore, the findings revealed that HODs have the heaviest workload in terms of the expectations to provide the support needed to change literacy instruction in the classrooms. This suggests that they are perceived as playing a prominent role in supporting literacy instruction when compared to other school-based instructional leaders. A lack of role clarification and/or collaboration emerged as a serious challenge. The study recommends the adoption of distributed and collaborative leadership as a possible framework that could assist in clarifying and strengthening collaboration among school-based instructional leaders.

Key words

Instructional guidance, collaborative leadership, instructional leadership, literacy instruction, school-based instructional leaders

1. Introduction and background

The recurring finding from local and international assessments that South African learners are performing below the expected norm, especially in literacy (Department of Basic Education [DBE], 2006, 2013a; Fleisch, 2008; Mullis, Martin, Foy & Drucker, 2012; Martin, Mullis & Kennedy, 2007; Spaull, 2013), has become a serious challenge for the country. As a result, a nexus of intervention strategies, such as the Annual National Assessment (ANA) (DBE, 2010), the Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) (Gove & Wetterberg, 2011), English across the curriculum (EAC) (DBE, 2013b) and the DBE workbooks, were immediately put in place to enhance learner attainment. These intervention strategies were supposed to serve as a barometer and a navigator to produce learners who are highly skilled in literacy (Aistrup, 2010). Regrettably, many teachers find these expectations too difficult or even impossible to meet (Hsu, 2008). This situation put more pressure on school-based instructional leaders (principal, deputy principal, HOD, senior teacher) to seek profound instructional leadership skills in order to change classroom practices and improve learner performance (McCoy & Holt, 2012). To improve learner performance, having effective leadership that is teacher-focused becomes the means, as teachers are key role players in learner improvement (Christie, Thompson & Whiteley, 2009).

Several studies have been undertaken to explore how instructional leaders can improve learner performance. Goslin (2008), for example, found that effective instructional leaders support and guide teachers on the application of different methods of instruction. Whiteman (2013) elucidates this as guiding teachers in lesson planning, resource provision and participation in subject meetings in order to listen to teachers' instructional challenges to enable them to provide relevant support and guidance. Flamini (2010) found that modelling, coaching as well as instructional guidance equips teachers with the skills and capacity to improve their instruction and accordingly enhance learner performance. Ohlson (2009) also highlighted the importance of regular workshops and teacher training in improving instruction. While there are numerous studies undertaken to investigate the relationship between instructional leadership, teachers' instruction and learner performance, there is limited research on teachers' perceptions of the support provided by school-based instructional leaders in the foundation phase, especially in South Africa. We aim to fill

this gap in literature by investigating how foundation phase literacy teachers perceive the guidance and support provided by school-based instructional leaders.

Baruthram (2012) argues that literacy contributes a great deal to shaping one's successes and failures in life. Without acquiring the necessary literacy skills, South African learners are unlikely to cope well with many of the demands of the global community. Considering that the foundation phase of schooling is critical to a child's educational development (Eller, 2015), learners in this phase should be taught by well-prepared and knowledgeable teachers (NCATE, 2013).

In the South African context, school-based instructional leaders should ensure that all teachers are well prepared and well equipped with the skills needed to be effective in their instruction. These leaders would, therefore, be expected to provide effective support for literacy instruction.

Seen in the above context, the need for professional support and guidance from school-based instructional leaders has become more urgent for stimulating teacher growth and professional development. This will improve their knowledge, skills, attitudes and beliefs related to their literacy instructional practices (Hsu, 2008, p. 265). Since the last decade, in Canada and the United States for example, coaching has been employed as a method of equipping teachers with skills and capacity to improve their classroom instruction (Lynch & Alsop, 2007).

Elish-Piper and L'Allier (2010) recommend in-class coaching where classroom observations and lesson modelling positively influence learner achievement. While the results of this study were promising, the study participants were limited to five literacy coaches; therefore, the findings cannot be generalised.

A similar study by Carlisle and Berebitsky (2011) in California highlighted that there is a positive relationship between the activities done by literacy coaches and literacy instruction as well as learner performance. According to this study, learners whose teachers were subjected to coaching performed well in literacy compared to those whose teachers were not supported by literacy coaches. However, the study did not address what needs to be done to ensure that all teachers are subjected to coaching to enable them to perform effectively in literacy instruction similar to their peers who were supported.

Recently, Salas, Dikotla and Nembahe (2015) undertook a study to explore the needs and possibilities of literacy coaching in Gauteng, South Africa. This study found that although literacy coaches existed, they lacked confidence and perhaps capacity to enhance collaboration among Gauteng teachers. Toll (2009) describes a coach as a person who provides guidance for teachers through planned support to progress in their professional learning. Ferguson (2014) adds that they should be able to work with teachers to improve literacy instruction and learner performance. This suggests that, as literacy coaches, school-based instructional leaders should assume the roles of supervisors and service providers of teacher development activities as well as working collaboratively with teachers to change literacy instruction in the classroom (Toll, 2007). These findings emphasise the existence of a positive relationship between coaching and high learner attainment.

While many intervention strategies have been and are still being developed to address the literacy challenge in South Africa, the way foundation phase literacy teachers perceive and make sense of the guidance and support received from school-based instructional leaders, is still a grey area. This study aims to address this gap in the literature by exploring foundation phase teachers' perceptions of the school-based instructional leaders' work in support of literacy instruction in selected primary schools in Limpopo, South Africa. The paucity of research on literacy coaching in South Africa motivated us to undertake this study.

This study was set up to address the following questions: *what are the perceptions of primary school teachers on the support provided for literacy instruction by school-based instructional leaders? Is there any relationship between teachers' gender, age, teaching experience and their perceptions of the support provided by school-based instructional leaders?*

2. Review of related literature

Recently, there has been increased interest in many countries with regard to school-based leadership and coaching as a strategy for improving learner performance (Msila, 2015; Mampane, 2015). School-based instructional leaders have been given greater accountability to ensure that teachers are well equipped with the knowledge and practices needed to be effective in their instruction (Leithwood & Riel, 2003) as well as offering support to literacy teachers through mentoring and coaching

(Timperley, Wilson, Barrar & Fung, 2008). This would in turn equip them with the knowledge to understand key aspects of literacy instruction as well as their application (Russo, 2004).

The International Reading Association (IRA) highlights multiple roles that school-based instructional leaders should carry out in bringing about a drastic improvement in literacy instruction (IRA, 2010). This report suggests that these leaders equip teachers with various instruction and assessment techniques and work collaboratively with them to address encountered challenges.

L'Allier, Elish-Piper and Bean (2010) emphasise that without the involvement of school-based instructional leaders, literacy instruction is unlikely to improve. Whether these practices are happening in primary schools in Limpopo, South Africa is a question that needs to be answered.

The inability of South African learners to read and write is a great challenge since without advanced knowledge and the required literacy skills they are unlikely to cope with the demands of a global world (Goldman, 2012). This will make it difficult for them to fit into the 21st century workforce. Graham, Hebert and Harris (2015) emphasise that reading and writing skills are needed for learners to solve problems and make meaningful decisions in academic, professional and personal contexts. This suggests that there is a need for all school-based instructional leaders to work collaboratively with teachers to put more effort into literacy instruction.

Findings from studies conducted by Eller (2015), Gewertz (2011) and Snyder and Dillow (2013) suggest that grade 3 is critical to a child's intellectual development and that the learners who acquire reading and writing skills by the end of grade 3 are likely to succeed academically and eventually in their careers. These findings emphasise the importance of supporting foundation phase teachers by school-based instructional leaders, as they will be in a better position to provide the much-needed support to learners.

According to Toll (2009), school-based instructional leaders should be able to plan thoroughly to ensure that teachers receive the necessary support, guidance and competences in all areas related to literacy instruction. They should usher in well-founded classroom literacy practices including reading groups, lesson planning

sessions, provision of feedback after classroom observation, co-presentation of lessons, modelling of instructional methods as well as creating platforms for discussion (Walsh, 2014).

3. Conceptual framework

This study proposes distributed and/or collaborative leadership as a possible framework for clarifying roles and strengthening collaboration. According to Heck and Hallinger (2009), collaborative instructional leadership denotes that all stakeholders in a school community work together as a team to ensure that the overall aims and goals of the school are achieved. This suggests that leadership functions should be distributed among school-based instructional leaders who should work collaboratively to improve literacy instruction and learner performance (Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, Anderson, Michlin & Mascall, 2010).

The first component of the distributed perspective is the leader-plus aspect (Spillane & Diamond, 2007; Spillane & Healey, 2010). In terms of this framework, the principal leads and manages literacy instruction with other formally designated instructional leaders. The second aspect is the leadership-practice aspect. This occurs where the formally delegated leaders interact with literacy teachers and share ideas in the planning, organising, leading and controlling of literacy instruction (Spillane, 2006). Figure 1 below illustrates collaborative and distributed leadership as our conceptual framework.

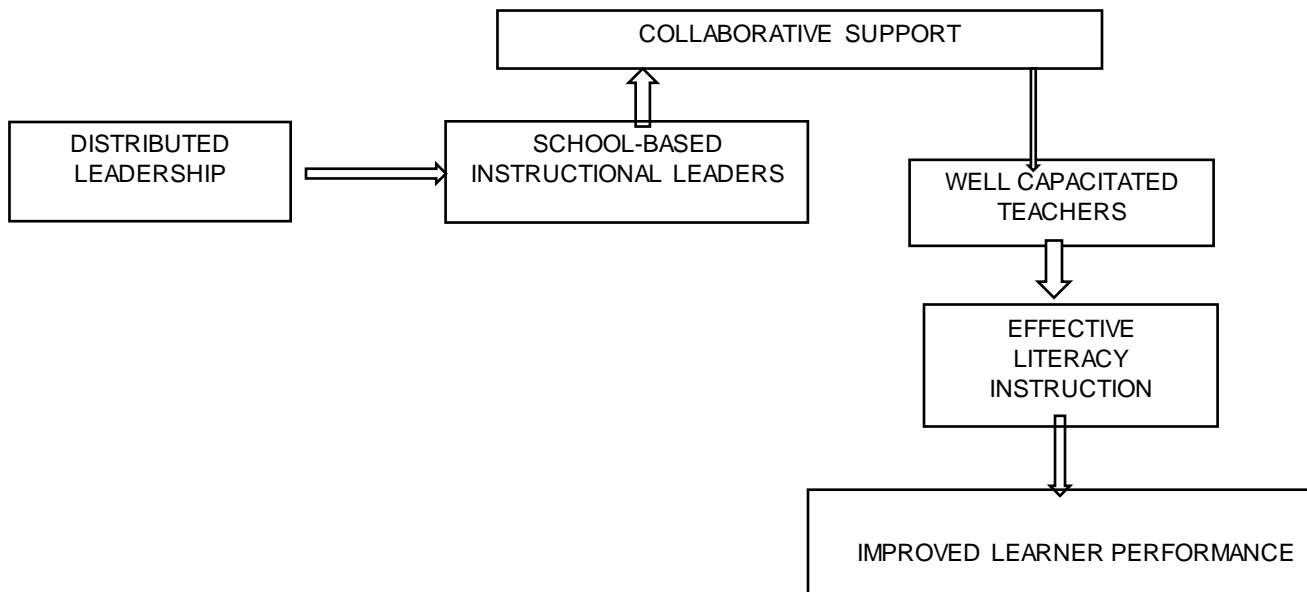


Figure 1: Distributed and/or collaborative leadership

As illustrated in figure 1 above, the self-designed conceptual framework for this study consists of six parts, i.e. distributed leadership, school-based instructional leaders, collaborative support, well capacitated teachers, effective literacy instruction and improved learner performance. This implies that leadership functions are distributed among school-based instructional leaders who work collaboratively to support literacy teachers. Well capacitated teachers will result in effective literacy instruction and improved learner performance (Stein & Nelson, 2003). This approach will allow instructional leaders to promote the success of every learner by sustaining a school culture that is conducive to learning and staff professional growth (National Governors Association, 2010).

The support and guidance given to teachers provides them with the knowledge they require to perform their roles effectively. We therefore argue that effective literacy leadership is needed in the foundation phase to improve literacy instruction in primary school. School-based instructional leaders should ensure that literacy teachers are motivated, inspired, supported and supervised. This includes working directly with teachers and engaging in practices such as modelling, co-teaching, training of teachers in best practices, lesson planning, classroom observation, feedback, learner assessment and conferencing (Walsh, 2014). Our study focuses on some of these abovementioned instructional leadership practices. These practices could provide

teachers with sustained school-based professional development that aligns their practices, beliefs and knowledge with research-based evidence related to pedagogical theory and best practices (National Reading Technical Assistance Centre, 2010).

4. Research methodology

This phase of the study was constructed as a quantitative project in which a descriptive survey design was adopted. Information was collected from literacy teachers without changing the environment (Lunenburg & Irby, 2008). Accordingly, this study set out to explore teachers' perceptions of the support for literacy instruction provided by school-based instructional leaders in three districts of Limpopo, namely Mopani, Sekhukhune and Vhembe. We initially wanted to conduct the study in five districts but due to a lack of responses from schools in the fourth and fifth districts, the study was restricted to only three. The target population was foundation phase literacy teachers (grades 1-3). Once the University of Free State had granted ethical clearance and the provincial Department of Education in Limpopo along with the principals from selected schools had granted permission, questionnaires were administered to 251 purposefully selected teachers after they had completed consent forms. The 251 teachers comprised 16 males and 235 females.

The questionnaire comprised two sections. The first section asked questions on the demographic characteristics of participants while the second consisted of key questions related to literacy teachers' perceptions of the support for literacy instruction in the foundation phase. The questionnaire consisted of twelve dimensions. It provided participants with five literacy coaches against which they had to indicate with a cross whether that coach performed the function provided in the questionnaire. The sixth option allowed them to indicate that the support was *not* provided at their school. The responses to these questions were treated as nominal categorical data, meaning that data were neither measured nor ordered but subjects were allocated to distinct categories.

The statistical analysis was carried out using the SAS/STAT 13.1 software (SAS, 2013). Descriptive statistics was used to understand how instructional leadership support for literacy instruction is organised in primary schools and to recommend a better structure that would clarify and strengthen collaboration among various school-based instructional leaders. The seven (7) age groups in the instrument were pooled

into three approximately equally large groups of 26-40 years, 41-50 years and 51- 60 years. The seven (7) teaching experience groups were also pooled into three approximately equally large groups of 5-15 years, 16-25 years and 26-40 years. The pooling was done to have reasonably large groups of participants.

5. Results

This section presents results on the demographic characteristics of the sample, i.e. teachers' perceptions of literacy coaches according to literacy support activities and lastly the influence of gender, age and teaching experience on the literacy group activities. The demographic characteristics of the respondents are summarised in table 1 below.

5.1. Demographic characteristics of the study participants

Table 1: Biographical data of teachers in the quantitative part of the study

		Literacy teachers	
Variable	Level	Frequency	Total (n)
Overall		N (%)	251
Gender	Female	235 (93.63)	251
	Male	16 (6.37)	
Age	26-30 years	4 (1.59)	251
	31-35 years	8 (3.19)	
	36-40 years	34 (13.55)	
	41-45 years	69 (27.49)	
	46-50 years	37(14.74)	
	51-55 years	78 (31.08)	
	56-60 years	21 (8.37)	
Teaching experience	5-10 years	54 (21.51)	251
	11-15 years	31 (12.35)	
	16-20 years	51 (20.32)	

21-25 years	36 (14.34)
26-30 years	29 (11.55)
31-35 years	49 (19.52)
36-40 years	1(0.40)

The majority of the 251 participants were females (235; 93.63%). Only 16 were male (6.37%). The biggest age group of the respondents across all the questions (31.8%) was between 51-55 years followed by those aged between 41-45 years (27.49), 46-50 years (14.74%), 36-40 years (13.55%), 56-60 years (8.37%), 31-35 years (3.19%) with the least between 26-30 years (1.59%). The teaching experience of participants varied from 5-40 years. The highest number was between 5-10 years (21.51%) followed by 16-20 years (20.32%), 31-35 years (19.52%), 21-25 years (14.34. %), 11-15 years (12.35%) and 26-30 years (11.55%) respectively. The least were between 36 and 40 years (0.40%).

5.2. Teachers’ perception of literacy coaches according to literacy support activities

The study explores foundation phase teachers’ perception of instructional guidance and support provided by school-based instructional leaders. Our focus was on the activities that these leaders performed in support of literacy instruction. The activities were divided into four groups. Group 1 was the most complex and involved actual modelling such as lesson modelling and co-presenting lessons while group 2 was less complex and was more about capacity building functions such as the provision of feedback after classroom observations, discussions, video lessons and individually working with teachers. Group 3 was even less complex and focused on advocacy such as the availability of workshops, promoting the use of different methods of instruction to serve all kinds of learners, the development of reading and writing skills as well as guiding teachers on the selection of multiple forms of assessment. Finally, group 4 was the least complex and focused on the provision of teaching and learning resource materials as part of guidance and support to literacy teachers. Figure 1 exhibits the results of teachers’ perceptions of instructional leaders’ support per group.

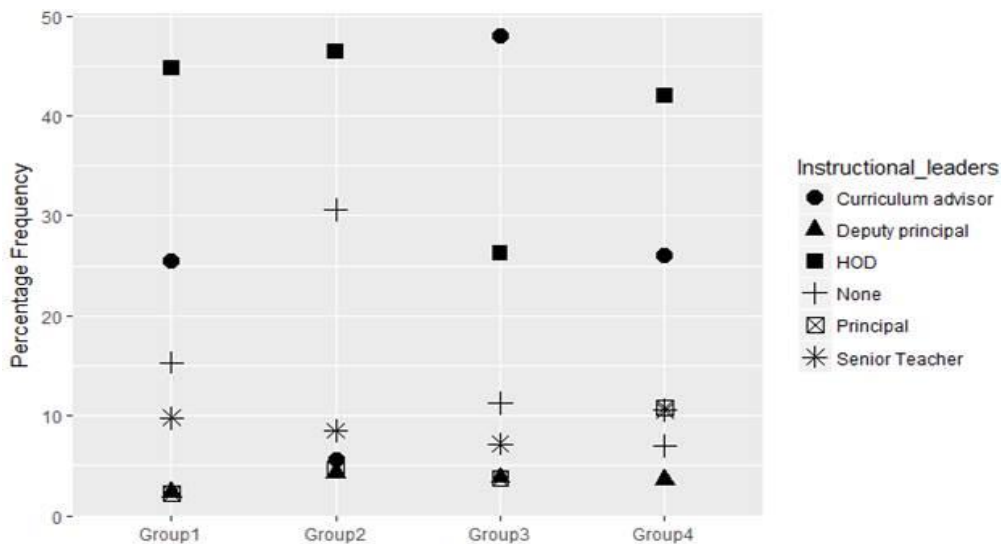


Figure 1: Teachers perceptions of instructional leaders' support per group activity

With regard to group 1 activities, 44.2% of the respondents perceived HODs as those coaches who provided the most support followed by curriculum advisors at 25.50% and senior teachers with 9.79%. Principals and their deputies were perceived as the least supportive at 1.19% and 2.30% respectively.

In group 2 activities, HODs were again identified by 46.41% of the respondents as their main source of support with regard to provision of feedback, addressing their individual needs and discussion of lessons. Senior teachers at 8.51% followed them. Principals and deputy principals were in position 3 and 4 with 4.65% and 4.26% respectively. Curriculum advisors were last with 5.59%. However, 30.6% indicated that none of the school-based instructional leaders provides support for them for this particular task. One respondent chose not to respond to group 2 activities.

The trend changed in group 3 activities. Curriculum advisors at 47.96% were perceived as the group of coaches that supported the teachers in this task. HODs followed with 26.2% and senior teachers at 7.18%. Principals and their deputies were perceived the same at 3.79% each. The same respondent who did not respond to group 2 activities also did not respond to group 3 activities.

In group 4 activities, HODs received 42.03%, which suggests that they were the most likely instructional leaders to assist teachers in this group. The second most support came from curriculum advisors at 26.1%. Principals and senior teachers were

perceived nearly the same at 10.97% and 10.6% respectively. Deputy principals were perceived as the least supportive with 3.59%. A significant number (6.97%) indicated that they received no support. In summary, HODs are mainly perceived as the providers of the most support to literacy teachers in group 1 activities (the most complex), group 2 activities (complex) and group 4 activities (least complex) while curriculum advisors support them mainly in group 3 activities (less complex activities).

We further subdivided the teachers' responses in order to investigate if gender influences teachers' perceptions. Table 2 below summarises our findings in this regard.

5.3. The influence of gender on teachers' perceptions

Table 2: A comparison of teachers' perceptions between gender groups

Gender	Principal	Dep principal	HOD	Senior teacher	Curriculum advisor	None of the above	Total
Female	356	237	1615	332	985	703	4228
Percentage	8.42	5.61	38.2	7.85	23.3	16.63	
Male	23	18	98	19	82	48	
Percentage	7.99	6.25	34.03	6.6	28.47	16.67	
Total	379	255	1713	351	1067	751	4516

Frequency
missing=2

Table 2 above reflects the sum of responses based on gender with regard to perception of support from the instructional leaders who were the subjects of the study. Hence, the totals exceed the study number. In response to activities directed at assessing teachers' perceptions of the support they were receiving from school-based instructional leaders, a greater number of respondents felt HODs followed by curriculum advisors were the leaders who provided the most support. Of those who chose HODs, the majority were female teachers with 38.2% while 34.03% were males. The above trend was reversed when curriculum advisors were involved; 28.47% were males and 23.3% were females. There was nearly an equal distribution of gender

spread where there was a lack of support and where principals (8.42% females and 7.99% males) and their deputies (5.61% females and 6.25% males) were chosen.

Figure 2 below exhibits the distribution of teachers' responses by age.

5.4. The Influence of age on teachers' perceptions

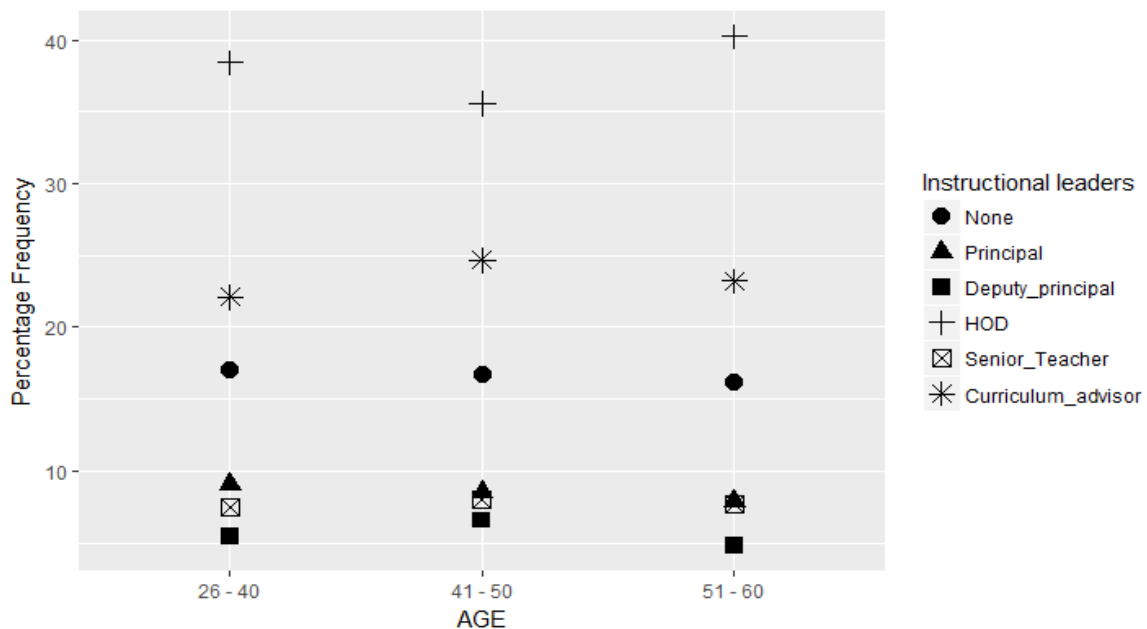


Figure 2: A comparison of teachers' general perceptions between the age groups

Figure 2 above suggests that HODs give high levels of support in all the group activities except group 3 where curriculum advisors were perceived as providing the highest level of support. In addition, curriculum advisors were the second most supportive instructional leaders who provided support to teachers in all the group activities with the exception of group 2 where senior teachers were second highest. Principals and deputy principals were perceived as providing the least support in all the group activities. Those in the age group of between 41-50 and 51 to 60 were in the majority where HODs and curriculum advisors were perceived to offer the most support. On the age interval 26 to 40, deputy principals seem to be providing the least instructional support whilst the HODs are providing the most support.

Teachers' responses were further subdivided to investigate if teaching experience has an influence on teachers' perceptions. The findings are reflected in figure 3 below.

