Analysing the Influence of Principal Classroom Supervision on Literacy Instruction: Some Critical Perspectives

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ABSTRACT
The literature indicates that instructional leadership, led by the school principal, substantially enhances instructional practices and learner performance. The application of instructional leadership to improve performance in key subjects, such as literacy, has become an important topic of discussion in research. This study aimed to analyse the influence of principal classroom supervision on literacy instruction, utilising the instructional leadership theory as a theoretical lens. The researcher adopted a qualitative desktop study approach, which involved gathering information and data from existing sources. The main tenets associated with the supervision of instruction were investigated. It further observed the influence and examined the impact of principal classroom supervision on instruction, predominantly in Grades 4-6. The findings revealed that principals have a crucial role to play, but that shared leadership approaches for improved literacy instruction are essential. The findings also showed that the supervision process is comprehensive and challenging, requiring careful planning and engagement. These findings imply that the supervision of instruction should receive more attention and intervention from all relevant educational stakeholders.
KEYWORDS
Instructional leadership; literacy; reading and writing; supervision.

INTRODUCTION

Of all the things that children have to learn when they get to school, reading and writing are the most basic, the most central and the most essential. Practically everything else that they do will be permeated by these two skills. Hardly a project lesson can be understood, hardly a project finished unless the children can read books in front of them and write or their time at school will be largely wasted. – Pretorius (in Plaatjies, 2016, p. 4).

The aforementioned statement verifies that acquiring literacy skills, encompassing reading and writing, is paramount in a child's academic pursuits. Furthermore, Zimmerman (2017, p. 36) raises the concern that "insufficient development in reading literacy will hinder learners' success in their educational journey, leading to severe consequences for their prospects". A report by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) also declares literateness as a fundamental privilege, instrument for individual empowerment, and vehicle for communal and individual progress. UNESCO also highlights that literacy skills are fundamental to basic education for everyone and are essential for eradicating poverty, lowering child mortality rates, controlling population growth, achieving gender equality, and promoting sustainable development, peace, and democracy (Le et al., 2011).

Despite these solemn reminders regarding the pivotal role of literacy, there are significant concerns about the literacy performance of learners globally. For instance, UNESCO's Global Education Monitoring Report of 2017 revealed that over 100 million young individuals still lack reading skills (Howie et al., 2017). Similarly, in the context of South Africa, various research reports have drawn attention to the inadequate literacy skills of primary school students (Department of Basic Education [DBE], 2013; Van der Bergh, 2015; Howie et al., 2017; Plaatjies, 2019; Plaatjies, 2020). This dire situation persists despite numerous interventions at the classroom and policy levels, as well as the commitment of educational authorities. For example, a report by UNESCO (2024, p. 20) which, proclaims that "South Africa's education system has made a political commitment to achieve foundational learning and numeracy."

As a result, it is unsurprising that researchers continue to investigate this subject extensively. Howie et al. (2017), for instance, observed that the findings of the 2016 Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) demonstrated the dire state of reading literacy achievement among South African Grade 4 learners. Out of the 50 participating countries, South Africa ranked last. More recent PIRLS results from 2021 are even more disconcerting, revealing that an astonishing 81% of Grade 4 learners are incapable of demonstrating elementary reading skills at the minimum performance standard, such as recovering and explicitly affirming details cited in a literary passage (DBE, 2023). According to a UNESCO report (2024), South Africa scored the lowest among participating countries in the 2021 PIRLS examination. Furthermore, the performance of South African learners has notably declined by 0.3 standard deviations between 2016 and 2021 (from a score of 320 to 288). The proportion of learners failing to reach minimum proficiency levels has also significantly increased from 78% to 81%. In 2021, only 19% of children

reached the minimum proficiency level in reading (Mullis et al., 2023). Regarding Grade 6 learners, the 2021 results demonstrate that 56% of learners are unable to demonstrate elementary reading skills at the minimum level of performance. This is when learners are expected to retrieve and explicitly declare details mentioned in a literary passage (DBE, 2023).

Research reports (see Howie et al., 2017; DBE, 2023; Pretorius & Klapwijk, 2016; UNESCO, 2024) identified a range of challenges that learners face in developing literacy skills. Howie and her colleagues (2017) analysed data from PIRLS 2016 and found that learners in Grade 4 struggled with locating explicit information and reproducing information from texts. They also noted that a majority of learners were unable to respond appropriately to basic questions, indicating difficulty in reading independently and comprehending simple texts. Similarly, Pretorius and Klapwijk (2016) also highlighted that reading comprehension presented a challenge for learners. The PIRLS report of 2021 presented another sobering statistic: only 3% of Grade 4 learners can fully engage with and reply to texts by integrating ideas and evidence to understand themes and interpret story events and character actions with support from the text (DBE, 2023).