5.5. The influence of teaching experience on teachers' perceptions

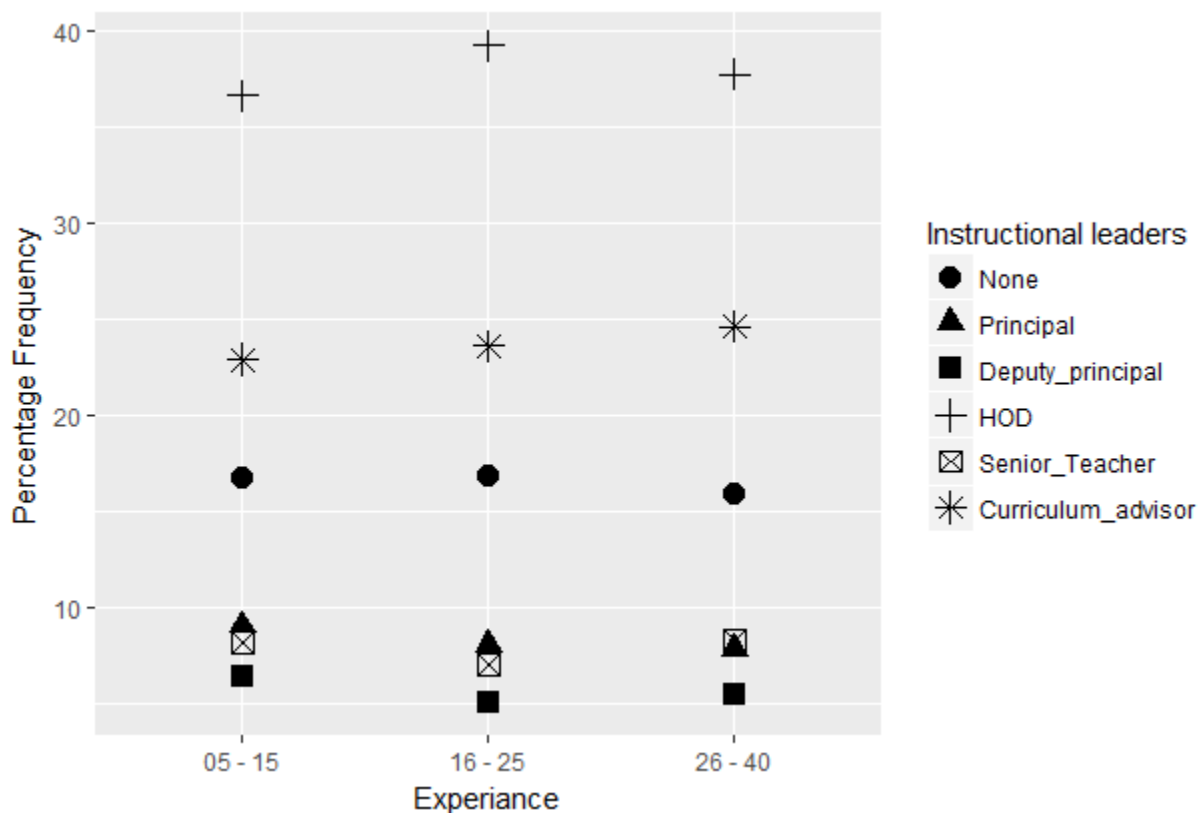


Figure 3: A comparison of teachers' general perceptions between the teaching experience groups

In terms of teaching experience and teachers' perception of school-based instructional support, the picture remained the same. Most of the teachers perceived HODs followed by curriculum advisors as the groups that provided the most support. When this is broken down according to teaching experience, those with teaching experience between 16-25 years (39.2%) were the dominant groups where the HODs were involved and the margin was slightly smaller between those with teaching experience of 0 to 15 years (23.6%) and 26 to 40 years (24.6%) where curriculum advisors were involved. The results are summarised in figure 2 above.

Generally, HODs were perceived as the primary source of support followed by curriculum advisors. Principals, deputy principals and senior teachers were perceived as the least supportive.

5.6. Fisher’s exact tests on the relationship between age, gender and teaching experience on teachers’ perceptions of literacy support

The results reported above seem to give an impression that gender, age and teaching experience could have an influence on respondents’ perception of school-based literacy coaches. To test its significance, the data was subjected to significance analysis using the two-sided p-value from Fisher’s exact test. To test the influence of gender, age and teaching experience on teachers’ perception of literacy support, exact p-values for Fisher’s exact test were estimated using Monte Carlo simulation to reduce computation time. Questions were grouped into four activities. Group 1 and group 4 activities had two questions meaning that if all 251 participants answered the questions, there would be 502 responses. Similarly, expected responses to group 2 activities with three questions were 753 and group 3 activities with four questions were 1004. This explains why the numbers exceed the number of participants (251). Not all participants answered all the questions and this appears as missing in relevant sections.

Table 5: The influence of gender perception of support

Group of activities	Question	p-value¹
1	Modelling lessons	0.8431
	Co-presenting lessons	0.1861
2	Providing feedback	0.2875
	Facilitating discussion	0.7075
	Working individually with teachers	0.7613
3	Doing workshops	0.6876
	Promoting differentiated instruction	0.0196
	Helping teachers understand learners’ development of skills	0.3551

	Guidance on the selection of multiple assessment	0.9307
4	Providing materials for teaching	0.8547
	Providing materials for learning	0.8777

¹Fisher's exact test for association of gender with response to the question

To test if there is a difference between male and female teachers' perception of the support provision, teachers' responses were subjected to Fisher's exact test. It could be observed from table 5 that all the p-values, except one (0.0196), are larger than 0.05. This suggests that generally, there is no significant difference between the perception of male and female teachers with regard to the provision of support by school-based instructional leaders. By implication, male and female teachers perceived the provision of support the same way except on the issue of promoting differentiated instruction.

Table 6: The influence of age on perception of support

Group of activities	Question	p-value¹
1	Modelling lessons	<.0001
	Co-presenting lessons	<.0001
2	Providing feedback	<.0001
	Facilitating discussions	<.0001
	Working individually with teachers	<.0001
3	Doing workshops	<.0001
	Promoting differentiated instruction	<.0001
	Helping teachers understand learners' development of skills	<.0001

Guidance on the selection of multiple <.0001
assessment

4 Providing materials for teaching <.0001
Providing materials for learning <.0001

1Fisher’s exact test for association of age with response to the question

Teachers’ responses were further subjected to Fishers’ exact test to explore if age has an influence on their perception of support provision. All the p-values as shown in table 6 above are less than 0.05, meaning that there is a significant association between age and all the responses to group 1-4 activities. This suggests that young and old teachers perceive the support provision from instructional leaders the same way regardless of age.

Table 6: The influence of teaching experience on perception of support

Group activities	Question	p-value ¹
1	Modelling lessons	<.0001
	Co-presenting lessons	<.0001
2	Providing feedback	<.0001
	Facilitating discussions	<.0001
	Working individually with teachers	<.0001
3	Doing workshops	<.0001
	Promoting differentiated instruction	<.0001
	Helping teachers understand learners’ development of skills	<.0001
	Guidance on the selection of multiple assessment	<.0001

4	Providing materials for teaching	<.0001
	Providing materials for learning	<.0001

1Fisher's exact test for association of teaching experience with response to the question

Fisher's exact test was used to test the relationship between teaching experience and support provision. As reflected in table 6 above, all the p-values of group 1-4 activities are less than 0.05. This implies that the teachers' years of teaching experience has an influence on their perception of the support provided by school-based instructional leaders.

6. Discussion

6.1. Teachers' perception of the support provided by school-based instructional leaders

A comprehensive analysis of our findings reflects that HODs mainly support literacy teachers with the most complex activities (lesson modelling and co-presentation of lessons), more complex activities (classroom observation, feedback provision, initiating discussion and individually working with teachers) and least complex activities which involves the provision of teaching and learning resources as part of guidance and support for literacy instruction. This is viewed as effective instructional leadership, which is teacher focused (Christine, Thompson & Whitney, 2009).

Effective leadership involves guiding teachers in lesson planning, modelling, coaching and ensuring that there are enough learner teacher support materials to enhance classroom instruction (Elish-Piper & L'Allier, 2010; Flamini, 2010; Walsh, 2014). However, HODs were outscored by curriculum advisors with regard to provision of support in less complex activities (organising workshops, promoting the use of different methods of instruction, development of reading and writing skills of learners as well as guiding teachers on the selection of multiple forms of assessment). This presents a gap in support provision since instructional leaders are expected to organise workshops and training as part of guidance and support for teachers (Ohlson, 2009) to equip them with knowledge, skills and capacity to function effectively in their classroom instruction.

Teachers' perceptions for senior teachers' support as instructional leaders was relatively low for all variables. This is a challenge since as instructional leaders they would be expected to have profound instructional leadership skills, knowledge and capacity to provide guidance and support to literacy teachers. Pulleyn (2012) asserts that perceptions influence educational norms and practices. Thus, low perceptions can influence teachers' literacy instruction, which leads to poor learner performance. In the South African context, senior teachers are supposed to perform the same roles as HODs in providing support and guidance to teachers (DoE, 1999).

Principals and deputy principals received minimal responses in terms of the perceptions on provision of guidance and support for literacy teachers. Interestingly, in the South African context the PAM document positions deputy principals as curriculum managers in schools (DoE, 1999). This suggests that deputy principals, supported by principals, should be at the core of provision of guidance and support for teachers. This implies that they should actively participate in subject and phase meetings, provide the recommended materials, such as pacesetters and lesson plans and keep in touch with what is happening in the classroom rather than being distant from it (Goslin, 2009).

These findings emphasise a finding by Mkhize (2007) that the DBE in South Africa excels in prescribing roles and responsibilities of instructional leaders but fails to provide programmes that could improve their leadership capabilities. Failure by senior teachers to provide sufficient support highlights certain challenges, including a lack of role classification and collaboration among instructional leaders in primary schools. These findings suggest an urgent need to enhance distributive and collaborative instructional leadership in schools and for the DBE to conduct workshops to clarify the roles and responsibilities of school-based instructional leaders and enhance collaborative leadership. Distributed and collaborative leadership is one of the strategies that could enhance learner performance (Bean & Lillesntein, 2012; Ferguson, 2014).

6.2. The influence of gender, age and teaching experience on teacher perceptions of the support provided by school-based instructional leaders

Literature on the influence of age, gender and teaching experience on teachers' perceptions of the support and guidance provided by school-based instructional

leaders on literacy instruction is quite scarce; hence, this study will add great value. However, other studies have been undertaken looking at other areas. For example, a study undertaken by Hwang and Evans (2011) to explore the influence of age and teaching experience on teachers' perceptions towards inclusive education found that the older teachers become and the more teaching experience they gain, the more they have negative perceptions towards inclusion. This study highlighted that age and teaching experience affects teachers' perceptions. Contrary to other studies, this study found that gender, age and teaching experience do not influence teachers' perceptions (Afolabi, 2013; Jameson-Charles & Jaggernauth, 2015; Kurga, 2014; Yates, 2007).

Although our study was on teachers' perceptions of the support provided by school-based instructional leaders, the results seem to support Hwang and Evans' (2011) study in that age and teaching experience influence teachers' perceptions. The study highlighted that there was a significant difference between the perception of young and old teachers of the support provided by school-based instructional leaders as shown in figure 1 above. Comparatively, young teachers (21-40 years) had poor perceptions of the support provided by curriculum advisors and HODs compared to older teachers (41-60 years) who seem to have positive perceptions. The reason for this disparity in their views may be that young teachers perceive support provision differently from old teachers who had been in the profession for a long time. The study also revealed that teaching experience influences teachers' perceptions of the support provided by school-based instructional leaders for literacy instruction as shown in figure 2 above. However, the results partially agree with the findings by Afolabi (2013), Jameson-Charles and Jaggemauth (2015) and Kurga (2015). Studies have also found that there was no significant difference between the perception of male and female teachers. This means that gender is not a factor in teachers' perceptions of the support provided by school-based instructional leaders. The reason for this could be that teachers of both genders are supported in the same way. However, Whiteman's (2013) study differs with our findings with regard to the relationship between gender and teachers' perceptions. The study found that there is a significant difference between male and female teachers' perceptions of instructional leadership. While it differs with our study on the gender issue, our findings agree in that age and teaching experience influence teachers' perceptions.

7. Conclusion and recommendations

The findings of this study suggest that HODs are playing a prominent role in supporting literacy instruction in the foundation phase while other school-based instructional leaders are providing limited support. These findings would seem to suggest that HODs have the heaviest workload in terms of the expectations to provide the support needed to change literacy instruction in the classrooms and that there is a lack of role clarification and/or collaboration among school-based instructional leaders in primary schools. According to our findings, there were no significant differences between male and female teachers' perceptions. However, the study highlighted that age and teaching experience influences teachers' perceptions. I, therefore, concludes my study by recommending that the structure of instructional leadership should be improved to provide much-needed support for literacy instruction in the foundation phase. This should be done by implementing distributed and collaborative leadership among school-based instructional leaders. Moreover, instructional leadership roles should be shared among school-based instructional leaders. It is also recommended that the DBE consider conducting workshops for school-based instructional leaders to re-orientate them of their roles in supporting literacy instruction and to strengthen collaborative leadership in schools. Motivational sessions should be conducted for old and young teachers, more experienced and less experienced literacy teachers to bridge the gap in their perceptions of support provision for literacy instruction.

8. Implications for the study

Although this study was only conducted in three districts with just 251 literacy teachers, its findings could begin to address the gap in the literature by providing information on teacher perspectives of the support provided by instructional leaders for literacy instruction in the foundation phase. It may also give insight for policymakers as to how instructional leadership could be better structured to improve literacy instruction and learner performance. Through proper understanding of these differences, school-based instructional leaders may benefit from utilising alternative support approaches when dealing with different age groups of teachers as well as more experienced and less experienced teachers. This study adds more value since there is limited research

on the perceptions of literacy teachers of support provision by school-based instructional leaders.

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ARTICLE 2

The effects of instructional leadership on literacy instruction in the foundation phase in Limpopo, South Africa

ABSTRACT

Many local and international assessment programmes reflect that South African learners are performing poorly when compared to their international counterparts. As a result, the Department of Basic Education (DBE) has recently introduced instructional leadership as a strategy for improving learner performance, especially in literacy. While much research exists on the relationship between school principals' instructional leadership practices and learner performance, there are far fewer detailed descriptions of the instructional leadership practices of school-based instructional leaders (principals, deputy principals, heads of departments [HODs] and senior teachers) in supporting literacy teachers and how these practices influence teachers' classroom literacy instruction. Using a qualitative approach, this study aimed to contribute to narrowing the research gap by exploring how and in what ways the practices of school-based instructional leaders affect literacy instruction. Data were obtained through semi-structured interviews with one foundation phase literacy teacher from each of the three districts of Limpopo in South Africa, namely, Vhembe, Sekhukhune and Mopani and was analysed using Tesch's (1990) method of data analysis. The results show that the instructional leadership practices of HODs positively affect literacy instruction compared to those of other school-based instructional leaders. We conclude by recommending a need for the development of training programmes, preferably lasting longer than a year, for all instructional leaders and literacy teachers. Such programmes could strengthen instructional leadership for literacy instruction and enhance teamwork among school-based instructional leaders and teachers. It is also recommended that the DBE in South Africa consider reviewing the responsibilities of HODs, as they seem to be negatively affected by work overload.

Keywords: instructional leadership, literacy instruction, foundation phase, heads of departments

1. Introduction and background

The under-performance of primary school learners in literacy in South Africa, which is reflected in provincial, national and international studies (Fleisch, 2008; Martin, Mullis, Foy & Drucker, 2012; Martin, Mullis & Kennedy, 2007; Spaul, 2013), is a concern for the entire country. As a result, the South African president, Jacob Zuma, set a target for the DBE to ensure that by the year 2014, 60 per cent of learners perform according to the expected level, especially in grades 3 and 6. Training strategies for teachers, policies such as the Annual National Assessment (ANA) (DBE, 2010), the Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) (DBE, 2008), English language across the curriculum (ELAC) (DBE, 2015) and the DBE workbooks were immediately put in place as intervention strategies. A high level of accountability is therefore accorded to school-based instructional leaders in terms of developing strategies to ensure that their schools reach the nationally set targets. Although these intervention strategies might be well placed to improve literacy instruction in the ²foundation phase, little is known about how the leadership practices of school-based instructional leaders affect literacy instruction. Ross and Cozzens (2016) and Weinstein and Hernandez (2016) assert that leadership should serve as a source for school improvement. As such, instructional leaders are expected to perform various instructional leadership functions to ensure effective literacy instruction. These include improving learner performance through effective leadership, building teacher capacity and ensuring that the school vision is clearly defined and well understood by teachers (Gaynor, 2012; Hall & Hord, 2015). It also includes ushering in best instructional methods (Kirtman & Fullan, 2015; Spillane, 2006; The Wallace Foundation, 2012), allocating resources, managing the curriculum, monitoring lesson plans and evaluating teachers to identify areas needing support (Good, 2008).

Seen in the above context, is a global call for all education systems to work collaboratively in developing strategies for improving classroom instruction (Rincón-Gallardo & Elmore, 2012). This presents the DBE with a challenge in South Africa of putting mechanisms in place that help improve learner performance in primary schools, especially in literacy (King, 2013). Instructional leadership has been

² The foundation phase is part of the educational structure of the South African education system.

employed in many countries as a strategy for improving learner performance. Despite the popularity of instructional leadership studies, limited literature is available that explains the practices of school-based instructional leaders in primary schools and how they affect literacy instruction and learner performance in South African primary schools in particular. As such, the effectiveness of school-based leadership as a strategy of improving learner performance has become the focus of the South African government (Govender, Grobler & Mestry, 2015; Ngcobo, 2012). Through their leadership functions, they influence teachers to enhance the effectiveness of their schools (Afshari, Bakar, Luan & Siraji, 2012). In the South African context, principals, deputy principals, HODs and senior teachers perform the functions associated with instructional leaders and instructional coaches. This study sought to answer the following questions: How do school-based instructional leaders enact their practices in supporting literacy instruction in the foundation phase? How do teachers understand these practices? In what ways do these practices influence teachers' classroom instruction?

Several studies have been undertaken in a number of countries to explore the relationship between instructional leadership, teacher instructional methods and learner performance through the implementation of coaching. The results show that in schools where teachers were subjected to coaching there was an improvement in teachers' instructional methods and learners' performance (Cantrell & Hughes, 2008; McCollum, Hemmeter & Hsieh, 2011). Furthermore, Neuman and Cunningham (2009) and Neuman and Wright (2010), in their separate studies on coaching, found that instructional leadership functions such as modelling and co-lesson planning, co-teaching and classroom observations, positively influence teachers' instructional approaches and learner performance. All these studies emphasise a positive relationship between literacy coaching, literacy instruction and learner performance. Gallegos (2016) found that in schools where principals provide support and guidance to teachers by ensuring that they receive suitable Learner-Teacher Support Materials (LTSM), there was a positive culture and enhancement of trust. Accordingly, teachers gained more confidence to apply new ideas, which led to improved learner performance. Therefore, the use of instructional leadership as a strategy of improving learner performance cannot be over emphasised. A similar study, undertaken by

Maree, Mutshaeni, Engelbrecht and Sommerville (2011), to determine the factors leading to high/low performance of learners in Limpopo schools found that the quality of school-based instructional leadership has an effect on learner performance. The current study aims to extend Maree *et al.*'s (2011) findings by exploring how and in what ways the instructional leadership practices of school-based leaders influence literacy instruction in order to recommend ways in which these practices can be better structured to improve literacy instruction.

2. Literature review

Results from international studies such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) cautiously reflect that learners in many countries, including South Africa, are performing below the expected norm in terms of literacy and mathematics (Hanushek & Woessmann, 2010). These studies compare learner performances in different countries and the findings have become the biggest determinant of the effectiveness of the education system in many countries around the world (Schnepf, 2007). As a result, the DBE in South Africa developed a number of intervention strategies to address this problem e.g. the Foundations for Learning Campaign (FFLC) and the ANA. Despite these interventions, learners in South Africa continue to perform poorly in literacy.

The continuing poor performance of learners in literacy could be a wake-up call for school-based instructional leaders to strengthen their instructional leadership functions to support teachers. The teachers will in turn be able to strengthen their instructional skills to improve learner performance, especially in literacy (Dennis, 2009). This could be done by ensuring the availability of resources such as reading materials, lesson plans and pacesetters as well as developing teachers' capacity to use different assessments and instructional methods to cater for the diversified needs of all learners in their classrooms (Aistrup, 2010). This implies that school-based instructional leaders should develop ways in which to equip teachers and inspire them with a stronger sense of professional power and skills to teach learners effectively

(Dennis, 2009). Without effective school-based instructional leaders, learner performance in literacy is unlikely to improve; hence, a need for effective instructional leaders interested in classroom instruction, learner progress and building teacher capacity.

Van Niekerk (2007) postulates that learners' academic performance is dependent on the nature of the instructional leadership functions performed by instructional leaders. This implies that the nature and extent of instructional leadership support for teachers determines the extent of learners' academic performance. As Graczewski, Knudson, and Holtman (2009) state, it is important for instructional leaders to create a favourable teaching and learning environment. Instructional leaders also need to display effective leadership and constructive management, maintain high professional standards for educators and collaborative ownership of the goals of the school. They also need to provide teachers with skills and capacity to improve the reading and writing skills of all learners. Effective instructional leadership can, therefore, be referred to as the leadership functions that build teacher capacity to improve their classroom instruction (Zepeda, 2012). Whether these practices are done in the Limpopo primary schools is still a question that needs to be answered.

The success of a school depends on instructional leaders who are able to guide and support teachers by providing training opportunities to build capacity and motivate them (Calculator, 2010; Downey, Steffy, Poston, & English, 2010). If this indeed happens, teachers will acquire the knowledge, skills and capacity to improve their instruction and impart this knowledge to learners as well as motivate them to read, write and think creatively (Million, 2010). It is therefore incumbent on school-based instructional leaders to conduct capacity-building workshops for teachers to equip them with current teaching and assessment strategies, to carry out classroom observations, to monitor learner progress and to provide instructional facilities and materials that enhance quality teaching-learning (Adeolu, 2012).

Furthermore, instructional leadership focuses on teacher improvement, classroom instruction, educational goals and curriculum development (Banerji & Chavan, 2016; Rofe, Stewart & Wood, 2016; Schleicher, 2016). These key performance areas ensure

that quality teaching and learning takes place, in addition to an improvement in learner performance. Quite often, teachers rely on school-based instructional leaders for information relating to effective instructional practices; therefore, these leaders should be conversant with issues relating to the curriculum, assessment and instructional strategies.

Studies by Hallinger (2012) and Sanzo, Sherman and Clayton (2011) found that instructional leaders in effective schools are characterised by academic goal setting, assessing the effectiveness of teachers' classroom instructional practices and creating opportunities for teachers' professional development (Ada & Gumus, 2012). These are referred to as instructional leadership practices. Based on the literature above, one could argue that it is impossible to improve learner performance without effective instructional leadership practices on the part of school-based instructional leaders. Recent studies have proven the centrality of the effectiveness of these leaders in high learner achievement. For example, a study by Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu and Easton (2010) found that when leaders demonstrate strong instructional leadership, learner achievement drastically increases. This emphasises the need for effective instructional leadership in schools. How leaders influence instructional decisions for better learning outcomes in schools is not as well understood (Jita & Mokhele, 2013, p3); hence, the need for this study.

3. Conceptual framework

Our study proposes the concept of instructional leadership as a framework for exploring the effects of instructional leadership on literacy instruction. Many scholars describe instructional leadership as leadership that influences the quality of education, enhances learner achievement and manages resources to improve teaching and learning (Mestry & Pillay, 2013; Msila, 2012). Bryk *et al.*'s (2010) study found that effective instructional leaders enhance high quality instruction and learner improvement. As such, school-based instructional leadership can be described as the leadership applied by leaders to motivate, enable, support and influence teachers to learn and change their instructional practices. These leaders observe and evaluate

teachers' instructional practices, provide feedback and offer incentives based on teachers and learners' progress (Hallinger, 2012).

In addition, our study adopts Glanz's (2006, p.72) PCOWBIRDS strategy of instructional leadership. Within this framework, school-based instructional leaders assist literacy teachers to develop appropriate and meaningful literacy instructional activities. This is done through planning, conferences, classroom observations, workshops, rearrangement of teaching schedules, sharing common instructional strategies and discussion of common problems they encounter during classroom instruction, modelling and demonstrating lessons for literacy teachers as well as creating opportunities for ongoing, purposeful and knowledge-based staff development.

4. Methodology

This study was part of a broader study that investigated the instructional guidance for literacy instruction in the foundation phase in three districts of Limpopo in South Africa. For this section, we employed a qualitative approach where semi-structured interviews were conducted with one purposefully selected foundation phase literacy teacher (3 in total) from each of the three districts to ascertain the practices of school-based instructional leaders and their effect on literacy instruction. The three teachers were sampled based on their responses during quantitative data collection. We initially intended to draw our sample from five districts but access was not granted by schools in the fourth and fifth districts.

After obtaining ethical clearance from the University of Free State, permission to conduct research was sought from the DBE in Limpopo and from the principals of the selected schools. Accordingly, respondents were requested to complete the informed consent forms and were assured that they are free to exit the study at any time they might wish (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). An interview schedule was drawn up to provide the researchers with a set of predetermined questions with which to engage the participants. This allowed us to ensure that all the important and relevant data are captured (Lichtman, 2013). We visited each school for a period of three weeks to

observe how support for literacy instruction was done and to conduct interviews. All interview sessions lasted for one hour and were recorded with a tape recorder.

Data were analysed using the Tesch (1990) method of qualitative data analysis. All the interviews were transcribed, translated and grouped according to their similarities and differences. This assisted in forming themes that helped in eliminating unwanted data. Our discussion is based on the responses provided by the three respondents we interviewed.

5. Findings

5.1. Development of the skills to cater for the diversified needs of learners in the classrooms

The three literacy teachers we interviewed overwhelmingly agreed that the HODs play a central role in enhancing their skills pertaining to the use of differentiated instruction in the foundation phase compared to other school-based instructional leaders. When asked about how she manages to teach learners with different needs in her classroom, the teacher from Mopani district responded as follows:

Honestly speaking, despite the directive given by White Paper 6 that we have to accommodate learners with special needs in the mainstream, it is not easy as we received no training. I commend our HOD because she closes this gap by organising workshops for us and also invites experts to come and assist us. She is so much overburdened by work. Less can be said of the principal as she has a lot of administrative work and it is not easy for her to meet with us. I just wish that the Department of Education could provide us with more in-service training, which could last for at least twelve months so we can be equipped with skills to use different methods in our classrooms.

Drawing from the statement above, one can infer that although there is only one HOD in this school, she tries to fulfil her instructional leadership roles. Insufficient training as singled out by the teacher remains a major problem. The teachers' response suggests that the DBE is not doing enough in this area. A lack of training on the implementation of White Paper 6 serves as an example. Given this response, an

interest arose to explore how other teachers deal with the diversified needs of learners. The extract below captures the feelings of a teacher stationed in Vhembe district.

I am very disappointed with the DBE. They introduced the policy on inclusive education where we are all expected to teach learners with special needs. The most challenging factor is that no training was provided, except a microwaving session which took one hour to deal with all issues of the policy. I give credit to our HOD who organised a school-based workshop on the policy.

Looking at the two extracts above, there is convergence on commending the role played by the HOD in providing internal training. The issue of insufficient training by the DBE also appears to be a common denominator. It is thus crucial for researchers to explore what district leaders are doing to support literacy instruction in the foundation phase.

A teacher from the Sekhukhune District supported the above views, saying:

...White paper 6 implies mainstreaming, and also giving individual attention to the diverse needs of learners. Unfortunately, due to lack of support from our SMT, as teachers we just use “one-size-fits-all” approach with no variation according to learners’ needs.

5.2. Development of strategies to improve the reading and writing skills of learners

Our next interview question explored the way school-based instructional leaders assist teachers by developing strategies for improving the reading and writing skills of learners, since this is a major challenge in the country. There were mixed feelings among the three interviewed teachers with regard to the role of these instructional leaders in developing such strategies. Below is an excerpt from our interview with the teacher from the Mopani district.

Year in and year out, the SMT instruct us to develop strategies of improving reading and writing which are then submitted to the circuit. Quarterly, we are expected to submit an implementation report. Honestly speaking, we just write and submit for the sake of compliance as we don’t really understand. The unfortunate part is that this seem to be a widespread problem across the province and maybe even nationally.

Views expressed in the above excerpt further builds into the assertion that the DBE is not supporting educators in their instruction. Teachers are mainly left to their own accord to improvise. An interesting, contradicting view arose from an interview conducted with a teacher from the Vhembe district.

All our SMT members always have their hands on the deck when it comes to matters of reading and writing. They don't leave things to chance. Each day commences with an assembly where learners are given opportunities to read before others. Additional time is also set aside for reading and writing competitions where incentives are also given.

The sentiments above reflect that informed, proactive SMT members can positively influence learners' reading and writing capabilities.

As a complement to this view, an extract from an interview with a teacher from Sekhukhune reflects the following:

When it comes to improving the reading and writing skills of learners, our SMT is tops. They established a partnership with a library in a nearby township. Learners frequently visit the library. This stimulates their passion for reading books. World read aloud day, spelling bee and Readathon are some of the activities we pride ourselves by participation in.

The two teachers above agree that their school-based instructional leaders support literacy instruction through many different strategies.

Our next focus was on how school-based instructional leaders support literacy teachers by addressing their individual instructional needs.

5.3. Addressing the individual instructional needs of teachers

In responding to this question, two of the teachers working in different districts shared similar views.

Despite that reading and writing are critical in grade 3, these issues are rarely put on the table as agenda items. The HOD gives herself time to address and resolve our individual instructional needs. When you struggle with lesson preparation or

presentation she would come and teach together with you or model the lesson until you gain understanding on how to do it (Sekhukhune district).

A different teacher working in another school in a different district expressed a similar view, characterising it as follows:

I love the way our HOD is showing interests in our well-being both professionally and individually. She is one person one can count on. She also serves as relief teacher (Mopani District).

These two interview extracts applaud the work done by HODs in addressing the individual needs of teachers despite their heavy workload. An interesting point to note is that the HOD is regarded as always being available to assist literacy teachers and as being involved in classroom activities. She is also commended for her availability to fill the gap whenever a teacher is absent. With such commitment, teachers have no choice but to follow their leader in working hard to improve learner performance.

The interviews with the two teachers above aroused our interest to continue the interview with the teacher in the Sekhukhune district to explore whether she shares the same views as her counterparts from the Mopani and Vhembe districts. She did not; this is how she expressed herself:

Our SMT does not have time for that, I cannot remember a single day where I had a one-on-one talk with any of the SMT members. We just discuss our frustrations as colleagues and assist each other. Sometimes we do not get solutions and we just have to leave with our frustrations.

The extract above suggests an unhealthy relationship between school-based instructional leaders and the teachers. The teachers blame the leaders for their unavailability to assist them to solve problems. This leaves the teachers frustrated. According to this teacher, they rely on their fellow teachers for solutions to the problems they encounter. One positive point to note in the above extract is that there seems to be close collaboration among literacy teachers since they are able to support one another.

5.4. Creation of opportunities for professional development

Since professional development is one area recommended for improving teacher instruction, we explored how this is done in the Limpopo primary schools. When asked how they are informed about opportunities for professional development, one teacher in the Mopani district responded as follows:

Our curriculum advisor sometimes provides us with information about free bursaries for further studies. At least if there were enough curriculum advisors maybe there would be workshops to train us, but in our circuit there is no foundation phase curriculum advisor, let alone for literacy instruction. Our HODs also tries to seek information for available opportunities for our professional development

Another teacher in a different district had this to say:

...The circuit office often sends information about opportunities for further studies; our HOD collects the information from the circuit office and passes to us. Due to the fact that we have few curriculum advisors, it is sometimes not easy to get the information.

Two important points to note in the two extracts above is that the circuit office assists in making information available to the HOD, who in turn passes it on to the educators. A disturbing comment made by one of the teachers is that curriculum advisors are scarce. This is a challenge since they are the ones who have to provide support and guidance for the school-based instructional leaders and literacy teachers. A teacher in our third interview in the Sekhuhune district made the following points:

I have never received information about professional development from the SMT. However, because I want to improve, I have registered myself for a degree but it is not in languages. It is not easy because I have to pay for my studies meanwhile the knowledge I gain will benefit the department. Sometimes even when you complete your studies your notch will remain the same, that's why most of the teachers in our school are not studying further because the DBE does not recognise our efforts.

As per the above assertion, the DBE's practice of not rewarding further qualifications discourages teachers from studying further.

5.5. Best strategies for improving teachers' instructional methods

Our next area of focus was to explore whether teachers are given suggestions for improvement. A teacher in the Mopani district shares her views as follows:

Our HOD not only conducts classroom observations, but also provides suggestions on how to improve in our instructions. Our deputy principal also does that sometimes. She often sample one teacher per term per grade for class visit. At the end of each term, she gives general report about the findings on her class visit and suggests strategies for improvement.

The HOD is again commended for her support to literacy teachers by suggesting strategies for improving their instructional methods. The deputy principal is also commended for sometimes giving such support. Nothing was said about the extent of support given by the principal and the senior teachers.

Another teacher working in the Vhembe district partially agreed with the view in the extract above. When we asked her the same question, she said the following,

...Our SMT only conduct class visits, after class visits we are not even given feedback on their findings nor told on how to improve.

An important point raised in this extract is the lack of feedback after classroom observations. This is a serious omission since feedback assists teachers to develop mechanisms to improve. In our third interview, the teacher working in the Sekhukhune district had this to say:

No one is assisting us to improve our teaching methods, in fact I do not care because the methods I am using are best for my learners. If I can call one of my learners to read for you, you cannot believe it's a grade 2 learner. The SMT members never supported us; they are only concerned with number of classwork we have given to learners per term.

The issues raised by the teacher above could suggest that she is not willing to change since she views the methods she is using as being best for her learners. Based on her inputs, it seems that school-based instructional leaders are only concerned with the quantity of work done.

6. Discussion of the findings

The main aim of this study was to explore the way in which school-based instructional leaders in the foundation phase enact their instructional leadership practices, how literacy teachers understand them and what effect they have on literacy instruction. Our discussion is thus organised into three themes. Firstly, we answer the question: how do school-based instructional leaders enact their instructional leadership practices to improve literacy instruction in the foundation phase. Secondly, we discuss how foundation phase literacy teachers understand such practices and, lastly, we discuss the effect of the instructional leadership practices of school-based instructional leaders on literacy instruction in the foundation phase.

6.1. How school-based instructional leaders enact their instructional leadership practices to improve literacy instruction in the foundation phase

This broad theme is best responded to by ascertaining how best school-based instructional leaders equip teachers with skills to cater for the diverse needs of learners in their classrooms, strategies to improve the reading and writing abilities of learners and improve the teachers' instructional methods and lastly to address their individual instructional needs. We based our investigation on the fact that the quality of the instructional leadership has an effect on learner performance (Maree *et al.*, 2011). Quality leaders motivate, support and influence teachers to implement new effective instructional strategies and practices (Knight, 2007; Mestry & Pillay, 2013). These are some of the effective instructional leadership practices one would expect school-based instructional leaders to perform in order to enhance learner performance. Consolidated responses on how teachers feel they are equipped with strategies to address the diversified needs of learners in their classes reflect that HODs conduct internal workshops and invite experts as part of their task of equipping teachers with skills to cater for the diversified needs of learners in their classrooms. This constitutes the major findings in this study regarding HODs being the ones who play this role although curriculum advisors also run workshops. The role of other instructional leaders in this regard seems to be invisible. This is quite challenging since White Paper 6 on inclusive education advocates that all schools must cater for the diversified needs of all learners (Department of Education [DoE], 2001). Responding to teachers' needs and concerns

would instil positive attitudes towards and consequently lead to improved learner performance (Sanzo *et al.*, 2011).

In ascertaining how school-based instructional leaders address their individual instructional needs, the findings suggest that HODs address the professional and individual needs of teachers. They are able to model lessons to individual struggling teachers, co-present lessons with them and attend to their personal needs. This, in a way, enhances teachers' instructional methods and practices and by doing this, raises their morale. Other school-based instructional leaders seem to be less involved in executing this task. This is quite a serious omission since school-based instructional leaders would be expected to usher in best instructional methods to enhance teachers' instruction (Kirtman & Fullan, 2015; Spillane, 2006; The Wallace Foundation, 2012), allocate resources, manage the curriculum, monitor lesson plans and evaluate teachers to identify areas that require support (Good, 2008). This would empower educators with a stronger sense of professional power and skills to teach effectively (Dennis, 2009). Failure of other school-based instructional leaders to offer such support would render literacy instruction ineffective; therefore, failing to address the global call for all countries to improve literacy instruction (Gallardo & Elmore, 2012).

For effective teaching and learning to take place, instructional leaders need to assist teachers with the development of strategies to improve their instructional methods (Manders, 2008). This would serve as a source for the improvement of learner performance (Ross & Cozzens, 2016; Weinstein & Hernandez, 2016). In line with the above assertion, our findings seem to suggest that when it comes to crafting strategies for improving the reading and writing skills of learners, HODs were helping teachers by organising reading and writing competitions. Principals, deputy principals and senior teachers seem not to be doing enough. This raises a serious concern since according to the Personnel Administrative Measures (PAM) document, deputy principals in South Africa are positioned as curriculum managers; senior teachers are supposed to assume the duties of HODs, while principals are the overall accounting officers (DoE, 1999). The success of a school depends on instructional leaders who are able to guide and support teachers by providing training opportunities to build capacity in teachers and motivate them (Calculator, 2010; Downey *et al.*, 2009). If this

indeed happens, teachers will acquire the knowledge, skills and capacity to improve their instruction and impart this knowledge to learners as well as motivate them to read, write and think creatively (Million, 2010). It is therefore incumbent on school-based instructional leaders to conduct capacity-building workshops for teachers to equip them with current teaching and assessment strategies. This seems far from being realised in some of the Limpopo primary schools as reflected in our study.

6.2. How foundation phase literacy teachers understand the practices of school-based instructional leaders in supporting literacy instruction

Bryk *et al.*'s study (2010) highlight that school-based instructional leaders are the driving force for achieving high quality instruction and improving learner performance. However, teachers in our study seem to perceive HODs as the only instructional leaders who are striving to support literacy instruction. Indeed, principals, deputy principals and senior teachers were perceived as doing little or nothing at all. This is presented as a challenge since the above study emphasises that for high quality instruction and learner improvement to occur, school-based instructional leaders have to work together to provide teachers with all the support they might require. Such support includes, among other things, setting clear goals to guide instruction and aligning the curriculum with instruction (Hallinger, 2012; Sanzo *et al.*, 2011). Teachers seem to feel that there is a serious gap regarding the communication of district goals. If educators are not clear regarding what the district and schools aim to achieve, it might create conflict in the school as individual educators might set their own goals.

6.3. The effect of school-based instructional leadership practices on literacy instruction in the foundation phase

Mestry and Pillay (2013) define school instructional leadership as the leadership that entails influencing the quality of education in schools, enhancing learner achievement, managing resources to improve teaching and learning as well as effective pedagogy and curriculum management. All these are supposed to be done by school-based instructional leaders. Aistrup (2010) adds that if these tasks are performed effectively, teaching instruction is likely to improve, which in turn will improve learner performance.

Furthermore, Glanz's (2006, p. 72) PCOWBIRDS strategy for instructional leadership emphasises that for instructional leaders to have an effect on literacy instruction, they

should assist teachers with developing teaching plans. They should also have conferences with them, observe them in class, provide resources, model and demonstrate lessons to enhance their instruction, conduct workshops and provide them with all the information they need to support their instruction. Our findings seem to suggest that this is only partially done in the Limpopo primary schools, as HODs seem to be the only instructional leaders whose leadership roles have an effect on literacy instruction.

All these findings seem to suggest that the instructional leadership functions of HODs have positive effects on literacy instruction in the foundation phase compared to those of principals, deputy principals and senior teachers. A challenge unveiled in this study was that HODs seem to be overloaded as they are not only actively involved in the improvement of literacy instruction and learner performance in reading and writing but also have to teach as they are allocated certain subjects.

7. Implications for the study

Although many previous studies have explored instructional leadership practices in schools, little has been done to explore how effective those practices are, especially in literacy instruction. Despite the limited number of participants in this study, it has important implications for instructional leaders, literacy teachers and the DBE. Accordingly, the findings should motivate the Department of Education to revisit the job descriptions of school-based instructional leaders, highlighting the enhancement of teamwork, since HODs seem to be working in isolation. It is also hoped that this study will help fill the gap in literature relating to the effect of instructional leadership practices on literacy instruction.

8. Conclusion and recommendations

The findings revealed that instructional leadership especially that of the HOD has a significant positive impact on literacy instruction in the foundation phase. Despite the outstanding support received from HODs, most participants still complained about the lack of professional development opportunities provided by the DBE, in particular the lack of training related to teaching learners with special needs and the scarcity of

curriculum advisors. We therefore recommend that in South Africa, the DBE develop training programmes for in-service training for all instructional leaders and literacy teachers, preferably lasting for longer than a year. Such programmes could strengthen instructional leadership for literacy instruction in the foundation phase and enhance teamwork among instructional leaders and teachers. We also recommend that the DBE in South Africa consider reviewing the responsibilities of HODs, as they seem to be overloaded. If their job description could be reduced to monitoring and support, and they were excluded from day-to-day teaching, they could have more of an effect on literacy instruction, as they seem to be committed to effective teaching and learning.

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ARTICLE 3

District leadership practices for literacy instruction in the foundation phase in Limpopo, South Africa

Abstract

Several studies have highlighted the national outcry at the poor literacy performance of South African learners when compared to their international counterparts. Consequently, literacy instruction has moved to the centre stage in the education system. School-based instructional leaders and literacy teachers are faced with a critical challenge of meeting the high national accountability standards. While this might be important, what is often overlooked is the responsibility of district leaders in supporting literacy instruction in primary schools. Using a mixed methods approach and instructional leadership as a lens, the study reported on here explored the practices of district leaders on improving literacy instruction in three districts of Limpopo in South Africa. Two hundred and fifty-one foundation phase literacy teachers completed a questionnaire intended to establish the district leadership practices that support literacy instruction. To validate the quantitative findings, semi-structured interviews were conducted with two primary school principals and two heads of departments in two districts, namely, Vhembe and Mopani. Statistical analysis was carried out using the FREQ procedure of the SAS/STAT 13.1 software. Data collected from the interviews was analysed by using the Tesch (1990) method of qualitative data analysis and subsequently units, categories and themes were identified. Our major findings suggest that schools have limited support because of, among other things, a shortage of curriculum advisors and formally employed circuit-based lead teachers. The study recommends an urgent intervention to strengthen district leadership support structures for literacy instruction in primary schools by addressing the limitations flagged by this study.

Keywords: district instructional leaders, curriculum advisors, literacy instruction, learner improvement, foundation phase

1. Introduction and background

Improvement of learner performance in literacy has become a focus in many countries including South Africa. This is due to the local and international assessment programmes that continue to reflect poor performance on the part of South African learners compared to their international counterparts (Progress in International Reading Literacy Study [PIRLS], 2006; Southern and East Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality [SACMEQ], 2011; Spaul, 2013). The Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) (2008) suggests that failure of learners to acquire the required educational knowledge and skills in the middle grades (grades 3, 6 and 9) could lead to among others, failure in high school, universities and could even lead to dropouts at tertiary level (Balfanz, 2009). This presents an unparalleled challenge to the possible economic gains of the country since they will be ill equipped to compete in the 21st century workforce and economy (Lincoln, 2009). Many studies have since been undertaken to explore the causes of poor learner performance in schools. In two such studies, Bayat, Louw and Rena (2014) and Murphy and Meyers (2009) suggest that the continuous poor performance of learners could be attributed to among others, poor levels of leadership at schools.

The continuous underperformance of learners in South Africa has led to the development of several intervention strategies in an attempt to address the problem. One such recently introduced intervention strategy was the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS), which provide a clear approach to and directives for effective literacy instruction, especially in primary schools. These policy guidelines placed more expectations and accountability on school-based instructional leaders and literacy teachers. While these parties have been placed at the centre of improving learner performance, what is often overlooked is the responsibility of district leaders in improving literacy instruction, especially in primary schools. Moorosi and Bantwini (2016) and Baroody (2011) point out that district leaders have a responsibility to change the status of underperforming schools into one of high performing schools. Limited studies have been done to explore the practices of district leaders in improving learner performance in literacy, especially in South Africa. It is against this background that we sought to explore the practices of district leaders in improving learner

performance in the foundation phase. The policy on the organisation, roles and responsibilities of education districts in South Africa clearly stipulates that district leaders should ensure that learners receive high quality education by providing professional support to school-based instructional leaders and building their capacity to achieve excellence (DBE, 2013). Whether these practices are performed in the districts in Limpopo is still a question that needs to be explored. We aimed to fill this gap in literature by exploring the practices of district leaders in improving literacy instruction as the biggest challenge in the country.

The centrality of district leaders in improving learner performance has been well documented in literature (Bantwini, 2015; Bantwini & Diko, 2011; Rorrer, Skrla & Scheurich, 2008). As such, district leaders would be expected to perform several leadership functions that improve learner performance. These include being actively involved in teacher development activities (Leithwood, Harris & Strauss, 2010), making their vision of effective instruction and assessment known to school-based instructional leaders and literacy teachers (Westerberg, 2013) and ensuring that all role-players clearly understand their vision and provide all resources needed to realise that vision. Furthermore, they should provide effective support and guidance for school-based instructional leaders and teachers, equip them with the best teaching and assessment strategies, enhance their capacity and remove all obstacles that could lead to ineffective literacy instruction (Freisen & Lock, 2010). Marzano and Waters (2009) recommend that district leaders, school-based instructional leaders and teachers should work as a team to set non-negotiable targets for instruction and learner performance. These findings all emphasise the centrality of district leaders in improving classroom instruction and learner performance.

Moorosi and Bantwini (2016) undertook a study to investigate how district leaders support school improvement in the Eastern Cape, South Africa. Although the study was more on leadership styles, it found that there was a lack of collaboration among district leaders and school-based instructional leaders with regard to district-wide decision-making and that district leaders were not providing effective support to schools. This was attributed to amongst other things, a lack of capacity amongst

district leaders as well as a lack of transport to visit school to provide support. There is limited research on the practices of district leaders in supporting literacy instruction in South Africa. Using a mixed methods approach and instructional leadership as a theoretical framework, this study aims to narrow the gap in the literature by exploring the practices of district leaders in supporting literacy instruction in primary schools. In the context of our study, district leaders will be referred to as curriculum advisors. Our study sought to explore the instructional leadership practices available to support literacy instruction as well as the forms of support provided by curriculum advisors to ensure that there is effective literacy instruction in the foundation phase and how such support is provided.

2. Literature review

This study forms part of a broader study that explored the provision of guidance and support for literacy instruction in the foundation phase. This paper specifically focuses on the provision of guidance and support for literacy instruction by curriculum advisors. We sought to answer the following question: What are the practices of district curriculum advisors in improving literacy instruction in the foundation phase?

Recently, many studies have been undertaken to explore the role of curriculum advisors in improving learner performance (Canole & Richardson, 2014; Corcoran, Casserly, Price-Baugh, Walston, Hall & Simon, 2013). All these studies emphasise that curriculum advisors are key role players in improving learner performance. As such, they should perform their instructional leadership functions effectively. Mourshed, Chijoki and Barber (2010) undertook a study to investigate the relationship between district instructional leadership practices and learner performance. The results showed that where district leaders played a central role in influencing the instructional practices in schools, there was evidence of high learner attainments. Could this imply that the poor performance of learners in Limpopo could be attributed to curriculum advisors not being positioned or enabled to perform a central role in providing support for literacy instruction? Our study sought to shed some light on this question.

An instructional leader or coach is a person who provides guidance to teachers by recognising their knowledge and what they are capable of doing (Toll, 2005). For the purposes of this study, a literacy instructional leader is someone who works with teachers to bring literacy practices that have been studied using a variety of research methods into the classroom. The purpose of these instructional leaders is, therefore, to provide planned support and guidance to teachers to improve in their professional learning so that they may build their own capacity. To capacitate teachers, however, literacy instructional leaders should possess three broad categories of skills, namely literacy pedagogical knowledge, content expertise and interpersonal capabilities (Steiner & Kowal, 2007). Thus, firstly, effective literacy instructional leaders should have a thorough understanding of literacy as well as the curriculum that is in use, in this context, CAPS. Secondly, literacy instructional leaders should be experienced teachers who have a thorough understanding of how children learn, who are skilled in developing and implementing instructional strategies and who have demonstrated success in the classroom. Thirdly, literacy instructional leaders must possess strong interpersonal skills and competences, such as the ability to build relationships, establish trust and credibility as well as tailor assistance to the individual educator's needs. Therefore, curriculum advisors, as district instructional leaders, should perform all the activities aimed at guiding and empowering school-based instructional leaders and literacy teachers to enable them to improve the quality of literacy teaching and learning in schools.

However, the overarching question is, amidst the crisis of poor learner performance in literacy facing many countries, what are curriculum advisors doing to support literacy instruction? According to Fletcher, Greenwood, Grimley and Parkhill (2011), instructional leadership should not be limited to the school setting but should go beyond the school walls. This implies that all stakeholders in the school community should work together and participate in instructional leadership practices to guide literacy instruction. There is a dire need for curriculum leaders to establish a relationship between policies that are designed and the support received by teachers (Geneva & Santa, 2010). This suggests that they should be actively involved in literacy instruction and building the capacity of school-based instructional leaders and literacy teachers through professional development. A study by Hargreaves and Shirley (2009)

suggests that there is a need for districts as well as provincial and national instructional leaders to design policies in such a way that they make room for instructional change. More emphasises was placed on a need to provide guidance and support and give direction on what needs to be implemented in order to achieve the desired results.

To enhance classroom instruction, curriculum advisors should create structures that empower educators to carry out their duties effectively (Saunders, Goldenberg & Gallimore, 2009; Levin, 2008) and help close achievement gaps (Foley & Sigler, 2009). One of those structures is teacher organisation. Freisen and Lock (2010) found that high performing districts ensure that there are sufficient learner-teacher support materials and policy alignment; hence, emphasising their centrality.

The literature above has shown that districts are at the centre stage in enhancing change in schools and that district intervention could contribute to an improvement in learner performance, especially in the area of literacy, which is the focus of our study.

3. Conceptual framework

The study proposes instructional leadership as a mechanism for establishing the practices of curriculum advisors in support of literacy instruction and learner performance in order to recommend the best ways in which district support structures could be enhanced to improve these issues. The following diagram illustrates the conceptual framework we developed for this study.

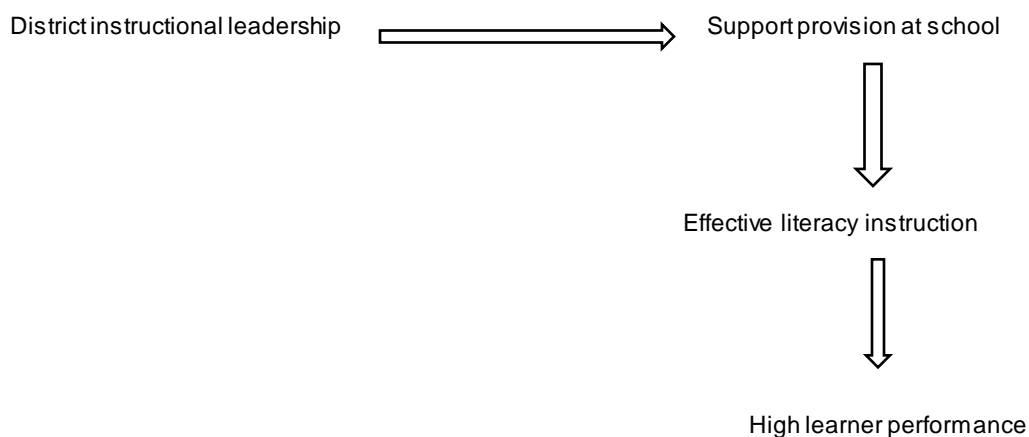


Figure 1: Effective instructional leadership

To understand the practices of curriculum advisors in improving literacy instruction, we developed our own original concept as illustrated in figure 1 above. Our conceptual framework consists of four parts, namely district leadership practices, support provision in schools, effective literacy instruction and high learner performance. Our framework suggests that district leaders should provide schools with effective support. This can be done by establishing goals that school-based instructional leaders and literacy teachers clearly understand (Murphy & Hallinger, 1988). Accordingly, this will lead to effective literacy instruction and eventually to high learner performance in literacy. This suggests that district leaders should equip school-based instructional leaders with the skills and knowledge required to lead literacy instruction and monitor progress in the implementation of any policy or intervention strategy. The centrality of district leaders in learner performance cannot be over emphasised, as districts are perceived as key role players in educational change (Marzano & Waters, 2009).

Under the current structure, curriculum advisors are deployed across the districts in South Africa (although they are ³scarce). They are supposed to provide planned support intended to guide teachers to progress in their professional learning, to build their own capacity. They are required to have literacy knowledge, content expertise and interpersonal skills (Toll, 2009). The curriculum advisory service of the Department of Basic Education is therefore an important component in the support of schools. This unit is responsible for, inter alia, effective leadership that focuses on learner achievement and learning, the development of clear goals that identify how learner achievement may be improved and the creation of opportunities for meaningful professional development (DBE, 2009). School-based instructional leaders, with the assistance of curriculum advisors, are therefore expected to join hands and play a

³ We initially wanted to interview curriculum advisors but we found that in many districts in Limpopo there was one or no curriculum advisor responsible for all foundation phase subjects. They were not easy to reach because of the work overload.

leading role in supporting and encouraging literacy teachers in implementing all initiatives intended to improve literacy instruction and learner performance.

4. Methodology

This paper forms part of a broader study that investigated the instructional guidance for literacy teaching in the foundation phase. Other papers focused on support provision at school level. This paper specifically focuses on the district support. The study was constructed as an explanatory mixed methods project where, firstly, quantitative data were collected and analysed. This involved administering questionnaires to 251 foundation phase literacy teachers from the Mopani, Sekhukhune and Vhembe districts of Limpopo to establish the practices of district instructional leaders in supporting literacy instruction in the foundation phase. The questionnaire comprised two sections. The first section asked questions concerning the demographic characteristics of participants while the second section consisted of key questions related to the practices of district leaders in their support of literacy instruction in the foundation phase. Teachers marked with a cross to indicate which literacy coach, if any, primarily provided support for the given task. Participants were divided into 7 age groups and 7 groups of teaching experience. The responses to these questions were treated as nominal categorical data.

The survey was followed by semi-structured interviews with two HODs and two primary school principals from the Mopani and Vhembe districts to validate the quantitative findings (Creswell, 2014). Interviews were conducted for a period of three weeks.

After obtaining ethical clearance from the University of the Free State, permission to conduct research was sought from the DBE in Limpopo and from the principals of the participating schools. Participants were requested to complete informed consent forms prior to their participation in the study.

Statistical analysis for quantitative data was carried out using the FREQ procedure of the SAS/STAT 13.1 software (SAS, 2013). The seven (7) age groups in the instrument were pooled into three approximately equally large groups of 26-40 years, 41-50 years and 51-60 years. The seven (7) teaching experience groups were also pooled into

three approximately equally large groups of 5-15 years, 16-25 years and 26-40 years. The pooling was done to have reasonably large groups of participants.

Data from the interviews were captured and analysed qualitatively using the Tesch (1990) method of data analysis. Units, categories and themes from the interviews were identified.

5. FINDINGS

5.1. Quantitative research findings

A summary of the statistics and responses gleaned from the questionnaires is presented first followed by a detailed analysis. We first present the demographic characteristics of our participants.

5.1.1. Demographic characteristics of participants

Table 1: Biographical data of teachers in the quantitative part of the study

		Literacy teachers	
Variable	Level	Frequency	Total (n)
Overall		N (%)	251
Gender	Female	235 (93.63)	251
	Male	16 (6.37)	
Age	26-30 years	4 (1.59)	251
	31-35 years	8 (3.19)	
	36-40 years	34 (13.55)	
	41-45 years	69 (27.49)	
	46-50 years	37(14.74)	
	51-55 years	78 (31.08)	
	56-60 years	21 (8.37)	
Teaching experience	5-10 years	54 (21.51)	251
	11-15 years	31 (12.35)	
	16-20 years	49 (19.52)	

21-25 years	51 (20.32)	
26-30 years	36 (14.34)	
31-35 years	29 (11.55)	
36-40 years	1 (0.40)	

There were 251 participants comprising 235 (93.63%) females and 16 (6.37%) males as reflected in table 1 above. The biggest age group of the respondents across all the questions (31.8%) was between 51-55 years followed by those aged between 41-45 years (27.49%). The next largest group was 46-50 years old (14.74%) followed by the 36-40 year age group (13.55%) and the 56-60 year age group (8.37%). The lowest 2 age groups were between 31-35 years old (3.19%) and 26-30 years old (1.59%). The conclusion that can be drawn from this observation is that the respondents were more mature.

The teaching experience of participants ranged from 5-40 years. The highest number was between 5-10 years (21.51%) followed by 21-25 years (20.32%), 16-20 years (19.52%), 26-30 years (14.34%), 11-15 years (12.35%) and 31-35 years (11.55%) respectively. The least was between 36-40 years (0.40%). This suggests that most respondents were probably less experienced in their profession; hence, one can expect them to have less insight into the issues under investigation.

5.1.2. District support for literacy instruction

The study explored district curriculum advisors' actions towards the improvement of literacy instruction in the foundation phase. District leaders in our study are referred to as curriculum advisors. To establish the practices of district leaders in improving literacy, we grouped the support activities into four groups. Group 1 activities explored whether curriculum advisors perform instructional leadership functions such as lesson modelling and co-presentation of lessons. Through the second group of activities, we wished to explore district leaders' role in building teacher capacity in literacy instruction, as this is the key aspect of improving their performance in the classroom. The third group of activities focused on advocacy. We aimed to establish whether workshops are organised at district level to equip teachers with literacy knowledge and skills. The last group of activities explored whether district leaders support teachers by

ensuring that sufficient literacy learner-teacher support materials are distributed to schools.

We further explored whether districts communicate their goals to schools as well as the role played by district leaders in improving literacy instruction in directing literacy instruction and providing information about opportunities for professional development. A detailed presentation of the findings is illustrated in tables 2-9 below.

Table 2: Group 1 activities

Instructional leader	Frequency	Percentage
Principal	11	1.19
Deputy principal	12	2.39
HOD	255	44.82
Senior teacher	49	9.79
Curriculum advisor	128	25.50
None	77	15.34

As reflected in table 2 above, curriculum advisors were ranked second by 25.50% of the participants with regard to support provision through modelling of lessons and co-presentation of lessons. HODs were ranked first.

Table 3: Group 2 activities

Instructional leader	Frequency	Percentage
None	230	30.59
Principal	35	4.65
Deputy principal	32	4.26
HOD	349	46.41
Senior teacher	64	8.51
Curriculum advisor	42	5.59
Missing=1		

A disturbing finding in table 3 above is that only 5.59% of the participants perceived curriculum advisors as leaders who support them through capacity building. This is quite worrying since it is one of the duties of curriculum advisors. They are supposed to ensure that school-based instructional leaders and teachers are well capacitated to perform their classroom functions. One respondent did not respond to this question. Our next point of interest was to establish support provision through advocacy. Our findings are reflected in table 4 below

Table 4: Group 3 activities

Instructional leader	Frequency	Percentage
None	113	11.27
Principal	38	3.79
Deputy principal	38	3.79
HOD	261	26.2
Senior teacher	72	7.18
Curriculum advisor	481	47.96

Missing=1

In terms of advocacy, curriculum advisors ranked highest in that 47.96% of the participants chose them as the group that provided the most support (table 4). This activity involves conducting workshops, assisting and teaching teachers to understand learners' development of skills as well as helping teachers in choosing learner assessments tools.

Table 5: Group 4 activities

Instructional leader	Frequency	Percentage
None	35	6.97
Principal	54	10.76
Deputy principal	18	3.59
HOD	211	42.03
Senior teacher	53	10.6

Table 5 above presents an interesting observation in that 26.10% of the participants view curriculum advisors as coaches who provide resource materials as part of guidance and support for literacy instruction, despite the fact that curriculum advisors are district-based and do not directly distribute resources to teachers. They were rated second behind the HODs in the survey. More will be discussed under the discussion section.

Communication of clear district goals to schools to make them aware of what is expected of them is one of the critical roles of curriculum advisors. This issue was also explored and the results are shown in table 6 below.

Table 6: Communication of district clear goals

Instructional leader	Frequency	Percentage
None	0	0.00
Principal	191	76.1
Deputy principal	30	12.0
HOD	30	12.0
Senior teacher	0	0.00
Curriculum advisor	0	0.00

Frequency missing= 1

Table 6 above presents an outcome (not easily synchronised with other findings, therefore, grounds for absurdity), which indicates that curriculum advisors do not communicate clear district goals to schools, as none of the respondents felt that they do. This finding seriously contradicts the findings that emerged from other responses by the same respondents. This response might have emerged because of the uncondusive environment in which curriculum advisors operate due to their short supply.

Our next focus was on exploring the role played by curriculum advisors in improving literacy instruction. Table 7 below illustrates our findings.

Table 7: Role of curriculum advisors in improving literacy instruction

Level of role	Frequency	Percentage
Minimal role	5	5.0
Moderate role	15	15.0
Bigger role	80	80.0
Total	100	100
Missing system	151	
Total	251	

As reflected in table 7 above, the majority of the respondents (80%) believed curriculum advisors play a significant role in improving literacy instruction while 15% indicated that they play a moderate role. Five (5%) felt that they play a minimal role. The finding above aroused our interest in exploring more about whether curriculum advisors provide direction to schools with regard to literacy instruction.

Table 8: Role of curriculum advisors in providing direction

Level of direction	Frequency	Percentage
No direction	67	67.0
Moderate direction	25	25.0
Adequate direction	8	8.0
Total	100	

With regard to the provision of direction, the responses seem to give an impression that there might be teachers who had an opportunity to meet with curriculum advisors and those who did not. The majority of the respondents (67%) felt that curriculum advisors provide no direction at all for literacy instruction. Twenty-five (25%) indicated that they provide adequate direction while 8% indicated that they provide moderate direction.

Table 9: Provision for information about opportunities for professional development

Instructional leader	Frequency	Percentage
None	13	5.2
Principal	15	6.0
Deputy principal	20	8.0
HOD	41	16.3
Senior teacher	12	4.8
Curriculum advisor	150	59.8

According to the results depicted in table 9 above, 59.8% of the respondents felt that curriculum advisors provide information about opportunities for professional development to schools.

The interviews with the HODs and school principals validated the data obtained from the survey. The next section presents the findings derived from the participant interviews.

5.2. Qualitative research findings

This section discusses the interview findings based on interviewees' responses. We wanted to explore the views of HODs and school principals on the instructional practices of district officers with regard to literacy instruction. Our interviews started with two primary school principals.

The common means for support by curriculum advisors as district leaders were highlighted as follows: conducting reading competitions, monitoring the use of workbooks in preparation of the ANAs and partnerships with teacher organisations. One principal from the Vhembe district shared her sentiments on this as follows:

I think the district is doing its best despite the limited human resource. They organise a number of reading competitions to enhance the reading abilities of learners, although only selected grades [grades 3, 6 and 9]. They also monitor the use of DBE workbooks

in preparation for ANA administration. The only thing I hate about ANA is that they leave us to invigilate without monitoring and some educators are tempted to give learners answers for fear of being labelled underperforming. This means that in some schools the results are fake.

Another principal from the Vhembe district had the following to say on the issue of partnerships between the DBE and one of the teacher unions:

The DBE has recently entered into a partnership with the teacher union SADTU to improve amongst others, literacy instruction at the foundation phase. Through its “Curtis Nkondo” project, with the support of DBE through curriculum advisors [although scarce] union members are selected to be trained by experts. They in turn train other union members and equip them with new methods of instruction. They also supply them with modelled lesson plans.

An important finding emerging from these interviews was that there is a shortage of curriculum advisers in the province. These shortages are critical and need urgent attention, as curriculum advisers provide teachers with guidance and support. The absence of literacy curriculum advisers would thus hinder any improvement in literacy instruction, which could have a negative effect on learner performance. Another challenging finding made during the interviews was the lack of reliability on ANA results due to a lack of monitoring during ANA administration.

Further interviews were conducted with two HODs from the Mopani and Vhembe districts to establish their understanding of the support provided by district leaders for literacy instruction. The provision of pacesetters and the writing of common tasks, workshops, teacher leaders and the provision of textbooks were the common issues that emerged from the interviews with regard to issues of support provided by district curriculum advisers. The HOD from Vhembe characterised it as follows:

They supply us with textbooks and workbooks although these workbooks do not have teachers’ guides. There are some sections in the workbooks which are difficult to teach without a teachers’ guide and as HOD I have to provide support to teachers meanwhile I do not understand too. They sometimes also call us to workshops together with teachers although they usually do not last for two hours. This is so frustrating because it’s impossible to grab new things being introduced.

The views of another HOD from the Mopani district with regard to district support are captured below.

I like the issue of lead teachers which have just been introduced but it's not working. You find that in the circuit there is only one lead teacher who is responsible for literacy instruction from grade R-7. It is impossible that she can be able to support all teachers. To make things worse they usually appoint high school teachers who are not familiar with foundation phase literacy instruction.

The two interviews held with the HODs highlighted a number of important aspects. First, they commended the district for providing workbooks and introducing lead teachers, but they also indicated a number of challenges, such as the unavailability of teachers' guides to complement the workbooks and the insufficient number of lead teachers. Secondly, lead teachers are generally nominated from among high school teachers, which present a challenge since they are unfamiliar with foundation phase literacy instruction.

A detailed understanding of all the facts raised above will be provided in the discussion, which follows.

6. Discussion of the findings

District leadership practices that support literacy instruction in the foundation phase

There are many issues involved that serve as causes for poor learner performance, one of those being the type of leadership and how it is provided at all levels of the education system (Bayat *et al.*, 2014; Murphy & Meyers, 2009). Weakness in leadership could lead to poor learner performance. This study explored teachers, principals and HODs' perceptions of the role of district curriculum advisors in supporting foundation phase literacy instruction. The study explored the role of district leadership in modelling activities, capacity building and advocacy, resource provision, communication of district goals, provision of literacy instruction and the provision of

direction in literacy delivery as well as information on opportunities for professional development.

The findings, as presented above, suggest that although curriculum advisors are in short supply, they performed well in the following areas: provision of information regarding opportunities for professional development, advocacy followed by modelling activities and resource provision. However, they performed unsatisfactorily in the following areas: communication of district goals, capacity building and giving direction. These findings present a gap in literacy support since many studies have highlighted district curriculum advisors as central in the improvement of classroom instruction and learner performance (Canole & Richardson, 2014; Cassery *et al.*, 2013; Mourshed *et al.*, 2010). As such, they should perform their instructional leadership functions effectively.

As per the presumed areas of underperformance by curriculum advisors from our findings, communication of clear district goals to schools is captured as one of them. This is critical as Varghese, Lucero and Von Esch (2014) state that leaders are expected to communicate clear goals to their subordinates by making sure that there is no ambiguity about what is expected. The norms and standards of the Department of Basic Education (2009) state that the curriculum advisory unit is responsible for, inter alia, effective leadership that focuses on learner achievement and learning, the development of clear goals that identify how to improve learner achievement and the creation of opportunities for meaningful professional development. The perception that curriculum advisors are doing nothing in this regard, may suggest that some schools in Limpopo may not be sufficiently aware of their district's goals. This raises the following question: towards which goals and achievement targets are these schools working? A simplistic interpretation of this finding is that curriculum advisors are doing nothing to make schools aware of the district goals. This may be misleading given the disabling environment in which curriculum advisors work (i.e. insufficient number of curriculum advisors). Curriculum advisors may choose to communicate district goals through school-based instructional leaders other than teachers. What remains a point to be noted of this finding is that a lack of sufficient, focused and continuous support

by curriculum advisors in primary schools might explain the persistently poor performance of learners in literacy and this call for action.

Another critical area of our findings is a perception that curriculum advisors play a minimal role in some schools in Limpopo in improving literacy instruction and building instructional leaders' capacity to provide support and guidance to teachers. This assertion needs attention, as the core responsibility of curriculum advisors is to provide planned support in order to guide teachers to progress in their professional learning and to build their own capacity (Toll, 2009). As highlighted in the interviews, this is attributed to the shortage of curriculum advisors. A shortage of curriculum advisors could thus lead to ineffective literacy instruction, as teachers would not receive the kind of support that is envisaged. In order to deal with this acute shortage of curriculum advisors, the few available curriculum advisors convene district meetings or cluster circuits where teachers converge for curriculum advisors to cascade information. This stopgap seems to be inefficient, as teachers are not given individual attention with regard to building their capacity.

The study further highlights a gap in the provision of direction for literacy instruction and provision of intervention strategies as a panacea or remedy to the literacy challenges. The standard expectation is that curriculum advisors should be more actively involved in the process of improving classroom instruction (DBE, 2012), developing strategies for improvement (Friesen & Lock, 2010) and providing resources (Marzano & Waters, 2009). Coupled with this, they should provide instructional direction to teachers as to what are the best strategies, what needs to be done and how (McLeod, 2007). The question is, if curriculum advisors and the essential stakeholders in literacy delivery have been alive to the ongoing underperformance of our learners, what sustained this chronic underperformance for years? One can conclude that the instructional direction and intervention strategies (partnership with unions, provision of pacesetters and workbooks, reading competitions and the appointment of lead teachers) provided by the curriculum advisory unit are not effective or schools are not implementing them correctly. Another dimension to this weakness is that where schools are directed to develop intervention strategies to deal with their peculiar challenges, they tend to develop them for the sake of compliance to

circuit timeframes. Baroody (2011) maintains that districts are central to changing the current undesirable situation of learner underperformance. It is within the districts' jurisdiction to ensure that they assess schools to identify the needs and provide the relevant support.

With regard to ongoing professional development, curriculum advisors received positive feedback. The majority of the respondents indicated that curriculum advisors provide their schools with information regarding opportunities for professional development. This is in line with Baker (2014) and Smith, Robb, West and Tyler's (2010) assertion that teachers need ongoing professional development in order to improve their practice as this fosters individual growth, teamwork and whole school development. It is however worrying that the respondents from some schools in Limpopo indicated that they never received any information regarding opportunities for professional development.

The findings drawn from the questionnaires and the interviews above highlight that there is a divergence in terms of responses from teachers versus those received from HODs. These differences are reflected in their perception of the role of curriculum advisors. Most teachers perceive curriculum advisors as providing minimal instructional guidance and support with regard to literacy instruction. Contrary to this, HODs and principals perceived the situation differently. They perceive curriculum advisors as providing sufficient support in various activities. The divergence of perceptions may be attributed to the finding that curriculum advisors are in short supply. Due to this anomaly, curriculum advisors sometimes convene meetings solely for school-based instructional leaders with the directive that they cascade the information to teachers.

Despite the challenges highlighted by the study, there are however interesting initiatives such as partnerships with teacher organisations and other crucial intervention strategies that signal a move towards effective teacher support and involvement in literacy planning. It is anticipated that this will ultimately lead to an improvement in learner performance and strengthening literacy education in South Africa (Foley & Sigler, 2009; Levin, 2008, Saunders *et al.*, 2009).

As seen in our conceptual framework (figure 1), district officials are crucial in the improvement of literacy instruction and learner performance; therefore, their short supply to provide support and guidance to school-based instructional leaders could be one of the major causes of poor learner performance in literacy.

6. Conclusion and recommendation

Our findings suggest that the practice of the department functioning with a skeleton staff of curriculum advisors due to their short supply hinders the effective delivery and implementation of literacy instruction. This is based on the notion that literacy contributes a great deal to shaping one's successes and failures in life (Baruthram, 2012). The need for an urgent recruitment of a sufficient number of curriculum advisors to marshal literacy instruction by the DBE cannot be over-emphasised.

The practice of supplying workbooks without teachers' guides renders literacy instruction ineffective. We therefore recommend that resource provisioning should be accurate and well executed.

Given the importance of the statistics provided on learner performance regarding assessments used as benchmarks, we therefore recommend that the administration of such tasks be well monitored to eliminate feeding the system with falsified information that will ultimately provide an incorrect picture on the state of learner performance. This understanding derives from the finding that teachers in some schools give their learners memorandums for the assessment prior to writing the assessments to enhance better performance to earn credits from school-based instructional leaders or to avoid being labelled 'underperforming' by the circuit.

There is a dire need for the DBE in South Africa to address the weaknesses flagged by this study in order to improve learner performance in literacy.

7. Implications of the study

Although this study was undertaken in three districts only, it provides fertile ground and bases for the DBE and policymakers to review policies that focus on capacity

building for school-based instructional leaders and foundation phase literacy teachers. It will also allow the DBE and policymakers to design policies in a way that will equip the teachers and school-based instructional leaders with skills and the capacity to perform their roles effectively.

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ARTICLE 4

Challenges faced by school-based literacy instructional leaders in the foundation phase in Limpopo, South Africa

Abstract

Effective support and guidance have proved to be powerful strategies for improving teacher capacity and instructional methods. While some schools might be enjoying positive results because of this, researchers have been silent about the challenges faced by school-based instructional leaders in the foundation phase. Using a qualitative method and instructional leadership as a lens, we explore these challenges in three districts of Limpopo in South Africa. These districts are Vhembe, Mopani and Sekhukhune. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with four principals and three HODs. We initially wanted to interview one principal from each district but in Sekhukhune, an additional principal volunteered. Amongst the HODs we interviewed, two were from Mopani and one from Vhembe. The HOD we were supposed to interview in Sekhukhune retired prior our interview and was no longer willing to participate. We could not find a replacement in the district. Data were analysed using the Tesch (1990) method of qualitative data analysis where units, categories and themes were identified. The results revealed challenges such as a lack of support by curriculum advisors, a lack of cooperation and negative attitude among literacy teachers, time constraints, a lack of training, misplacement of principals, a lack of collaboration and role clarification. The paper concludes by recommending that the DBE in South Africa consider revisiting their capacity building programmes for school-based instructional leaders and structure them in a way that would skill them with the capacity to support literacy instruction in the foundation phase as well as address all the weaknesses in the system such as shortages of curriculum advisors. We further recommend an urgent intervention to instil or inculcate positive attitudes towards the guidance and support for literacy instruction among literacy teachers.

Keywords: Literacy coach, instructional leadership, literacy teaching and learning, instructional support

1. Introduction and background

Over the years, research has acknowledged that there is widespread underachievement in literacy in South African schools, especially in the foundation phase (Motshekga, 2011; Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality [SACMEQ], 2011; Mullis, 2007; Spaul, 2013). Poor performance of learners in literacy is quite a challenging reality since reading is an important instrument for academic success (English, 2011). As a result, several initiatives were introduced by the Department of Basic Education (DBE) to support literacy instruction in the foundation phase. One of the recently introduced initiatives for improving learner performance in many countries is school-based literacy coaching (Bush, Kiggundu, & Moorosi, 2011; Steyn, 2008). While literacy coaching has proven to be the most powerful tool of improving classroom instruction in most developed countries, limited studies have been done to explore the challenges faced by literacy coaches while supporting literacy teachers, especially in South Africa.

Today literacy teachers are faced with the universal demands of improving learner performance in literacy. As such, they should prepare learners to meet the literacy demands of the 21st century. In every stage of instruction, educators need to balance the attention to the skills required for accurate and fluent word reading with opportunities to expand students' knowledge and language (Murnane, Sawhill, & Snow, 2012). According to these scholars, the country is not only faced with a challenge of improving learner performance in literacy but also to equip them with advanced skills to address the economic and the complex political and social challenges facing the nation. The current trend in which learner performance in literacy and mathematics is benchmarked against international standards was not a practice in the past (Mansouri, Jenkins, Leach & Walsh, 2009). Therefore, it adds more pressure on schools to enforce learner improvement in literacy and mathematics.

For Smith and Gillespie (2007), new implementations must adhere to specific principles and importantly, provide evidence that they produce results to convince teachers to make sustainable changes to their instructional methods. Sailors (2008) is also of the opinion that teachers need proof that the new methods and teaching instructions will bear concrete results. Teachers need to be well equipped with skills

to address the challenge of poor literacy performance since reading is seen as the major cause of poor academic performance in all subjects (Hornig, 2009). This requires instructional leaders to equip foundation phase teachers with skills and capacity, which will enhance their literacy instruction; hence, improving learner performance. With the continuous challenge of learners' poor performance in literacy, despite the many initiatives undertaken by the DBE to address this challenge, one may ask what it would take to address this challenge. Our study aims to provide answers to this question.

Elish-Piper and L'Allier (2010) found that literacy coaches' failure to clarify their roles to literacy teachers causes confusion and misunderstanding. The PAM document (DoE, 1999) clearly specifies the roles of each school-based instructional leader. For example, heads of department and senior teachers primarily work closely with teachers and also model for and co-teach with the literacy teachers while principals ensure that all literacy related resources are available. The deputy principal on the other hand, ensures that there is effective curriculum implementation as the PAM document positions them as curriculum managers. Although curriculum advisors report to districts, their functions are more at schools. According to the PAM document, they should equip school-based instructional leaders with skills, knowledge and capacity to guide and support teachers in their instruction. Accordingly, teachers will be effective; hence, improving learner performance. In the South African context, school-based instructional leaders perform the functions of a literacy coach; therefore, they will also be referred to as literacy coaches throughout this study. Failure to clarify the roles of each literacy coach leads teachers to expect all three of these coaches to perform the same duties (Deussen, Coskie, Robinson, & Austio, 2007). This might lead them to develop negative perceptions as they might compare the extent of support provided by each of the literacy coaches.

However, while performing their functions, school-based instructional leaders sometimes meet certain challenges. In one study by Richards (2002), it was found that some teachers have negative attitudes towards professional development and classroom observations. These teachers believe they are doing fine in their classroom

instruction and therefore, they do not need help. This poses a serious challenge to school-based instructional leaders since they are expected to forge a climate in which academic success is a basic goal (Turan & Bektas, 2013), evaluate teacher performance, follow district protocols and equip teachers with skills and capacity to meet the demands of each new curriculum.

Another challenge highlighted in a study by Lunenburg and Ornstein (2004) was that teachers tend to question the capacity of school-based instructional leaders in providing the kind of support and guidance they need to change their instruction. While such high accountability is placed on school-based instructional leaders, there are many studies reflecting that they are not adequately equipped with the skills and capacity to face the challenges and demands at their schools (Byrne-Jiménez & Orr, 2011; Walker, Bryant, & Lee, 2013).

2. Literature review

In the years subsequent to 1994, policies were developed with the aim of improving the quality of education. Since 1996, South African schools experienced several curriculum changes such as Outcomes-based Education (OBE), a change to Curriculum 2005, a change to the National Curriculum Statement (NCS) and the recent change to the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS). The first two changes were quite dramatic in our curriculum change history because curriculum implementers and the teachers raised major concerns. The third change to CAPS was less dramatic as teachers hailed the removal of assessment standards and the introduction of content. However, these efforts never bore fruit, as the reading and writing abilities of learners in South Africa remains poor (Martin, Mullis & Kennedy, 2007; Fleisch, 2008; Martin, Mullis, Foy & Drucker, 2012; Spaull, 2013). This places more accountability on school-based instructional leaders to ensure that literacy teachers are equipped with skills, knowledge and capacity to function effectively in their classroom. While such high accountability is placed on school-based instructional leaders, there are limited studies in South Africa to explore the challenges they face while performing their instructional leadership functions. This study sought to explore the challenges faced by school-based instructional leaders in the foundation phase.

This choice is important since these leaders are essential in the improvement of literacy instruction (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008).

It is common knowledge that teachers, as professionals, acknowledge the importance of literacy for improving learner performance. However, literature reveals that there are many challenges in literacy teaching. This is in part, as Reeves (2008) suggests, a lack of common understanding of the meaning of effective literacy instruction among school-based literacy instructional leaders and literacy teachers. Reeves (2008) further emphasises that the lack of common understanding is caused by the failure of instructional leaders to resolve the challenges experienced by literacy teachers; therefore, teachers develop negative attitudes towards literacy support and guidance.

Coburn conducted a study in California in 2005 on literacy coaching, highlighting the importance of literacy coaches having literacy knowledge, which will enable them to offer guidance and support to literacy teachers (Coburn, 2005). Therefore, educational leaders need to ensure that school-based instructional leaders are fully equipped with skills and capacity to perform their instructional leadership functions to the satisfaction of the education system. To add on this, they should be experienced classroom literacy instructors themselves. Borba (2009), Booth and Rowell (2007), Goodman and Goodman (2009), Stribling (2015) and Printy (2008), for example, argue that principals first need to become acquainted with the classroom by being effective teachers before they offer guidance and support to teachers and learners. This is important because they require experience, skills and knowledge in order to engage knowledgably with teachers when giving support. This implies that literacy coaches should have the skills and capacity to support literacy teachers by demonstrating the teaching of specific strategies, observing teachers, facilitating conversations about those observations, supporting teachers and modelling new school literacy initiatives. In order to perform those duties, literacy coaches need to be actively involved in classroom activities.

Support and guidance enhances teacher morale and attitudes and encourages them to participate effectively in group and individual learning activities (Northouse, 2010). This creates an opportunity for them to discuss issues related to students' learning as well as problems encountered during classroom instruction (English, 2008). This would seem to suggest that a lack of support and guidance to teachers could

demoralise literacy teachers causing them to be negative towards literacy instruction. This could lead to them ineffectively performing as literacy teachers.

Kise (2006) conducted a study to investigate the effect of coaching on classroom instruction. According to the findings of this study, the “one-size-fits-all” type of coaching does not work, as different teachers need different types of coaching and different amounts of support. This adds more challenges to literacy coaches as they have to group teachers in terms of their needs, interests, experience and professional background. This implies that they have to manage and prioritise time, taking into consideration coaching activities, administering assessment, participating in meetings, modelling and classroom observations, conferencing with teachers, lesson planning, preparing and providing professional development. This causes plenty of strain and heavy workloads for literacy coaches. Taole’s (2013) study also highlighted some challenges faced by instructional leaders. These include among others, heavy workloads and pressure, irregular daily interruptions to their support programme and insufficient delivery of learner-teacher support materials (LTSM). McEwan’s (2003) study adds challenges such as a lack of support by authorities and time constraints. As Dowd, Borisova, Amente and Yenew (2016) state, a lack of district support implies the lack of technical support as well as policies designed to support new knowledge about instructional leadership. Limited knowledge about instructional leadership could limit school-based instructional leaders to perform their functions ineffectively, thus leading to poor literacy instruction. Accordingly, this would lead to poor learner performance.

Considering the challenges outlined in the above literature review, our study sought to highlight some of the challenges that school-based instructional leaders come across while providing support for literacy instruction in Limpopo primary schools in order to make recommendations on how to overcome them.

3. Conceptual framework

This study employs the instructional design-theory called “Theory One”, as developed by Perkins in 1992, which offers explicit guidance on how best to provide educators with direct guidance and support for achieving set goals in their instruction. The theory proposes to achieve this by identifying elements of guidance for what the instruction

should provide in order to foster cognitive learning, including methods of instruction and an analysis of the situations in which those methods would be applicable. Perkins (1992) identified four characteristics of the instructional design-theory.

Firstly, design theory is design-oriented or focuses on the means to attain given goals for learning rather than being description-oriented or focused on the results. In the case of Theory One, the goal is to enhance learning for any performance we want to teach (Perkins, 1992). Being design-oriented makes this theory more useful to teachers because it provides direct guidance on how to achieve their goals. Secondly, instructional design theory identifies methods of instruction (ways to support and facilitate learning) and the situations in which those methods should be used. In the case of Theory One, the methods include a clear formulation of goals, identification of the required knowledge, a discussion of the expected performance and suggestions on thoughtful practice, informative feedback and strong intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Thirdly, in all instructional design theory, instructional methods are broken down into more detailed component methods, which provide more guidance to the teachers. In the case of Theory One, Perkins (1992) provides information regarding components for each of the four methods. Fourthly, the methods are probabilistic rather than deterministic. In the case of Theory One, giving many examples of the concepts will not ensure that the goals will be achieved. Theory One suggests that for educators to improve learner performance in literacy, they need to be capacitated in the various domains associated with instruction as identified by the theory. It is therefore quite clear that Theory One is concerned with instructional leadership.

Instructional leadership is defined by Goslin (2009) as the provision of guidance and support to teachers, which could positively influence their instruction. This includes among others, the provision of relevant resources to support teaching and learning as well as recommending a variety of instructions to cater for the diverse needs of learners. It also includes recommending multiple forms of assessment to guide instructional decisions and enhance teacher practice as well as organising workshops and subject meetings to provide room for communication with the teachers so that they can be well acquainted with the activities happening in the classroom.

4. Methodology

This study was constructed as a qualitative research project, involving 4 principals (2 from Sekhukhune and 2 from Vhembe and Mopani as explained earlier) and 3 HODs (2 from Mopani and 1 from Vhembe). It was a follow up study to a quantitative study on instructional guidance for literacy teaching in Limpopo, South Africa. Participants were selected based on their responses during quantitative data collection. This type of study allowed us to collect data in face-to-face situations by interacting with school-based instructional leaders in their natural settings: their schools (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). It was set out to explore challenges faced by school-based instructional leaders in the foundation phase. We sought permission from the Limpopo Department of Education and each of the participating schools after obtaining ethical clearance from the University of Free State. On our first visit to each of the participating schools, prior to the commencement of the interviews, the study was introduced and participants were requested to complete informed consent forms. The schools were visited for a period of one month each and data were collected through semi-structured interviews with four primary school principals and four foundation phase HODs who were purposefully selected. The interviews lasted for one hour with each participant. The interviews focused on the challenges they experience with regard to the provision of guidance and support to literacy teachers in the foundation phase. An interview schedule was drawn up to provide the researchers with a set of predetermined questions with which to engage the participants. The participants were chosen based on their formal positions as school-based instructional leaders and that they were likely to be knowledgeable and informed about the topic we were investigating (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

Data were captured and analysed qualitatively using the Tesch (1990) method of data analysis. Units, categories and themes from the interviews were identified.

5. Findings

The interview schedule focused on the challenges faced by school-based instructional leaders while performing their functions as literacy coaches in the foundation phase.

5.1. Challenges faced by school-based instructional leaders in primary schools

Our first interview was conducted with principals from the three participating districts. All four principals we interviewed appeared to experience the same challenges in their venture of supporting literacy teaching and learning in the foundation phase. These challenges include teachers' negative attitude towards training and foundation phase literacy educators' resistance to change. This is how one principal, working in the Mopani district, expressed her views:

The biggest challenge that I have is the negative attitude of teachers towards training. They are resistant to change and they prefer to use the traditional methods of teaching, as according to them is the best method when it comes to teaching reading and writing. Another challenge is that I have been trained for high school teaching and for 16 years I have taught grade 11 and 12. This is very challenging since I am not able to deal with some challenges which are faced by foundation phase educators although I am trying. The challenge is that since I was employed as a principal for this school, I have never been called for training in the provision for support in literacy teaching and learning. I think this should be the key focus for the Department of Basic Education since there is a challenge of poor literacy levels of learners. I so wish I can have that knowledge and capacity to sometimes teach while teachers observe and to guide them through best methods of literacy teaching and assessment strategies.

The tone of this extract reflects a sense of frustration. Three important issues can be deduced from this extract namely, teachers' negative attitudes, the misplacement of the principal and a lack of training. Thus, the principal was unable to motivate teachers effectively to participate in training sessions or accept change. Another principal working in Vhembe district echoed similar sentiments as the following excerpt reflects.

Some teachers are resistant to change, more especially when the change is directed by their immediate seniors. This becomes very challenging because they don't open up concerning their needs and expectation or challenges. This makes it difficult to provide training that can change their practice. I wish curriculum advisors could offer us more support in terms of training so that we can learn more about literacy. This will assist us to know what to expect from literacy teachers and what kind of support we can give in different situations.

Once again, the above excerpt highlights the question of teachers' resistance to change and the lack of principals' training as instructional leaders. This, according to the above excerpt, makes it difficult for instructional leaders to provide training and support for literacy teaching and learning in the foundation phase. The third principal from the Sekhukhune district agreed with the views expressed above as the extract below indicates.

Educators were poorly trained during OBE. The methodology they were given for teaching reading and writing was very poor. This led them to develop a very negative attitude towards training and it is hard to motivate them to be passionate about literacy teaching. I could be happy if capacity-building workshops are provided for principals, deputy principals and heads of department so that we can be equipped with skills to provide support for literacy teachers.

The sentiments from the above extract sound similar to a reiteration of the norm of the challenges experienced by all four principals we interviewed.

The challenges noted above persisted in subsequent interviews conducted with other principals. The extract below from one of the principals also working in the Sekhukhune district but in a different school is captured as follows:

You know teachers, they are resistant to change, especially the old ones. They think the method that they use is the best and if you introduce new things, they develop a negative attitude towards you which ultimately impedes on the altitude up to which they can adapt to new things you are bringing in. This is a very big challenge because for every policy implementation to succeed, we need the buy-in of teachers.

The well-expressed views of the challenges experienced by principals in their support for literacy teaching and learning in the foundation phase aroused our interest to explore the challenges experienced by HODs while providing support and guidance for literacy teaching. The three HODs we interviewed had similar views to the principals regarding the challenges that hinder the support of literacy teaching and learning in the foundation phase. This is how one HOD expressed herself:

As you know ma'am, where there is more than one person there is always a challenge. I also experience challenges during teacher training sessions. Some teachers display unacceptable behaviour saying that they are treated like toys because policies change every year and they always have to undergo training. They also complain that they are

not given time to master and to become specialist in literacy. It is not easy to convince teachers to transits [transition] from the traditional way of teaching. Another challenge is a lack of support from the principal. I never saw her doing anything except sitting in the office giving instructions for me to develop a literacy policy, literacy activity plan and many more demanding things. I sometimes wonder if she realises that I have lots of work to do including my periods to teach. Everything is done by HODs in this school. All she does is to sit in the office and demand reports every day. If she is not demanding reports she is attending meetings and setting very high targets which are difficult to reach. She expect me to provide support for teachers and she knows I was trained to teach in high school. Where do I get the knowledge and skills without training? (HOD no 1, Mopani district).

Listening to this HOD, one senses a negative attitude towards the principal. Despite her negative attitude, she has the same views as the principals concerning the negative attitudes of educators towards training as one of the issues, which limits the support for literacy teaching and learning in the foundation phase. A new challenge that emerges from this interview was the continuous change of the curriculum, which does not afford literacy teachers time to master any initiative. Another HOD working in the same district but in a different school expressed herself as follows:

The challenge that I have when training teachers is that they have negative attitude towards literacy instructions especially those that are teaching the first grade. They complain that it is not an easy task teaching a grade 1 learner to read and write. They complain that the admission age set by the Department of Basic Education makes it difficult for learners to comprehend information due to their inadequate cognitive development level. Another challenge is lack of support from my principal. It seems no good innovative ideas on guidance and support ever crosses or visits her mind for her to transfer or share with us. All she does is to always demands too much from us as HODs, I sometimes feel like quitting but I can't because I love my work. She set very high target for learner performance in literacy. If you do not reach the set target, HODs must write a report and explain why. She also wants learners to participate in unending literacy competitions which consumes most of our crucial teaching time (HOD no 2, Mopani district).

In the above extract, the issue of negative attitudes reappear. Interestingly, a new issue of the admission age of learners in the first grade is also highlighted. Again, the issue of a lack of support from principals is being highlighted. We conducted an

interview with another HOD from a different district on the same topic. When questioned regarding the challenges she experienced in her venture of supporting literacy instruction in the foundation phase she expressed herself as follows:

My high workload is unbearable, I have to teach, monitor the foundation phase grade R-3, at the same time there are many duties assigned for me from the management side. Sometimes we are bound to conduct internal workshops after school hours to the dislike of some teachers. What is very stressful is that with all the sacrifices I make, teachers do not seem to appreciate the effort. You find that those who need more support are the ones who give excuses to go home. This is so much frustrating (HOD no 3, Vhembe district).

Based on the above excerpt, one could assume that teachers' negative attitude is a problem in many schools. This is challenging since they are the key role players in curriculum implementation. The intriguing aspect of the interviews is that principals are blaming curriculum advisors and literacy teachers for the challenges obstructing effective support for literacy instruction while HODs are equally blaming principals and teachers for hindering the effective support for literacy teaching and learning. A new emerging challenge in the interview above was the HOD's heavy workload, which poses a serious hindrance. She has to attend to her managerial and professional duties while at the same time providing guidance and support to literacy teachers who seem to be unappreciative of this sacrifice. The question is who is to blame for the ineffective support for literacy instruction in the foundation phase?

6. Discussion of the findings

6.1. Challenges faced by school-based instructional leaders while providing support for literacy instruction in the foundation phase

School-based instructional leaders are essential in the improvement of classroom instruction and learner performance (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008; Robinson *et al.*, 2008). Hence, they should be well supported to be able to “forge a climate in which academic success is a basic goal” (Hoy & Miskel, 2013, p199), evaluate teacher performance, follow district protocols and equip teachers with skills and the capacity to meet the demands of each new curriculum. However, while providing support, there are some challenges they face which sometimes limit the effectiveness of the support. In this

discussion, we shed some light on the realities facing school-based instructional leaders while supporting literacy instruction in the foundation phase.

There is limited literature on the challenges faced by school-based instructional leaders in the foundation phase, specifically for literacy instruction. Therefore, our discussion will be based more on our findings.

The purpose of the study was to garner insight from school-based instructional leaders regarding the challenges they face while providing support and guidance to literacy teachers in Limpopo primary schools. The participants pointed out many challenges they experience while performing their instructional leadership functions. These include among others, their insufficient knowledge and capacity to model best practices for literacy instruction in terms of lesson presentation, assessment strategies as well as giving feedback to teachers. The inefficient capacities of school-based instructional leaders to perform the instructional leadership functions that were pointed out in the study, pose a threat to literacy instruction and learner performance as this could frustrate teachers and negatively affect their effectiveness in the classroom. Teachers are expected to demonstrate effectiveness in the classroom in order to teach learners in an acceptably high standard (Trehearn, 2010). Accordingly, this would expand their knowledge and the way they think and help them to stimulate learners to grow. School-based instructional leaders would be expected to create a positive school environment by providing effective leadership skills that improve instructional practices and learner performance (Spillane, 2006; Tschannen-Moran, Bankole, Mitchell, & Moore, 2013). This seems far from being realised in some of the Limpopo primary schools.

Nearly all HODs in the study perceive principals as less concerned about what is essentially happening in the classroom. This is quite challenging since principals need to build a relationship of trust and collaborate with all stakeholders in the school community to yield positive learner performance (Hoy & Miskel, 2013). Almost all of the interviewed HODs and principals pointed out the challenges they experienced due to their limited knowledge, skills and competencies in literacy instructional methods and assessment strategies, which limit them in providing the much-needed support to

literacy teachers. The challenges pointed out above are core functions of effective instructional leadership, leading to effective literacy instruction and improved learner performance (Cray & Weiler, 2011; Hallinger, 2011; Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008). Failure to perform these functions would seem to mean that school-based instructional leaders are providing limited or no support for literacy teachers at all. Without guidance and support, teachers are unlikely to be effective in their classroom instruction, which could lead to poor learner performance.

As reported mostly by the principals, the current system of appointment into senior positions in the DBE in South Africa is a serious challenge. Most of the school leaders indicated that they were trained to teach in high schools. They pointed out that they were appointed as principals of primary schools without any training. This poses a great challenge as they are expected to provide guidance and support to literacy teachers. A lack of knowledge and skills to provide guidance and support to teachers might limit them from making informed decisions on how well they can build teacher capacity to improve literacy instruction, hence improving learner performance. Waugh and Gronlund (2013) are of the opinion that school leaders need to be well equipped in all areas of schoolwork as they are key stakeholders in ensuring the success of their schools. Principals, for example, would be expected to be effective in classroom activities for them to identify areas where teachers are struggling in order to give relevant support and guidance (Zepeda, 2007). This would equip them with skills and knowledge to be effective in their instruction, hence improving learner performance (Masumoto & Brown-Welty, 2009). All these studies emphasise the importance of school-based instructional leaders in improving learner performance and yet this seems not to be happening in some of the Limpopo primary schools.

Nearly all principals and HODs in our study highlighted the issue of teachers' negative attitudes towards training, a lack of teamwork and role clarification among school-based instructional leaders. Principals and HODs blame teachers for their negative attitude and resistance to change while HODs point a finger at principals for a lack of interest in teaching and learning. To develop an interest in teaching and learning, school-based instructional leaders need to first become acquainted with the classroom (Borba, 2009); Booth & Rowell, 2007; Goodman & Goodman, 2009; Printy, 2008;

Stribling, 2015). This is important, as they require experience, skills and knowledge in order to engage knowledgeably with teachers when giving support. The principals' lack of interest could imply that they are not acquainted with the classroom. Our argument is that if principals are not acquainted with what is happening in the classroom, how will they know the strengths and weaknesses of their teachers? How are they going to support them? With these findings, it is no surprise that there is little improvement in learners' literacy performance. According to Coburn (2005), principals should have literacy knowledge in order to offer guidance and support to literacy teachers. It is a challenging finding to discover that some school-based instructional leaders have little knowledge about literacy instructional methods and assessment strategies, as highlighted in this study. There is an urgent need for the DBE to ensure that school-based instructional leaders have the necessary capacity to support literacy teachers and to perform their instructional leadership functions to improve learner performance, especially in literacy. They require skills, knowledge and capacity to enable them to engage knowledgeably with literacy teachers during the support sessions (Stribling, 2015).

Instructional leaders need to be more involved in teaching and learning, and teachers need motivation to accept change. It is the researchers' view that the DBE in South Africa has neglected teacher professional development, especially in literacy. The occurrences in Limpopo cannot be classified as teacher professional development in literacy when district curriculum advisors conduct one meeting per year. Most circuits in Limpopo do not even have a literacy curriculum advisor. The curriculum advisory service of the DBE is an important component in the support of schools.

Most learners in primary schools fail literacy, which assists in galvanising a negative attitude towards the subject. An urgent intervention is required to equip school-based instructional leaders with skills and capacity to guide and support literacy teachers in Limpopo to improve teacher professional development. In turn, this will improve the teaching of literacy and learner performance. Ultimately, this will change the negative attitudes.

The issue of the misplacement of principals also poses a challenge, as flagged by one of the principals who taught in high school for many years and has no knowledge of

literacy instruction. This is in part because the principal has received no training since being appointed as a primary school principal. Therefore, the participant lacks the capacity to provide guidance and support to literacy teachers.

7. Conclusion and recommendations

The findings from this study warrant the attention of policymakers and the DBE in South Africa to revisit the policies on professional development. Although the sample of this study only consisted of seven school-based instructional leaders in three districts, it has produced valuable insights into challenges faced by school-based instructional leaders while providing support and guidance to literacy teachers. We therefore recommend the provision of suitable opportunities for developing school-based instructional leaders, particularly in primary schools, in matters pertaining to literacy instruction if the country is serious about improving the literacy skills of its learners.

There is also a need for teambuilding workshops to enhance teamwork among school-based instructional leaders to remove the practice of pointing fingers at each other with regard to the poor performance of learners in literacy. Motivational sessions should be conducted for literacy teachers to instil positive attitudes towards support provided for literacy instruction.

We further recommend that the DBE put an efficient accounting system with clear means of verification (MOV) in place to enhance active participation in classroom activities by school-based instructional leaders.

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ARTICLE 5

School-based instructional leaders and their capacity to lead literacy instruction in the foundation phase

Abstract

Determining the capacity of school-based instructional leaders (principal, deputy principal and HOD) in leading foundation phase literacy instruction in Limpopo, South Africa constituted the focus of this investigation. A qualitative research approach was employed to achieve the set aim. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with one literacy teacher, two heads of departments and two principals in each of the two selected districts of Limpopo (Mopani and Vhembe). Data were analysed using the Tesch (1990) method, which assisted in identifying units, categories and themes in the interview data. The findings revealed that school-based instructional leaders lack the literacy knowledge, skills and capacity required to guide and support literacy teachers in their classroom instruction. This is, in part, because of weaknesses in the recruitment and appointment procedures of educators in senior positions. The current practice is that once a primary school post is advertised, any teacher may apply as long as s/he meets the minimum requirements. Thus, candidates may include educators trained or professionally qualified to teach in high schools. The paper concludes by recommending that unless continuous in-service training is provided to equip school-based instructional leaders with the specific requisite skills and capacity to function as effective literacy instructional leaders, the reading ability of South African learners will forever remain a challenge. We further recommend that the Department Basic of Basic Education (DBE) in South Africa revisit its recruitment and appointment procedures for educators in senior positions and structure them in such a way that appointment is based on the relevance of qualifications and area of specialisation.

Keywords: instructional leadership, instructional capacity, school-based instructional leaders

1. Introduction and background

For numerous years, studies have focused on the importance of school-based instructional leaders as a strategy for improving learner performance (Kirtman & Fullan, 2015; Neumerski, 2013; Sergiovanni, 2015; Waters, Sun & Leithwood, 2015; Whitworth & Chiu, 2015). This is because effective leadership determines the success of an organisation (Goldring & Schuermann, 2009; Walker, Bryant & Lee, 2013). How these leaders affect learner attainment through their instructional leadership functions has increasingly been emphasised (Hauserman & Stick, 2014). For example, Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom and Anderson (2010) and Hopkins, Stringfield, Harris, Stoll and Mackay (2014) found that a congruent relationship exists between learner performance and the leadership provided by school-based instructional leaders. Hence, school-based instructional leaders should have the capacity to plan, coordinate and evaluate teaching and the curriculum through classroom observations, feedback on teacher planning and instructional strategies, classroom walkthroughs and organising professional learning communities for teachers (Robinson, 2007). Furthermore, they should be able to build a relationship of trust with teachers (Turan & Bektas, 2013). While the importance of school-based instructional leaders in the improvement of learner performance has increasingly been emphasised, researchers have been silent about their capacity to lead classroom instruction, especially in literacy. Dufour and Marzano (2015) highlighted building the capacity of school-based instructional leaders to perform their instructional leadership functions as one of the effective strategies of improving learner performance. Moorosi and Bush (2011) emphasise that instructional leadership is the way to go if schools are serious about the improvement of learner performance. However, Bush and Oduro (2006) argue that this seems to be impossible since school-based instructional leaders are not well capacitated prior to their appointment in their leadership positions, especially in South Africa. This poses a challenge since according to the Personnel Administrative Measures (PAM) document, these leaders are expected to have the knowledge, skills and capacity to guide, support and build the capacity of all teachers (Department of Education [DoE], 1999). As the foundation phase consists of four subjects (mathematics, Home Language, First Additional Language [FAL] and life skills), this implies that school-based instructional leaders appointed at this level would generally be expected to support teachers in the 4 subjects. It is, however, unlikely that these

leaders could have the knowledge or the skills to embrace all four subjects (Angelle & DeHart, 2011). This presents a gap since teachers rely on their leaders' knowledge, skills and capacity for guidance and support with regard to all the challenges they might face in their instruction (Ghavifekr & Ibrahim, 2014). A lack of knowledge and capacity in instructional leaders could lead to a lack of confidence among literacy teachers and consequently to negative perceptions of their leaders. Accordingly, negative perceptions could therefore lead to a general underperformance in teachers' classroom instruction and, consequently, to poor learner performance (Pulleyn, 2012).

Results drawn from local and international studies reflect that learners in South Africa are performing below the expected norm. School-based instructional leaders are therefore at the coalface of this reality. It is therefore not surprising that the DBE is placing an increasing responsibility and accountability on school-based instructional leaders. With such great responsibility and accountability placed on them, it becomes important to explore whether they have the literacy knowledge, skills and capacity needed to monitor, guide and support literacy teachers. There is, however, limited research in this area in South Africa. Our study sought to fill this gap by exploring whether such leaders have the capacity to lead literacy instruction in order to recommend ways of improving literacy instructional support in the foundation phase.

School-based instructional leaders are expected to manage all the instructional activities taking place in their schools. Thus, they should be able to provide guidance and support to teachers through classroom observation, providing feedback, monitoring learner progress and discussing instructional issues with teachers (Gamage, Adams, & McCormack, 2009). To execute this task, they need to possess literacy skills and knowledge of different instructional methods and assessment techniques (Jenkins, 2009). Whether school-based instructional leaders have such capacity is a question that needs to be answered.

Several studies have since been undertaken to explore the capacity of school-based instructional leaders to provide guidance and support to teachers. A study by De Clercq and Shalem (2014) for example, found that most instructional leaders lack the capacity to develop strategies for teacher development, which are aimed at equipping teachers with effective instructional methods and content knowledge. The study

concluded that this could be the root cause of poor learner performance in schools. This presents a challenge since instructional leaders should make instructional quality the top priority of the school (Mestry, 2013). This requires of them to have the capacity to train, support and guide teachers in their literacy instruction. A corresponding study by Bush and Oduro (2006) highlighted the fact that in most countries, school-based instructional leaders are not prepared for offering this type of support prior to their appointment. They are appointed on the basis that they excelled during interviews and on the assumption that they will also do well as school managers. The question that arises here is if they are not well trained and capacitated prior to their appointment as school managers how do they navigate their way as literacy instructional leaders? How do they provide guidance and support to literacy teachers without the requisite skills? This study sought to provide answers to some of these questions. If school-based instructional leaders do not have the capacity to lead and manage literacy instruction, learner performance is unlikely to improve (Christie, 2010).

2. Literature review

Our study argues that the literacy skills, knowledge and capacity of school-based instructional leaders are the prime determinants for their competency to guide and support literacy teachers. We wish to extend the findings of a study by Bandur (2012) that in many countries the managerial skills of instructional leaders coupled with their competencies remain crucial if the country sees value in improving the quality of education. This therefore strengthens the argument that instructional leaders should be well equipped with skills, capacity and knowledge to be able to guide and support teachers in schools (Boerema, 2011). This, according to Crawford (2014), will instil teachers' confidence in their leaders' ability to lead them.

Phillips (2009) argues that leaders should incorporate their management skills with the school vision to ensure that the vision is realised. To realise this vision and improve learner performance, school-based instructional leaders should ensure that there is alignment between the curriculum, classroom instruction and assessment strategies, especially in literacy. This requires them to evaluate the competences of the entire staff in order to guide and support them. For all of this to happen, school-based instructional leaders should have the requisite literacy skills and capacity, which will in

turn enable them to support literacy teachers through classroom observations, lesson modelling and co-presentation of lessons aimed at improving instruction. Joubert and Van Rooyen (2008) add that school-based instructional leaders should ensure that they are familiar with literacy-related matters by attending professional development activities with teachers. This will improve their capacity to provide relevant interventions when literacy teachers are encountering challenges. When leaders do not have the capacity to perform their instructional leadership functions effectively, their schools usually underperform (Kirtman & Fullan, 2015). Could this be the case with the underperformance of South African learners in literacy? We sought to shed some light on this.

Masumuto and Brown-Welty (2009) postulate that instructional leaders should perform their instructional leadership roles effectively in such a way that they positively affect teacher classroom instruction, in turn positively influencing learner performance. Could it be that school-based instructional leaders in Limpopo are not performing their instructional leadership roles effectively? Why is learner performance in literacy not improving? This paper aims to provide some light on these challenges. Instructional leaders should have the capacity to provide teachers with opportunities to acquire new knowledge, skills and capacity to function effectively in their instruction (Daly & Finnigan, 2011). The following questions remain. Are school-based instructional leaders prepared well enough to perform these roles? Whose responsibility is it to build the capacity in school-based instructional leaders? According to Hornig and Loeb (2010), instructional leaders should be more involved in instruction-related matters. This implies that they should have the competency to perform all the functions related to instructional leadership if they are to effect change in literacy instruction (Robinson, 2011). Accordingly, they should be conversant in different literacy instructional methods and assessment strategies. Most importantly, they should have a thorough knowledge of literacy instruction.

3. Conceptual framework

Our study proposes the concept of instructional leadership as a framework for exploring the capacity of school-based instructional leaders to lead literacy instruction in the foundation phase. Phillips (2009) defines instructional leadership as those

functions performed by instructional leaders to ensure that clear school goals are set, resources are well allocated to ensure effective curriculum delivery and guarantee that instruction is achieved through well-managed and monitored lesson plans and pacesetters. These leaders' responsibilities are emphasised to evaluate literacy teachers' competencies in their classroom instruction and to provide guidance and support. Gamage *et al.* (2009) add that instructional leaders should discuss instruction-related issues with teachers, conduct classroom observations to establish areas where support is required, provide feedback and monitor improvement. In order to perform such functions, instructional leaders in schools require knowledge of different teaching methods and assessment strategies (Jenkins, 2009).

Joubert and Van Rooyen (2008) emphasise that one of the effective methods for supporting teachers is by attending professional development workshops with them. They argue that this would assist instructional leaders in being exposed to current issues related to classroom instruction and improve their capacity. With improved capacity, they would be able to provide effective, relevant support and guidance. Whether school-based instructional leaders in Limpopo possess the knowledge, skills and capacity to perform the instructional leadership functions stated in the literature above is still a grey area; hence, the importance of this study cannot be over emphasised.

4. Methodology

This paper is an integral part of a study that investigated the instructional guidance for literacy teaching in the foundation phase in three districts of Limpopo. We employed a qualitative approach to explore the capacity of school-based instructional leaders to lead literacy instruction in the foundation phase. A qualitative approach was chosen because it allowed us to collect data in face-to-face interviews from selected school-based instructional leaders and foundation phase literacy teachers in their natural setting (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The interviews were conducted after obtaining ethical clearance from the University of Free State, permission from the Limpopo Department of Basic Education (DBE) as well as selected circuit offices and

schools. We visited the selected schools to introduce our study and requested all participants to complete the informed consent forms.

Data were collected using semi-structures interviews with two purposefully selected foundation phase heads of departments, two principals and one foundation phase literacy teacher from each of the two selected districts in Limpopo (Mopani and Vhembe). Six participants were interviewed. An interview schedule was drawn up to provide the researchers with a set of predetermined questions with which to engage the participants. This allowed us to ensure that all the important and relevant data were captured (Lichtman, 2010). Principals and HODs were asked questions on whether they perceive themselves as having capacity to provide guidance and support for literacy instruction; while teachers were asked whether they perceived school-based instructional leaders as having the capacity to lead literacy instruction. A one and a half hour interview was held with each of the participants. Each participant was allowed to choose a place that was convenient for him/her. All interviews started with background questions including amongst others; level of training, number of years of teaching experience and experience in foundation phase teaching. All interview sessions lasted for one hour and were recorded with a tape recorder, as this is one of the most appropriate methods for the safekeeping of data (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2013). All the interviews were transcribed, translated and grouped according to their similarities and differences to form themes. This was intended to assist us in identifying similar themes and eliminating unwanted data that did not answer the research questions.

Data were analysed using the Tesch (1990) method of qualitative data analysis, subsequently producing units, categories and themes. Our findings are presented in the section below.

5. Findings

Table 1: Qualifications and teaching experience of participants in the study

District	Position	Level of training	Previous level of teaching	Years of teaching experience	Experience in the foundation phase
Mopani	Principal	High school	High school	21	1 years

Vhembe	Principal	High school	High school	25	2 years
Mopani	HOD	High school	High school	11	None (the HOD was positioned in the foundation phase but teaches in the intermediate phase because of her qualification and experience in high school).
Vhembe	HOD	Primary school	High school	8	2 years
Mopani	CS 1 teacher	Primary school	Primary school	11	11 years
Vhembe	CS 1 teacher	Primary school	Primary school	16	16 years

As shown in table 1 above, all the school-based instructional leaders (except 1) who participated in the interviews had a secondary teachers' diploma or degree. They had between 1 and 2 years teaching experience in the foundation phase. The teachers in the interviews were qualified primary school teachers with 11 and 16 years of teaching experience.

Our interviews commenced with the principal from Mopani. When asked about her qualification and teaching experience she said:

I hold a secondary teachers' diploma which I obtained at the former Tivumbeni College of Education where I specialised in biology and education. I have taught life science (previously known as biology) and English for 15 years in the neighbouring high school until I was promoted into a principalship position 2 years back in the primary school where I am currently working.

Her response aroused our interest in finding out how she coped with the change of environment from high school to primary school. This is how she characterised it:

I am trying my best although it's difficult as I was trained as a high school teacher. When I first received my appointment letter I thought maybe there will be an orientation session or training from the department, but it never happened. Adapting to a primary school from high school is not easy...

Given the fact that the principal was trained as a high school teacher and her indication that she received no training or orientation into primary school since her appointment, we further explored how she provided support and guidance especially to literacy teachers as this is a serious challenge in the country. Below is the extract from our interview.

That is my biggest challenge. I even do not have confidence to sample teachers and conduct classroom observations as I should because I don't know what to expect or what feedback to give. As I said I was trained as a high school teacher and I was teaching biology and English. I just rely on the policy documents though it is not easy.

The principal's response reflects some weaknesses in the education system. Training would build the capacity in principals and other school-based instructional leaders that would enable them to perform their instructional leadership functions with confidence. The principal from Vhembe who shared similar sentiments regarding training of school-based instructional leaders had this to say:

My support to literacy teachers is not direct. I hold monthly meetings with the deputy principal and HOD where we discuss about the challenges they encounter while providing support to literacy teachers. Whenever there are challenges we develop intervention strategies. It is not easy though as we have to struggle on our own because in our circuit we do not have literacy curriculum advisors to consult whenever we face challenges. Training for school-based management teams (SMT) is also rare. It is very challenging since literacy teachers are more informed than us. When the department sometimes organises literacy workshops for teachers, we are left behind.

In the extract, the lack of training for school-based instructional leaders was once again reflected as one of the challenges. Another challenge reflected was that literacy teachers are often more informed than their managers are because they sometimes attend literacy training while training for instructional leaders is rarely done. When asked about her level of training and teaching experience, the principal from Vhembe responded as follows:

I got my BA at the University of Limpopo where I specialised in Xitsonga and Biblical studies. This was my first degree. I also obtained an Honours degree in Xitsonga at the same University. I am currently doing my Masters in Xitsonga. For 21 years I taught in a certain secondary school in Mpumalanga where I taught Xitsonga and tourism although tourism was not my specialisation. I was just lucky to be appointed as a principal here in Limpopo. I am in my twelfth month now.

The HOD from Vhembe district voiced sentiments similar to those of the two principals that were interviewed. When asked about her teaching experience she explained,

Previously I was working as a post level 1 educator in a high school in the Mpumalanga province where I was teaching maths and science. I hold a primary teachers diploma but I couldn't get space in the primary school. Back then it was not a problem, you could be placed in any phase as long as you hold a teachers' diploma. I was later employed as HOD for maths, science and technology (MST) in a high school here in the Limpopo province. I was later transferred to my current primary school post because of operational requirements.

Listening to this HOD was thought provoking. We wanted to know how she provides guidance and support to literacy teachers, as she does not have primary school teaching experience. She expressed herself as follows:

As I said I have been trained to teach in primary school, I use the knowledge I gained during my training at the college. It is not enough though, as there have been so many curriculum changes since my training. When conducting classroom observations, I sometimes get frustrated as I struggle to provide enough support to those who are struggling with literacy lesson presentation as my teaching experience is more into high school. I have to conduct audit for written work to determine whether the work is of required quality and quantity. I remember at one time I challenged the quality of classwork in the learners' books and I was told that my problem is that I expect high school work in the foundation phase learners' books. The teachers told me that is the level of work needed in the primary school learners' books. Conducting internal workshops is also not easy as teachers seem to be a little informative [better informed] than me

Listening to this HOD aroused our interest in exploring how she dealt with the challenges she mentioned in the above extract. The following excerpt reflects her response.

I do not have much to offer to deal with such challenges. There is no literacy curriculum advisor to assist us with such challenges. I wish there were training sessions for SMTs, but they are scarce. The department is not doing much to support us. Teachers tend to develop negative attitude towards our support mechanism because they feel they are more knowledgeable than us as they are sometimes called to workshops and we are not catered for.

Our next focus was to explore how HODs in the Mopani district provided guidance and support to literacy teachers. The following extract was taken from our interview with one of the HODs.

Providing guidance and support to literacy teachers has been a nightmare to me. Honestly speaking I do not enjoy teaching in primary schools. I chose high school training because I love teaching in high schools. I didn't come to my current work station by choice. I was employed as HOD for commercial subjects in a neighbouring high school. I taught in high schools for 15 years. When I was declared in excess three years back, the department couldn't find a space for me in high schools, so I was placed at this primary school. Since I started working here 2 years back, I was not called to any workshop and yet the department expect me to provide support and guidance to teachers. Another challenge is that I never saw a curriculum advisor to support us in our schools as there is only one or two foundation phase curriculum advisor in the whole district. I am not familiar with primary school subjects, it's still a learning curve for me. Worst part is that I am currently teaching EMS and Xitsonga in the intermediate and senior phase, yet I provide guidance and support to foundation phase teachers. The principal thought I cannot cope in the foundation phase and I think she was right. I am expected to provide feedback after classroom observations, model literacy lessons for teachers and many more things. This is really difficult since I don't have literacy knowledge and I do not teach in the foundation phase.

Once again, the issue of the misplacement of school-based instructional leaders who were trained as high school teachers but placed in primary schools as well as the paucity of workshops have been highlighted as challenges in the excerpt above. Another point to note in the extract is the fact that the HOD had been employed as the foundation phase HOD and yet she was teaching in the intermediate phase. In addition, the scarcity of curriculum advisors was also mentioned as one of the challenges faced by school-based instructional leaders.

To validate the findings from our interviews with school-based instructional leaders, we conducted semi-structured interviews with two literacy teachers from each of the selected districts in Limpopo. When asked about her perception of the support and guidance provided by school-based instructional leaders for literacy instruction in the foundation phase, a teacher from Vhembe district had this to say:

We never receive the support we desire to receive from our principal and HOD, even when they conduct classroom observations you can observe they are just doing it for adherence sake. They do not seem to understand anything about literacy instruction, who can blame them? They were high school teachers before they became our managers. It is worse with curriculum advisors because we do not have foundation phase curriculum advisors in our circuit, let alone literacy curriculum advisors. It's a pity our deputy principal was transferred to another school because our learner enrolment dropped, affecting our post allocation. She seemed to have all the answers to our questions. She would guide you through lesson preparation and presentation. Once she notify you that she will visit you in class, you know that the feedback you would get will be relevant.

The extract above confirms what the principals and HODs highlighted during our interviews. As the extract reflects, the teacher in our interview felt that the instructional leaders in her school did not provide enough support and guidance for literacy instruction. This was attributed to the fact that they were high school teachers before they became primary school managers. We further explored what the above teacher expects from school-based instructional leaders if, according to her, they are competent in the provision of support and guidance for literacy.

Once you are a principal, deputy principal, HOD or senior teacher, I expect that you have content knowledge of all the subjects in the foundation phase because at the foundation phase we should be specialists in all subjects. If we struggle with lesson planning then you should do modelling of lessons. In literacy specifically, I expect the management to assist in develop strategies to improve learner performance as it is a big challenge in the country. I think that is what it means to be in the management position. As it is now, we are better off that our SMTs as it look like they are the ones needing support and not vice-versa.

The concerns raised by the teacher above aroused our interest in exploring how teachers in the Mopani district perceive the competencies of school-based instructional leaders to provide guidance and support for literacy instruction. A teacher in the Mopani district echoed similar sentiments:

Not that I am negative, but to speak the honest fact, it's like we do not have SMT members in our school. When our HOD joined us, she was supposed to work with us in the foundation phase, but we were told she will be teaching in the intermediate phase

though she is attached to foundation phase. The reason given to us was that she was previously teaching at a high school before joining our staff, and that she would struggle with the foundation phase subjects.

The above extract reflects an anomaly in the curriculum management system of the school. The HOD is supposed to be actively involved in classroom activities in order to identify instructional challenges faced by teachers. This would assist him/her to be hands on about instruction-related issues and to provide relevant guidance and support where needed. When asked about her expectations for the guidance and support for literacy instruction from school-based instructional leaders she said:

I expect them to organise internal workshops for us frequently. They should be able to guide us on how to deal with struggling readers and learners with special needs in our classrooms. As supervisors they should be able to convene frequent meetings to coach us in areas where we encounter instructional challenges. My lesson plans and learners work were never monitored, how are they supposed to know if I am doing things correctly? The Integrated Quality Management Standards [IQMS] requires that they conduct classroom observation as part of the support and guidance and give feedback thereafter. This is never done in our school. We just complete forms for compliance.

The extract above gives us a perception of what the teacher views as competency from school-based instructional leaders, which includes having meetings with teachers, monitoring lesson plans and learners' work, classroom observations and providing feedback.

6. Discussion

Our discussion is based on two themes namely, the self-perceived capacity of school-based instructional leaders to lead literacy instruction in the foundation phase and how literacy teachers perceive the capacity of their leaders to guide and support them.

6.1. Self-perceived capacity of school-based instructional leaders to lead literacy instruction

Louis *et al.* (2010) and Hopkins *et al.* (2014) assert that a congruent relationship between learner performance and the leadership provided by school-based instructional leaders exist. Hence, they should have the capacity to plan, coordinate and evaluate teaching and the curriculum through classroom observations, feedback on teacher planning and instructional strategies, classroom walkthroughs and organising professional learning communities for teachers (Robinson, 2007). They should also be able to build a relationship of trust with teachers (Turan & Bektas, 2013). These will enable them to provide effective leadership that will determine the success of their schools (Goldring & Schuermann, 2009; Walker *et al.*, 2013) and the improvement of learner performance (Hauserman & Stick, 2014). However, this study found that most school-based instructional leaders in the foundation phase perceive themselves as having limited knowledge, skills and capacity to lead literacy instruction in this phase. This was mainly attributed to a lack of training prior to their appointment to leadership positions and the lack of capacity building workshops. A lack of training hinders their capacity to provide effective literacy leadership that would change the status of poor learner performance and enhance the quality of education (Darling-Hammond & Orphanos, 2007). A lack of literacy knowledge, skills and capacity limit the instructional leaders' competency to function effectively as literacy instructional leaders. This would suggest that literacy teachers in some of the primary schools in Limpopo do not receive the much-needed guidance and support they require to improve their knowledge, skills and competency as classroom literacy teachers. Consequently, this would have a negative effect on learner performance.

Nearly all the school-based instructional leaders in the interviews (except one) have a secondary teachers' diploma or high school. This made it difficult for them to provide support such as modelling literacy lessons, providing constructive feedback, equipping literacy teachers to apply different methods of instruction as well as the different assessment techniques to serve the diverse needs of learners in their classrooms. These key instructional leadership functions could improve teachers' instructional methods and improve learner performance (Hopkins *et al.*, 2014). Failure by

instructional leaders to perform these functions present a challenge since they are subjected to greater accountability and would be expected to possess leadership and management skills as well as the capacity to provide guidance and support to teachers (Lam ,2006). They need skills and capacity to perform their instructional leadership effectively (Boerema, 2011). This seems to be far from being realised in the Vhembe and Mopani districts of South Africa. Most of the participants made it clear that they do not possess sufficient knowledge, skills and capacity to provide support and guidance to teachers. One respondent also mentioned that she was teaching in the intermediate phase yet she was providing guidance and support in the foundation phase. This reflects shortcomings in the DBE systems, which allow for the recruitment and appointment of educators for leadership positions without considering the level of qualifications and specialisation of the candidates.

Our findings also suggest that there are gaps with regard to the implementation of the policy on operational requirements. Both HODs in our study had been transferred from high schools to primary schools due to operational reasons (DBE, 2003). This was done in light of the oversupply of teachers in certain subjects in high schools. This is a serious challenge as this could be loosely interpreted as the dumping of excess HODs in primary schools. This is done with no due regard to the relevance of their skills and their competency to guide and support teachers. A serious issue to note is the fact that despite such limited literacy knowledge, skills and competency, the DBE expects school-based instructional leaders to provide teachers with guidance and support while failing to provide them with capacity-building workshops.

The finding that most of the interviewed school-based instructional leaders had not undergone any preparatory training prior to assuming their duties as school managers also pose a challenge. This finding supports the finding by Bush and Oduro (2006) in that school-based instructional leaders are not well capacitated prior to their appointment in their leadership positions especially in South Africa. This might seem to imply that they are unfamiliar with the instructional leadership functions that they have to perform to support and improve literacy instruction. If this is the case, then how school-based instructional leaders lead literacy instruction in the foundation phase while they are not prepared prior to assuming their managerial position needs further attention. As Bush (2007) states, school leaders should perform instructional

leadership functions that will ensure that teaching and learning is managed effectively in their schools. This, in turn, will improve classroom instruction and learner performance. In addition, this is emphasised by the South African Standards for Principalship (DoE, 2014), which highlights the need for school-based instructional leaders to ensure that there is quality teaching and learning in their schools. According to the PAM document, the SMT is responsible for ensuring the quality of teaching and learning in the school (DoE, 1999).

The incompetency of school-based instructional leaders to possess knowledge, skills and capacity that will enable them to guide and support teachers would negatively affect teachers' instructional capacity. Accordingly, this would lead to poor learner performance. This is a serious challenge that needs urgent attention if the country is serious about the improvement of learner performance, especially in literacy.

6.2. How literacy teachers perceive the capacity of school-based instructional leaders in guiding and supporting them

As Waugh and Gronlund (2013) state, instructional leaders are key role players in the improvement of learner performance. Hence, they should be knowledgeable, skilled and well capacitated in all aspects of schoolwork in order to guide and support teachers. This seems far from being realised in some of the primary schools in Limpopo since literacy teachers in our study perceive school-based instructional leaders as having limited literacy knowledge, skills and capacity to guide and support literacy instruction in the foundation phase. This would present a challenge in literacy support since teachers need to have confidence in their leaders' ability to lead them (Crawford, 2014). Literacy teachers in this study highlighted a series of areas they feel school-based instructional leaders are not competent in. These include amongst others, the capacity to model lessons, conduct classroom observations and giving feedback, conducting internal workshops, monitoring lesson plans and learners' books as well as having meetings with them to listen to the problems they encounter in class and provide solutions. This perception could create negative attitudes in literacy teachers towards their leaders. Indeed, one of the interview extracts highlighted that literacy teachers are more knowledgeable than their leaders. This might result in literacy teachers undermining the instructional leaders and developing a negative

attitude towards the support and guidance they provide. As Pulleyn (2012) states, perceptions have an influence on educational norms and practices and can easily affect teachers' classroom practice negatively or positively. Negative perceptions among educators could lead to their general underperformance in classrooms and consequently to poor learner performance in literacy. There is therefore an urgent need in South Africa for the DBE to develop programmes for the development of school-based instructional leaders to enable them to perform their literacy instructional leadership roles effectively.

7. Implications

The findings of this study warrant the attention of the DBE and policymakers in addressing the interests of foundation phase learners in particular. This calls for the DBE to consider creating rigorous opportunities for the development of school-based instructional leaders with regard to literacy instruction. Since this study was undertaken in two districts only, it could be replicated in future and involve the whole province and a large number of participants in light of the current findings.

8. Conclusion and recommendations

Our findings led us to the conclusion that school-based instructional leaders do not have the requisite knowledge, skills and capacity required to guide and support literacy teachers in their classroom instruction. This is, in part, because of weaknesses in the recruitment and appointment procedures of educators in senior positions. The current practice is that once a primary school post is advertised, any teacher may apply as long as s/he meets the minimum requirements. Thus, candidates may include educators trained or professionally qualified to teach in high schools.

Given the limited capacity of school-based instructional leaders to lead literacy instruction, as reflected in this study, we recommend that the DBE in South Africa redesign the capacity building programmes and structure them in a manner that will effectively equip these leaders with skills, knowledge and capacity to provide effective guidance and support to literacy teachers.

We further recommend that policymakers at the DBE consider reviewing their policies on recruitment and appointment into leadership positions such that rigorous

preparatory programmes are put in place for these leaders prior to their assumption of duty.

Lastly, we recommend that policymakers revisit their policy on the transfer of educators based on operational requirements and structure it in a way that will consider qualifications and area of specialisation before placement.

We conclude our paper by highlighting that unless the DBE applies rigorous strategies to improve the literacy knowledge, skills and capacity of school-based instructional leaders, literacy instruction in the foundation phase is unlikely to improve, consequently poor learner performance in literacy will remain a norm and deteriorate further.

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SECTION 3: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This section reflects on how the articles integrate and how the findings answer the research questions. It also draws conclusions on how support and guidance is provided for literacy instruction at schools and makes recommendations.

1. The first article focused on teachers' perceptions of the support provision for literacy instruction. It further explored whether gender, age and teaching experience are significant factors on teachers' perceptions of the support provision for literacy instruction.
2. The second article investigated the effect of instructional leadership on literacy instruction in the foundation phase.
3. The third article focused on the practices of district leaders as a way of supporting literacy instruction.
4. The fourth article explored the challenges faced by school-based instructional leaders while supporting literacy instruction.
5. The last article focused on the capacity of school-based instructional leaders to lead literacy instruction.

3.1.1 Research question 1 and 2: Foundation phase literacy teachers' perceptions of the guidance and support provided by school-based instructional leaders

How do foundation phase literacy teachers perceive the guidance and support provided by school-based instructional leaders? Do gender, age and teaching experience influence teachers' perceptions of the support provision and guidance for literacy instruction?

Answers to research question one and two were drawn from article 1 on the perspectives of foundation phase teachers of the support and guidance provided by school-based instructional leaders in the foundation phase.

Focus on actual modelling, capacity building and advocacy

As discussed in article 1 (see pages 16-42), the major points of this investigation was to explore how literacy teachers perceive the provision of support and guidance for literacy instruction by school-based instructional leaders. Thus, during this exploration I focused on the provision of support with regard to lesson modelling and co-presenting lessons, providing feedback after classroom observations and discussing video lessons and working individually with teachers. I also focused on the availability of workshops, promoting the use of different methods of instruction to serve all kinds of learners, development of reading and writing skills as well as guiding teachers on the selection of multiple forms of assessment and providing teaching and learning resource materials as part of the guidance and support for literacy teachers. I also wanted to establish the relationship between teachers' gender, age and teaching experience with teachers' perceptions of the support provision for literacy instruction in the foundation phase.

The key findings show that literacy teachers perceive HODs as leaders who guide and support them through a series of instructional leadership activities including modelling and co-presenting lessons. Coupled with these, they observe them during lesson presentation, discuss lessons and give them constructive feedback to build their capacity as well as improve their literacy instructional methods. These were complemented by ensuring that there are sufficient learner-teacher support materials to enhance literacy instruction. Although some teachers in the study indicated that HODs also conduct workshops, promote the use of different methods of instruction, assist them in developing the reading and writing skills of learners and guide them on the selection of multiple forms of assessment, the majority of the teachers converged on the view that it was curriculum advisors who support them in this regard.

While some teachers indicated that senior teachers support them through classroom observations, discussing lessons and providing feedback as well as addressing their individual instructional needs, the general perception was that support provision by principals, deputy principals and senior teachers is quite limited. When it comes to the relationship between gender, age and teaching experience with regard to teachers' perceptions of the support provided for literacy instruction, two findings emerged.

Firstly, gender does not influence the way teachers perceive the support and guidance provided by school-based instructional leaders. Secondly, age and teaching experience are significant factors that influence teachers' perceptions of the support provision and guidance for literacy instruction. On the whole, these findings thus mean that there might be a lack of collaborative leadership amongst school-based instructional leaders. As per the teachers' perceptions, their modus operandi does not display teamwork as a significant percentage of the teachers in the study perceived HODs as their only source of support provision for literacy instruction.

Secondly, these findings suggest that the roles of school-based instructional leaders are not clarified to literacy teachers. Hence, they expect all these leaders to perform the same instructional leadership activities in the provision of support and guidance for literacy instruction.

Thirdly, these findings suggest that the DBE does not conduct sufficient workshops on role clarification for school-based instructional leaders upon their appointment and/or the instructional leaders are not well capacitated to perform their instructional leadership functions. Furthermore, distributive leadership is not effectively implemented in some of the Limpopo primary schools since HODs seem to be the only leaders carrying the heaviest workload to ensure the effectiveness of literacy instruction and learner performance in the foundation phase.

3.1.2. Research question 3, 4 and 5: The effect of instructional leadership on literacy instruction

How do school-based instructional leaders enact their practices in supporting literacy instruction in the foundation phase? How do literacy teachers understand those practices and how do these practices affect literacy instruction?

In article 2, I was interested in examining the practices of school-based instructional leaders in supporting literacy instruction, the way literacy teachers understand those practices and lastly, the manner in which these practices influence their classroom instruction. These three questions are importance for our understanding of how support and guidance for literacy instruction is provided in primary schools.

The key findings from article 2 (see pages 43-65) of this report) are that support provision is done through workshops where literacy teachers are equipped with the skills and capacity to cater for learner diversity in their classrooms. Additional skills that are taught at these workshops include how to apply different assessment techniques, assisting teachers to develop strategies of improving the reading and writing abilities of learners, classroom observations, modelling and co-presenting lessons to struggling teachers, lesson discussion, feedback provision and working closely with teachers to address their individual instructional needs. This is all done as part of the guidance and support offered to literacy teachers and as a means of enhancing their instructional methods and raising their morale. However, the HODs mostly implemented these procedures while other school-based instructional leaders were perceived to be providing limited support. These findings can be interpreted as giving evidence that HODs' practices are in a way influencing literacy instruction in the foundation phase, as understood by literacy teachers in our study, therefore having a positive effect on learner performance. The link between article 1 and 2 is that in both articles, HODs were perceived as the main source of support provision and guidance for literacy instruction while all the other school-based instructional leaders were perceived to be providing minimal support. However, our study also highlighted some challenges with regard to support provision for literacy instruction. These include amongst others an indication by some study participants that in their schools, the activities that HODs were supposedly doing were not utilised and that HODs are overloaded with work as they are not only actively involved in the improvement of learner performance in literacy but are also allocated subjects to teach.

3.1.3. Research question 6: District support for literacy instruction in the foundation phase

What are the district practices in support of literacy instruction in the foundation phase? Our focus in article 3 was to establish the activities done by curriculum advisors as part of district leadership in supporting literacy instruction in the foundation phase. Since poor learner performance in literacy instruction is a national crisis, this question was important to help us understand what the upper structures are doing to support schools in implementing policies and intervention strategies for improving literacy instruction. The key findings drawn from article 3 (see pages 66-90) of this report)

suggest that the activities done by curriculum advisors as part of the guidance and support for literacy instruction include the provision of information with regard to available opportunities for professional development, conducting workshops and ensuring that there are sufficient literacy resources in schools. It also includes organising reading and writing competitions, initiating partnerships with teachers' unions, providing workbooks and pacesetters as well as introducing lead teachers. However, there are some challenges revealed in this study. Challenges such as a short supply of curriculum advisors, ineffective communication of district goals, DBE workbooks without teachers' guides and inefficient direction for literacy instruction and intervention strategies renders literacy instruction ineffective. These findings highlight that despite their short supply, curriculum advisors are playing a role in the provision of guidance and support for literacy instruction. However, there are serious challenges mentioned above which require urgent intervention. The link to article 1, 2 and 3 is that all these articles reflect that the current support provision and guidance for literacy instruction taking place in schools is minimal and thus there is a need for better structure.

3.1.4. Research question 7: Challenges faced by school-based instructional leaders while providing support for literacy instruction

What are the challenges faced by school-based instructional leaders in support of literacy instruction in the foundation phase?

In article 4, I wanted to examine the challenges faced by school-based instructional leaders closely while providing support and guidance for literacy instruction in the foundation phase. It was crucial for me to understand how these challenges affect literacy instruction. The major findings in this article (see pages 91- 111) of this report) were that provision of support for literacy instruction is hindered by literacy teachers' negative perceptions towards the provision of support and guidance by school-based instructional leaders. This was attributed to the perception that school-based instructional leaders have insufficient knowledge and capacity to model best practices for literacy instruction in terms of lesson presentation, assessment strategies as well as giving feedback to teachers. This was attributed to their appointment into leadership positions without sufficient support and training by the DBE. These findings suggest that most of the literacy teachers from the Limpopo primary schools where this

research was conducted are insufficiently supported in their instruction due to the limited capacity of school-based instructional leaders to perform their instructional leadership roles. The link between this article and the previous articles is that it highlights the challenges that lead to the inefficient support for literacy instruction that is discussed in articles 1-3.

3.1.5. Research question 8: How can the capacity of school-based instructional leaders to lead literacy instruction be explained?

How can the provision of instructional guidance for literacy in the foundation phase be understood and/or explained?

As discussed in article 5 (see pages 112-133 of this report), the focus of this investigation was to determine how the provision of instructional guidance for literacy in the foundation phase be understood and/or explained. In exploring this puzzle, the one question that I was concerned about was whether school-based literacy instructional leaders have the capacity to lead literacy instruction in the foundation phase. The key findings show that school-based instructional leaders have limited capacity to lead literacy instruction in the foundation phase. A number of factors may cause this. Firstly, a lack of training prior to their appointment into leadership positions presents a gap in their capacity to perform their instructional leadership roles.

Secondly, this may be a result of improper implementation of the policy on the transfer of educators based on operational requirements results in many challenges. Most teachers were transferred from high schools to primary schools because they could not find placement in high schools where they were initially trained to work.

Thirdly, the weaknesses in the appointment of educators into leadership positions without due consideration of their level of qualifications also limits their capacity to lead literacy instruction in the foundation phase. For example, all the school-based instructional leaders in the study were qualified high school teachers who have taught in high schools prior to their appointment into leadership positions in primary schools except one who was initially trained as a primary school teacher but has taught in a high school prior to her appointment. These findings thus mean that literacy teachers

in some of the Limpopo primary schools do not receive the much needed guidance and support for literacy instruction that would change their instructional methods and practices and accordingly, improve learner performance.

3.2. Implications

A comprehensive analysis of the findings suggest that the DBE should review its capacity building programmes for school-based instructional leaders and design them in a way that would equip these leaders with skills, knowledge and capacity to perform instructional leadership functions that focus on teacher development. Effective instructional leadership implies that they should be able to model and co-present literacy lessons with teachers who are struggling, offer support and guidance through classroom observations, discuss lessons with them and provide feedback to enhance instruction modelling and co-presentation of lessons (Christie, Thompson & Whitney, 2009; Walsh, 2014). They should also conduct workshops that will equip teachers with the skills, knowledge and capacity to be effective literacy teachers (Ohlson, 2009). These are practices that other scholars found characteristic of quality leaders and that are aimed at motivating, supporting and influencing teachers to implement new instructional methods and practices effectively (Knight, 2007; Mestry & Pillay, 2013). In essence, failure to perform these functions would render literacy instruction ineffective. Therefore, there is a need for an urgent intervention if the country is serious about the improvement of learner performance in literacy.

Secondly, the findings suggest a need to strengthen collaborative and distributed leadership in primary schools. The current situation as reflected in our findings leaves HODs heavily overloaded, as they seem to be the only instructional leaders who are actively involved in the improvement of literacy instruction. This presents a gap in the provision of support and guidance for literacy instruction since distributed and collaborative leadership have proven to be powerful strategies that can improve learner performance in many countries (Bean & Lillesntein, 2012; Ferguson, 2014).

Thirdly, these findings seem to suggest an urgent need for the DBE to clarify the role of each school-based instructional leader in the improvement of learner performance as outlined in the PAM document (DoE, 1999). This document clearly stipulates that

senior teachers and HODs should perform the same instructional leadership functions in the provision of support and guidance to teachers. These include participating in subject and phase meetings; providing the recommended materials such as pacesetters and lesson plans, modelling and co-presenting lessons, conducting classroom observations, discussing lessons and providing feedback (Goslin, 2008). This means that they should be in touch with what is happening in the classroom rather than being distant from it. Deputy Principals should manage the curriculum through checking the work done by HODs and senior teachers and report to principals who are chief accounting officers. The current situation where principals, deputy principals and senior teachers are providing limited support suggests that they are not well conversant with their roles and/or that they are not well capacitated to perform their functions as instructional leaders. This supports the findings by Mkhize (2007) that DBE in South Africa usually prescribes the roles and responsibilities of instructional leaders but fails to provide programmes that could improve their leadership competences.

Fourthly, although curriculum advisors were found to be supportive of literacy instruction in many ways, despite their short supply, their ineffective communication of clear district goals and giving direction with regard to literacy instruction limits the support and guidance for literacy instruction. This affects literacy instruction negatively since other studies have found that the type of leadership and its provision on different levels of the education system can affect classroom instruction and learner performance positively or negatively (Bayat, Low & Rena, 2014; Murphy & Meyers, 2009).

3.3 Conclusion

Our findings made it clear that the instructional leadership practices of HODs positively influence literacy instruction in the foundation phase. Despite their short supply, curriculum advisors also seem to be playing a prominent role in the provision of guidance and support for literacy instruction. Principals, their deputies and senior teachers' roles in the provision of guidance and support for literacy instruction is minimal. The improper implementation of the policy on the transfer of educators due to operational requirements seems to be posing a threat in the provision of support

and guidance for literacy instruction. This led to the dumping of HODs who were initially trained as high school teachers into primary schools because of a lack of placement in high school. The weaknesses in the appointment of educators into leadership positions without due consideration for their level of qualifications also poses a threat. This limits their capacity to provide effective support and guidance to literacy teachers. The limited capacity of school-based instructional leaders to provide effective guidance and support for literacy instruction seems to lead to literacy teachers developing negative attitudes towards the provision of guidance and support. A lack of support and guidance might negatively affect teachers' literacy instruction, leading to poor learner performance.

In conclusion, we recommend that the structure of instructional leadership be improved to provide the much-needed support for literacy instruction in the foundation phase. We further recommend that the DBE should address all the weaknesses flagged in our study if the country is serious about the improvement of learner performance in literacy. These weaknesses include the short supply of curriculum advisors, improper implementation of the policy on the transfer of educators due to operational requirements and the weaknesses with regard to the process of appointment of teachers into leadership positions without due consideration of their area of specialisation and level of qualification. We therefore recommend that the process of appointment of teachers into leadership positions be structured in a way that will consider the level of qualification and area of specialisation.

Lastly, the study found that support provision for literacy instruction by principals, deputy principals and senior teachers was limited due to their incapacity to perform most of the literacy instructional leadership activities. We therefore recommend that the DBE revisit its capacity building programmes and redesign them in a way that would enhance the capacity of school-based instructional leaders to provide the much needed guidance and support for literacy instruction in the foundation phase. Without rigorous strategies to address the weaknesses in the study, poor learner performance in literacy might remain a norm and deteriorate further. The study achieved its aim of exploring curriculum guidance, support systems and instructional leadership practices for literacy in the foundation phase. It has also unveiled the shortcomings of these

systems for which practice-based strategies for effective instructional guidance are recommended.

3.4 Limitations

Although this study was only conducted in three districts with just 251 literacy teachers, its findings could begin to address the gap in the literature by providing information on the provision of guidance and support for literacy instruction in the foundation phase. It may also give insight to policymakers as to how instructional leadership could be better structured to improve literacy instruction and learner performance. It also provides a fertile ground and bases for the DBE and policymakers to review policies that focus on capacity building for school-based instructional leaders and foundation phase literacy teachers and design them in a way that equips these leaders with the skills and capacity to perform their roles effectively.

3.5. Recommendations for further studies

This study was undertaken in three districts of Limpopo and consisted of a limited number of participants. Other studies could be undertaken that could involve the whole province and a larger sample.

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Appendix A: Ethical Clearance



Faculty of Education
Ethics Office

Room 12
Winkie Derek Building
Faculty of Education
University of the Free State
P.O. Box 339
Bloemfontein 9300
South Africa

T: +27(0)61 401 9922
F: +27(0)61 401 2010

www.ufs.ac.za
BarclayA@ufs.ac.za

10 April 2014

ETHICAL CLEARANCE APPLICATION:

INSTRUCTIONAL GUIDANCE FOR LITERACY TEACHING IN LIMPOPO, SOUTH AFRICA: A CASE STUDY OF THE FOUNDATION PHASE POLICY AND PRACTICE

Dear Ms Mbhalati

With reference to your application for ethical clearance with the Faculty of Education, I am pleased to inform you on behalf of the Ethics Board of the faculty that you have been granted ethical clearance for your research.

Your ethical clearance number, to be used in all correspondence, is:

UFS-EDU-2014-007

This ethical clearance number is valid for research conducted for one year from issuance. Should you require more time to complete this research, please apply for an extension in writing.

We request that any changes that may take place during the course of your research project be submitted in writing to the ethics office to ensure we are kept up to date with your progress and any ethical implications that may arise.

Thank you for submitting this proposal for ethical clearance and we wish you every success with your research.


Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A. Barclay'.

Andrew Barclay
Faculty Ethics Officer



Appendix B: Permission letters Limpopo DOE

 **LIMPOPO**
PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

**DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION**

Enquiries: Dr. Makola MC, Tel No: 015 290 9448. E-mail: Mc.Makola@edu.limpopo.gov.za

PO BOX 964
LETABA
0870
NKHESANI 8M

RE: Request for permission to Conduct Research

1. The above bears reference.
2. The Department wishes to inform you that your request to conduct a research has been approved- **TITLE: INSTRUCTIONAL GUIDANCE FOR LITERACY TEACHING IN LIMPOPO :THE CASE OF FOUNDATION PHASE POLICY AND PRACTICE**
3. The following conditions should be considered
 - 3.1 The research should not have any financial implications for Limpopo Department of Education.
 - 3.2 Arrangements should be made with both the Circuit Offices and the schools concerned.
 - 3.3 The conduct of research should not anyhow disrupt the academic programs at the schools.
 - 3.4 The research should not be conducted during the time of Examinations especially the forth term.
 - 3.5 During the study, the research ethics should be practiced, in particular the principle of voluntary participation (the people involved should be respected).
 - 3.6 Upon completion of research study, the researcher shall share the final product of the research with the Department.
4. Furthermore, you are expected to produce this letter at Schools/ Offices where you intend conducting your research as an evidence that you are permitted to conduct the research.

Page 1 of 2

Cnr. 113 Biccard & 24 Excelsior Street, POLOKWANE, 0700, Private Bag X9489, POLOKWANE, 0700
Tel: 015 290 7600, Fax: 015 297 6920/4220/4494

The heartland of southern Africa - development is about people

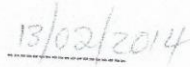
5. The department appreciates the contribution that you wish to make and wishes you success in your investigation.

Best wishes.



Dederen K.O

Acting Head of Department



Date

Appendix C: Permission letter: circuits



LIMPOPO
PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION

REF: 913155
ENQ: RASEBOTSA O
DATE: 04 MARCH 2014

Mrs. N.B Mbhalati
P. O Box 964
LETABA
0870

RE: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH: YOURSELF.

1. The above matter reference.
2. You are kindly notified that your request to conduct a research in Nkowankowa Circuit is granted.
3. You are further requested to adhere to all the condition stipulated by the attached letter from head office as well as your letter: item number 6, 7 and 8.
4. Wishing you well in your endeavour to improve the education system in our country.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'S. D. Manzini', written over a dotted line.

CIRCUIT MANAGER (MANZINI S.D)

Nkowankowa Circuit, Private Bag X 1413, LETABA, 0870
TEL NO. 015 303 1719/1725/ 2398 FAX NO. 015 303 1539



LIMPOPO
PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Private Bag X9259
SASELAMANI
0928
Tel.: (015) 853 1089

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
MALAMULELE EAST CIRCUIT

REF : 81027371
ENQ.: Dr. R.W. Chabalala
TEL : 083 535 6288

27 MARCH 2014

NKHESANI BRENDA MBHALATI
P.O BOX 964
LETABA
0870

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE MALAMULELE EAST CIRCUIT.

1. Permission is hereby granted for you to conduct research work within the circuit as requested.
2. Wishing you the best in your field of studies.


CIRCUIT MANAGER
MALAMULELE EAST CIRCUIT





LIMPOPO
 PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT
 REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION
VHEMBE DISTRICT
MALAMULELE CENTRAL CIRCUIT

Ref: 2/2/1/1
 Enq: Chauke T.R.
 Cell: 076 567 0943


Nkhensani Brenda Mbhalati
 P.O. Box 964
 LETABA
 0870

REQUEST FOR A PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AT MALAMULELE CENTRAL CIRCUIT: YOURSELF

1. The above matter refers.
2. Your request for a permission to conduct research at Malamulele Central Circuit schools has been approved on the following condition that:
 - 2.1. Schools will not be disturbed for effective teaching and learning.
 - 2.2. Research must be done after 14h30.
 - 2.3. You will be at your school till after 14h30 for your research.
 - 2.4. The research will not be conducted during the time of examinations, especially the fourth term.
3. You are further requested to make prior arrangements with the school principals of the schools concerned.
4. Wishing you all the best on your research.


 CIRCUIT MANAGER

MALAMULELE CENTRAL CIRCUIT
 DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
 TEL/FAX: (015) 551-0035
 2014-03-10
 P.O. BOX 2424, MALAMULELE, 0982
 VHEMBE DISTRICT
 LIMPOPO PROVINCE


 DATE

Malamulele Central Circuit Building Opposite Shitlhelani Clinic, Private Bag X 9133, Malamulele, 0982
 Tel: (015) 851 7919, 7920, 7921 Fax: 086 537 3059

The heartland of southern Africa - development is about people!



LIMPOPO
PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT
 REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
KHUJWANA CIRCUIT


To whom it may concern.

It is our pleasure to inform you that you have been granted permission to conduct research (qualitative or quantitative) in our circuit, thereby working with us as your units of analysis.

We shall co-operate with you by assisting you in your quest to justify your hypothetical view as encapsulated in your research topic.

We believe your ethical considerations will be informed or rather be guided by the response rate of your participants. Good luck in your P.H.D studies and hope that the consciousness of your participants will be raised as you interact with them, on daily basis, thus extrinsically motivating them to pursue their studies as well.

Thank you.



 Circuit Manager
 MOHLATLOLE MW

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
 KHUJWANA CIRCUIT
 CIRCUIT MANAGER KHUJWANA

17/03/2014
 Date

17 MAR 2014

PRIVATE BAG X1423 LENYENYE 0357
 015 355 4023 & 4025

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
 KHUJWANA CIRCUIT
 Private Bag X 1423- LENYENYE, 0857
 Tel 015 355 4537 / 4549 - Fax No. 015 355 4525

The heartland of Southern Africa – development is about people



DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
SHILUVANE CIRCUIT


ENQ : Dr. T Mbalati
CON : 079 510 4106
E-mail : tim.mbalati@gmail.com

Wednesday, 26 February 2014

Dear Mrs NB Mbalati
P O Box 964
LETABA
0870

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN SHILUVANE CIRCUIT

1. The matter alluded to above refers.
2. Be informed that your request for permission to conduct a research in Shiluvane Circuit is granted in terms of the conditions stated in par. 7, 8 and 9 of your application letter.
3. We appreciate the contribution that your findings will do to our education system.


CIRCUIT MANAGER
SHILUVANE



LIMPOPO
PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

REF. : 913154
ENQ. : MALATJI M.S.
DATE : 27 FEBRUARY 2014

ATTENTION: NKHENSANI B. MBHALATI

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN MAFARANA CIRCUIT.

1. The above matter refers
2. Kindly receive my preliminary approval to conduct research in Mafarana Schools.
3. Preliminary because the School Managers must give consent after consultations with SGBs at their respective schools. Mafarana has 15 schools with foundation phases.
4. We warmly welcome one of us to research the effectiveness & challenges in the foundation phase.
5. Hoping that the research will be of assistance to improve teaching and learning in foundation phase.
6. Regards

Circuit Manager
/mrs

27/02/2014

Date

MAFARANA CIRCUIT

Private Bag x 1420, LETABA, 0870

TEL: 015 303 2336/ 2355 / 2387/2472. FAX: 015 303 2196



LIMPOPO
PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Office of the Circuit Manager
Leolo Circuit
Private Bag X1305
Atok 0749

DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION

Enquiries : MAEPA M.K.

Cell No. : 082 550 5514

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

REQUEST TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN LEOLO CIRCUIT- NKHENSANI MBALATI

- 1.The above matter refers.
2. We have received your letter of request and your approval from the Head of Department in Limpopo with respect to the above matter.
3. The matter has received our necessary attention and permission is hereby granted for you to conduct the research without actually disturbing the academic programmes of the identified institutions.
4. we would appreciate it if a list of the identified (sampled) institutions is sent to us so that they can be informed accordingly.
5. Wishing you all the best in your interactions with us.

MAEPA M.K.

17/04/2014

(ACTING CIRCUIT MANAGER)

RIBACROSS DISTRICT
LEOLO CIRCUIT

Tel : 015 619 0118/0164/0112
Fax : 015 619 0073

THE HEARTLAND OF SOUTHERN AFRICA-DEVELOPMENT IS ABOUT PEOPLE



LIMPOPO

PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION

Private Bag X1413
LETABA
0870
Tel No. 015 303 2154
Fax No. 015 303 2196
Cell No. 071 679 3189


04 March 2014

Enq. Magwaza Ngomana

Attention: NB Mbhalati

Re: Request for permission to conduct research at Xihoko Circuit: Yourself.

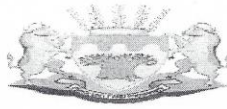
1. The above matter refers
2. I acknowledge receipt of your letter dated 25 February 2014 and the attached written permission by the Provincial Department of Basic Education.
3. The circuit therefore informs you that permission is granted on the strict conditions outlined in paragraph 3 (3.1 – 3.6) of the PDBE letter of approval for consideration, which I may not repeat.
4. I further advice you to heed paragraph four of the same letter.
5. I wish you the best in your endeavours to expand your knowledge horizons, which I believe will benefit both yourself and the department of education, in particular Xihoko circuit.
6. All the best.


Circuit Manager: Ngomana ME



Xihoko Circuit

Private Bag X1411
LENYENYE
0857
Tel. No. 015 355 4027
Fax. No. 015 355 4029



LIMPOPO
PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION
THABINA CIRCUIT

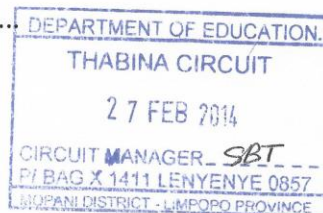
ENQ: MOTLOUTSI ME
DATE; 2014.02.26

TO: NKHENSANI BRENDA MBHALATI
P.O. BOX 964
LETABA
0870

**REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN SCHOOLS UNDER
THABINA CIRCUIT.**

1. The above matter refers to your letter dated 2014.02.25:
2. Please be informed that permission has been granted for you to conduct research in schools under Thabina Circuit.
3. The conditions for your project are as stated in the permission letter from the Provincial Department of Education.
4. Wishing you the best and hoping you will find everything in order


CIRCUIT MANAGER - THABINA



APPENDIX D: PERMISSION LETTERS FROM SCHOOLS

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION – LIMPOPO PROVINCE
THABENG L/ H PRIMARY SCHOOL

P O BOX 319
LENYENYE
0857

PRINCIPAL: MALELE RHM
CONTACT NO: 082 298 6602

EMIS NUMBER: 926541235
REG.NO: 050140240
PAYPOINT NO: 8409/410921

16 APRIL 2014


MBHALATI N.B
BOX 964
LETABA
0870

MADAM

Re: Request for permission to conduct Research

1. The above bears reference.
2. The above mentioned Primary School hereby inform you that your request to conduct a research is accepted.
3. This is viewed as an opportunity to make a meaningful contribution in the development of our institution.
4. Maximum participation is guaranteed.
5. We wish you the best in your studies.

Thank you.


.....
MALELE R.H.M (Principal)





MOHLODUMELA PRIMARY SCHOOL

P.O. BOX 304
LENYENYE 0857

DISTRICT: MOPANI
CIRCUIT: THABINA

EMIS NO:
0926541006

All correspondence to be addressed to the Principal: R. J. SELOISA - 073 467 2867

Reference to Nkhensani Brenda Mbhalati.

PO BOX 964

LETABA

0870

Dear Madam

Permission to conduct research in our school.

The permission to conduct research in our school has been granted. We are delighted to observe that the investigation will be conducted in a manner that will not disrupt teaching and learning.

Your Co-operation as always is highly prized.

Yours Faithfully
Seloisa RJ



RHANGANI PRIMARY SCHOOL

Ref No: 2013
EMIS No. 0911360313
Enq: Chauke L.T

Cell: 072 417 5128
: 0713836013
: 072 656 7408
: 082 748 8606



P.O. Box 168
Mhinga
0976
Stand No: 809

28/03/2014

Email: rhanganione@webmail.co.za
Vhembe District

Malamulele North East Circuit

Mbhalati N.B.
Box 964
Letaba
0879

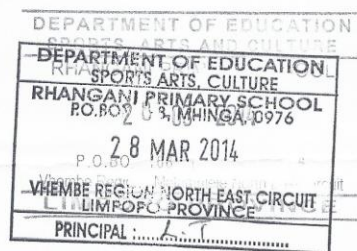
REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN OUR SCHOOL

1. The above bears reference
2. The principal and staff of Rhanganani Primary School acknowledge receipt of your letter dated 19 March 2014 whereby you requested to make a research in our school.
3. We therefore whole heartedly welcome you as your research may be of great help in the running of our school.

Banking on your co-operation

Faithfully yours
Chauke L.T (principal)

Chauke L.T





DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
PONANI PRIMARY SCHOOL

P.O. BOX 593
LETABA 0870

EMIS NO:
0915541112

TEL:
015 355 3154

ENQ: MALUNGANE S.S. - CELL: 083 490 5887
All communications to be addressed to The Principal



GOOD EDUCATION



DONT BELIEVE IN CRIME
BUT KEEP CHILDREN SAFE
AND SECURED



KNOWLEDGE CAN GIVE
YOU SAFETY AND SECURITY



BELIEVE IN FAMILY

Mbhhlati N B

P.O. Box964

Letaba

0870

Madam

RE: Request for permission to conduct Research

The above matter refers:

1. The school takes pleasure in informing you that your request to conduct a research has been granted,
2. We are looking forward to working with you in endeavour to answer your research questions.

Best wishes

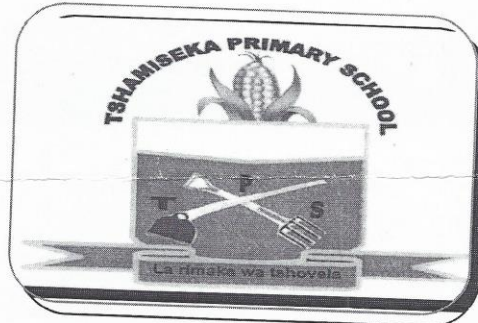
Malungane SS

Principal



ENQ : MR NKUNA
CONTACT NO : 083 922 1323
REF : A/ 911360795

P.O.BOX 1136
MALAMULELE
0982
DATE : 16/04/2014



MRS N.B MBHALATI
P.O.BOX 964
LETABA
0870

Dear Madam

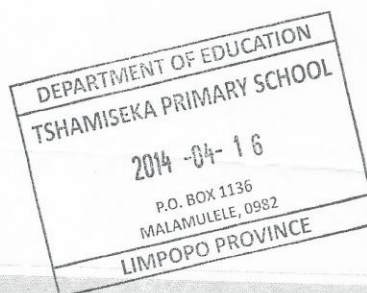
RE: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

1. The above matter bears reference.
2. The school wishes to inform that permission to conduct research has been granted to you.

Your co-operation will be highly appreciated.

Yours truly

NKUNA M.R (PRINCIPAL)



MUKHOMI J.P. SCHOOL

Mukhomi Village
Stand no. 038
P. O. Box 1238
MALAMULELE 0982



Enquiries.
M.P.MADZIVANE
Cell. 073 565 3268
EMIS NO 0911360696

Mrs N.B Mbhalati

P.O.BOX 964

LETABA

0870

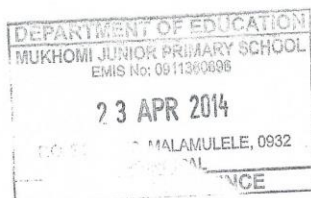
YOUR REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEACH IN MUKHOMI JUNIOR PRIMARY SCHOOL

1. We also acknowledge your letter dated 25 February 2014
2. Permission is granted
3. Your co-operation will highly appreciated

We wish you well

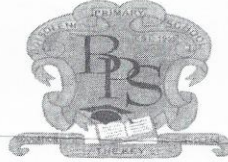
Yours Faithfully

MADZIVANE M.P (Principal)



BOTSOLENI PRIMARY SCHOOL

Ref : 13 of 2014
Enq : Magwaza T.H
Cell : 083 363 6364
: 071 921 8000
: 076 204 3359



P.O.Box 252
Saselamani
0928

EMIS No: 911 360 351


12 May 2014

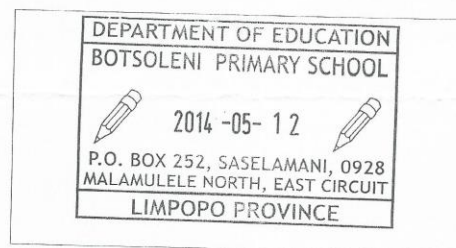
Malamulele North east Circuit: Vhembe District Limpopo

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN OUR SCHOOL: YOURSELF

1. With reference to the letter dated the **11th April 2014**, the school management team in collaboration with the SGB has a pleasure in granting you a permission to come and conduct research in our school as alluded above.
2. However, we also wish to apologise for the delay of the response due to unforeseen circumstances. We believe that you still have ample time to communicate with us about the date on which research will be conducted.
3. Hoping that our response in this regard will receive a warm acceptance.
4. Yours Faithfully


(School Management)


(SGB Secretary)





PHAPHAZELA
JUNIOR PRIMARY SCHOOL
Department of Education
EMIS : 911360757



Enquiries : Chabalala D.M. Cell : 083 950 9722 / 072 260 1392 Fax : 079 203 3320 Ref. No.

16 April 2014

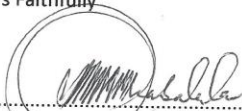
Mrs N.B Mbhalati
P.O.Box 964
LETABA
0870

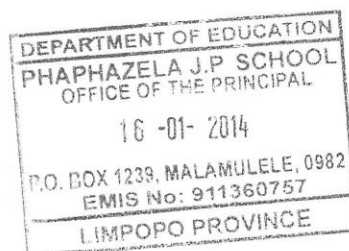
Madam

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN OUR SCHOOL

1. Receipt of your letter dated 11 April 2014 is hereby acknowledged.
2. The management of the school mentioned above informs you that permission has been granted for you to conduct Research on your studies in this school.
3. Your cooperation will be appreciated.

Yours Faithfully


Principal





EMIS No. : 926541013
ENQ. : MALEMA P.W
CELL : 082 744 8686
TEL : 079 823 4934
E-Mail : moimeprimaryschool@gmail.com
FAX : 086 228 4027

P O BOX 132
LENYENYE
0857

15 April 2014

Ms NKhensani Mbhalati

RE: Your request to conduct research in our school

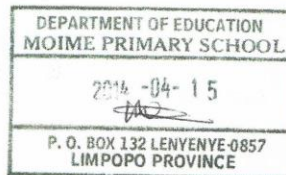
The above matter refers:

1. In response to your request, I hereby give you permission to conduct your research at our school.
2. The school further wishes you success in your studies.

Hoping that you will find this in order.

Yours truly
MALEMA P.W.


.....
PRINCIPAL





MAVUMBHA COMBINED PRIMARY SCHOOL

Enq: MASHELE CCM
Contact no: 0827403 795

Private Bag x1442
LETABA
0870
27 March 2014

Mrs NB Mbhalati
P.O box 964
LETABA
0870


Dear Sir/Madam

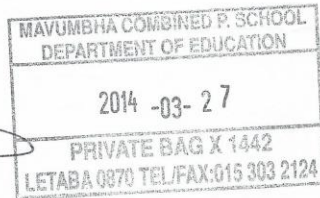
**REF: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN
OUR SCHOOL BY YOURSELF.**

1. The matter above refers.
2. The school acknowledges receipt of your letter dated 24/03/2014 in which permission is requested by you to conduct a research.
3. I wish to inform you that the school has welcomed your request to conduct a research.
4. Our educators are willing to cooperate with you during this project.

We wish you well.

Thank you


Mashele CCM
(Principal)





MAAKE PRIMARY SCHOOL

SEDIBENG SA THUTO

CELL:
TELEFAX:

P.O. Box 64
LENYENYE
0857

Enquiries:Maake MM

Contact:0828624564

Email:mohlago.maggie@gmail.com

Friday 28 March 2014

Dear Mr NB Mbhalati

P.O.Box 964

Letaba

0870

Permission to conduct research: Maake Primary School v/s Yourself

1.The matter above bears reference:

2.Your request on the above matter has been considered and permission to conduct research is granted.

3.We hope your findings will have a contribution to our education system.

Yours truly

Maake M.M (Principal)



APPENDIX D: CONSENT FORM

A LETTER TO THE RESPONDENTS ASKING THEM TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY

Dear Sir/ Madam

My name is Mbhalati NKhensani Brenda. I request you to participate in a research project which is part of my research for a Doctor of Philosophy degree, currently being undertaken at University of Free State. The purpose of this study is to investigate instructional guidance for literacy teaching in Limpopo Province. The title of the study is **“Instructional guidance for literacy teaching in Limpopo, South Africa: A case study of the Foundation Phase policy and practice”**

You are therefore requested to participate in the interview session which will last about 45 minutes. Your answers will be confidential. The records of this study will be kept private and the outcomes of the interview will be presented anonymously in the dissertation. In any sort of report I make public, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you. The research findings may be used in presentations and publications. Research records will be kept in locked file and only the researcher will have access to the specific data that is collected.

Participating in this study is completely voluntary. If you decide to participate, you may, at any time, withdraw from the study by simply indicating your intention to withdraw. If you require any further information or explanation, please contact me at 0849000312/0713083299 I will appreciate your taking the time to participate.

Thank you very much for your co-operation.

Yours Faithfully

Mbhalati NKhensani Brenda (Researcher).

CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS

Iconfirm that I have read and understood the conditions under which I will participate in the interview meeting and give my consent to be a participant and to have the discussion audio-recorded. I understand that the title of the project in which I am participating is “Instructional guidance for Literacy teaching in Limpopo Province, South Africa”. I understand that the benefit of this study is to help provide a more in-depth understanding in the scholarly area of literacy instruction. I agree that any data contributed by me may be published. I also agree to the use of anonymised quotes in the publications. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving reason.

.....

Name of the participant

.....

Signature

.....

Date

Researcher:.....

APPENDIX E: QUESTIONNAIRE

My name is Nkhensani Brenda Mbhalati, A PhD student at the University of Free State. You are humbly requested to complete this questionnaire about the instructional guidance for Literacy teaching at the foundation phase. Only foundation phase teachers who have completed a consent form are legible to complete this questionnaire. Completion of this questionnaire is voluntary. Thanking you in advance as you complete this questionnaire.

INSTRUCTIONAL GUIDANCE FOR LITERACY TEACHING AT THE FOUNDATION PHASE: A CASE OF THE FOUNDATION PHASE POLICY AND PRACTICE

PART A: BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

MARK WITH A CROSS (X) NEXT TO THE APPROPRIATE ANSWER

PART A

YOUR GENDER:

MALE

FEMALE

YOUR AGE:

26-30

31-35

36-40

41-45

46-50

51-55

55-60

YOUR TEACHING EXPERIENCE

5-10

11-15

16-20

21-25

26-30

31-35

36-40

SECTION B

MARK WITH A CROSS NEXT TO THE INSTRUCTIONAL LEADER WHO PERFORMS THE INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP PRACTICE TO SUPPORT LITERACY INSTRUCTION

1. Which of your Literacy coach support you by providing Literacy resource materials for teachers in your school?

Principal

Deputy Principal

HOD

Senior Teacher

Curriculum Advisor

None of the Above

2. Which of your Literacy coach support you by providing Literacy resource materials for Learners in your school?

Principal

Deputy Principal

HOD

Senior Teacher

Curriculum Advisor

None of the Above

3. Does your school has a policy that helps to provide guidance and support for Literacy teaching and learning at your school?

Agree

Disagree

Not Sure

4. Which of your Literacy couch support you by modelling lessons for you?

Principal

Deputy Principal

HOD

Senior Teacher

Curriculum Advisor

None of the Above

5. Which of your Literacy coach support you by providing feedback after observing you in class?

Principal

Deputy Principal

HOD

Senior Teacher

Curriculum Advisor

None of the Above

6. Which of your Literacy coach present you with useful Literacy information in a workshop formant?

Principal

Deputy Principal

HOD

Senior Teacher

Curriculum Advisor

None of the Above

7. Which of your Literacy coach support you by addressing your individual instructional needs?

Principal

Deputy Principal

HOD

Senior Teacher

Curriculum Advisor

None of the Above

8. Which of your literacy coach works with you to support the development and implementation of differentiated methods of instruction to serve all kinds of learners?

Principal

Deputy Principal

HOD

Senior Teacher

None of the above

9. Which of your Literacy coach works with you to develop the reading and writing skills of learners?

Principal
Deputy Principal
HOD
Senior Teacher
Curriculum Advisor
None of the Above

10. Which of your Literacy coach assist you to select and use multiple forms of assessment?

Principal
Deputy Principal
HOD
Senior Teacher
Curriculum Advisor
None of the Above

11. Which of your Literacy coach support you by co-presenting lessons with you?

Principal
Deputy Principal
HOD
Senior Teacher
Curriculum Advisor
None of the Above

12. Which of your Literacy coach support you by facilitating discussion of video lessons?

Principal
Deputy Principal
HOD
Senior Teacher
Curriculum Advisor
None of the Above

13. Which of your Literacy coach assist you to analyse student performance data to inform your instructional decisions?

Principal
Deputy Principal
HOD
Senior Teacher
Curriculum Advisor
None of the Above

14. Which of your Literacy coach support you by attending workshops with you?

Principal
Deputy Principal
HOD
Senior Teacher
Curriculum Advisor
None of the Above

15. Which of your Literacy coach support you by communicating clear school goals?

Principal
Deputy Principal
HOD
Senior Teacher
Curriculum Advisor
None of the Above

16. Which of your Literacy coach support you by providing information for professional development?

Principal
Deputy Principal
HOD
Senior Teacher
Curriculum Advisor
None of the Above

17. Which of your Literacy coach discusses and assist you in finding solutions for problems you encounter during your classroom instruction?

Principal

Deputy Principal

HOD

Senior Teacher

Curriculum Advisor

None of the Above

18. Which of Literacy coach support you by complementing your special efforts with regards to Literacy instruction?

Principal

Deputy Principal

HOD

Senior Teacher

Curriculum Advisor

None of the Above

19. Which of your Literacy coach support you by suggesting best strategies of improving your Literacy instructional approaches or methods?

Principal

Deputy Principal

HOD

Senior Teacher

Curriculum Advisor

None of the above

20. In your opinion, how much of a role should curriculum advisors play in providing direction for Literacy instruction at the foundation phase?

Bigger role

Minimal role

Moderate role

No role at all

21. Given all issues and priorities facing curriculum advisors would you say they provide adequate direction, moderate direction or no direction at all for Literacy instruction at the foundation phase?

Adequate direction

Moderate direction

No direction

22. Do you agree with this statement: For the past 5 years to date, more instructional decisions in your district have been made at district level as opposed to school level?

Strongly Agree

Partially disagree

Agree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

23. Do you agree with this statement: The Annual National Assessment (ANA) has forced curriculum advisors to play a larger role in guiding the kind of Literacy instruction practiced at the foundation phase?

Strongly Agree

Partially Agree

Agree

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

24. Do you agree with this statement: Regardless of ANA, curriculum advisors should play an active role in supporting Literacy Instruction at the Foundation phase?

Strongly Agree

Partially Agree

Agree

Strongly Disagree

Disagree

SECTION C

MARK WITH A CROSS NEXT TO THE INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP PRACTICE WHICH YOU THINK COULD IMPROVE LITERACY INSTRUCTION AT THE FOUNDATION PHASE EVEN IF IT IS NOT CURRENTLY PRACTICED IN YOUR DISTRICT. YOU CAN CHOOSE AS MANY INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES AS YOU WANT

Equip teachers and principals with skills to analyse students' performance data

Conduct classroom observations

Have a system where each school draws its own improvement plan based on students' performance data

Have induction programme for newly-appointed literacy educators

Use the same Literacy programmes and textbooks.

Have same reading programmes and same reading books across the district

Have common planning time

Administer district-wide benchmark assessment

Require teachers to adjust instruction based on benchmark assessment

Provision of Data-management system

Limit professional development to students improvement

Have teacher-leader positions at schools through which a teacher is freed from classroom duties to coach other literacy teachers

Establishment of partnership with teacher organisations and other community structures

Thanks a million for participating in this study.

APPENDIX F: INTERVIEW GUIDES

Interview for Teachers

- 1. May you please tell us about yourself?**
- 2. What qualifications do you have?**
- 3. How long have you been in the teaching profession?**
- 4. How long have you been teaching in the foundation phase?**
- 5. Given the poor literacy levels of South African learners and the diversity classrooms we are facing today, how do your SMT members assist you to deal with the diversified needs of learners in your classroom?**
- 6. How are you assisted with to develop the reading and writing skills of learners?**
- 7. How do you experience support from SMT members with regards to your individual instructional needs?**
- 8. What activities are done by your SMT to improve your instructional methods?**
- 9. Which are the activities done by SMT members to support literacy instruction?**
- 10. How do these activities effect your classroom instruction?**
- 11. What are the activities done by Curriculum advisors to support literacy instruction?**
- 12. . How do you perceive support with regards to opportunities you are given to improve your profession?**
- 13. In your view, would you say the SMT in your school have the capacity to lead literacy instruction and why?**

14. **What do you think can be done to support literacy instruction and learner performance?**

Interview guide for School-based instructional leaders

1. **May you please tell us about yourself?**
2. **May you please tell us about your qualifications?**
3. **How long have you been in the teaching profession?**
4. **How long have you been in the management?**
5. **How long have you been teaching in the primary school?**
6. **Given the situation of poor learner performance in literacy, what do you do to support literacy teachers?**
7. **In your view, would you say you have sufficient knowledge skills and capacity to lead literacy instruction and why?**
8. **What challenges do you encounter while supporting literacy instruction and how do you deal with them?**
9. **What activities are done to support literacy instruction?**
10. **What do you think should be done to improve literacy instruction and learner performance?**