The literature revealed various factors that can hinder reading and writing performance. Cekiso et al. (2022) ascribed it to factors such as learners' disadvantaged backgrounds, resource shortages in schools, teacher absenteeism, incomplete curriculum coverage, and lacking formal qualifications. However, scholars (see Pretorius & Klapwijk, 2016; Spaull, 2013; Zimmerman, 2017) also pointed out that teachers lacking the necessary educational background to effectively develop learners' reading literacy contributes to the issue. Additionally, Plaatjies (2016) identified two concerning issues: curriculum overload and a CAPS-writing curriculum that may be too idealistic and complex for learners, particularly in disadvantaged school settings. Consequently, teachers often struggle to teach, assess, and complete the curriculum. Furthermore, resources such as libraries, classroom libraries, and computers – which directly impact literacy improvement – are scarce in disadvantaged schools (Howie, 2017).

Motivation to Conduct the Study

The preceding paragraphs offered a brief, comprehensive overview of the significance of literacy skills, supported by relevant statistics and highlighting the challenges that impede performance. While numerous studies have focused on classroom practices to address this problem, few have approached it from an Instructional Leadership (hereafter referred to as IL) perspective. Plaatjies (2019) piloted research on the capacity of principals to provide IL in literacy, leading to two main conclusions. Firstly, teachers may lack sufficient guidance and support to improve literacy instruction. Secondly, principals are not adequately providing instructional support – a key area of their IL leadership role (DBE, 2016). When examining these findings within a broader context, researchers emphasise that IL has the most significant evidence-based effect on learner achievement among various leadership approaches (Hou et al., 2019), encompassing different school contexts and levels (Shaked, 2022).

While certain experts in school leadership argue that alternative approaches to leadership can improve overall performance, Sinnema et al. (2013, cited in Mestry, 2017) asserted that the IL leadership approach tackles significant issues regarding the performance of both teachers and learners. These concerns encompass teaching methods, learner evaluations, interventions for struggling students, enrichment programs for gifted students, and the efficient utilisation of existing resources. Due to the reasons presented here and in previous sections, it is crucial to examine literacy challenges from an IL perspective, focusing solely on the principal's role in instructional supervision. Research on IL in literacy within the South African school context is limited compared to the extensive focus on this topic in countries such as the US, UK, and Australia. However, given the weight of empirical evidence associating IL with improved learner outcomes (see, for example, Gashe & Rao, 2019; Plaatjies, 2019; Naidoo, 2021), there is a need to further explore the impact of IL on subject leadership (specifically literacy) within the South African context, considering local realities.

Aim of the Study

The study aimed to examine the key strategies that principals use to provide helpful classroom supervision. These strategies are intended to support and improve literacy instruction in Grades 4-6. The purpose of this discussion is to provide background information for principals on what they should focus on when supporting teachers' instruction.

Literacy Skills in Grade 4-6 CAPS Curriculum

South Africa's education system is divided into four stages: the foundation stage (Grades R-3), the intermediate stage (Grades 4-6), the senior stage (Grades 7-9), and the further education and training stage (Grades 10-12) (UNESCO, 2024). Since 2012, South African public schools have been required to implement the National Curriculum Statement Grades R-12 with Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS) for all approved subjects listed in this document (DBE, 2011). This also entails the inclusion of literacy in languages. The policy document clearly outlines the guidelines that should be adhered to as to ensure effective curriculum delivery in languages. These guidelines include time allocation, content, approaches for reading and writing, as well as specific activities for each phase (DBE, 2011). The document provides an overview of the writing process, including the steps that should be followed (DBE, 2011). Moreover, the document emphasises the importance of instructional time slots per week and the availability of appropriate teaching and learning materials. It also provides a detailed account of the sub-skills associated with reading and writing, the distribution and requirements of texts, as well as the skills expected per grade and term (DBE, 2011).

Next, an analysis of the current body of literature on principal supervision in literacy instruction will follow. However, before probing into this review, engaging in a theoretical discourse surrounding the relevant perspectives related to this subject matter is essential.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES AND LITERATURE REVIEW

This study is grounded in the Instructional Leadership theory. In the 1970s, theorists such as Brookover and Lezotte (1977) and Edmonds and Fredericksen (1978) initiated teaching and learning challenges from a leadership angle (Hallinger & Wang, 2015 in Jordaan, 2021). Subsequently, scholars including Hallinger and Murphy (1985), Murphy (1990), and Alig-Mielcareck and Hoy (2003) developed various (overlapping) models of Instructional Leadership based on this research. The principles of Instructional Leadership can be divided into three main areas: first, setting and conveying goals and missions; second, overseeing instructional programs by monitoring and providing feedback on teaching and learning; and third, nurturing a learning environment by stressing the importance of professional development (Naidoo, 2021). In alignment with the study's objective, the researcher's focus was specifically on the second dimension, which involves managing the instructional program, with a particular emphasis on the supervision of instruction in literacy.

Tenets for Effective Literacy Supervision

Establishing clear guidelines that direct instructional practices is crucial for effective classroom instruction in literacy. These guidelines also serve as the foundation for creating a supportive and engaging learning environment, where teachers are guided toward improving their instructional methods. Awan, Jabeen and Ali (2022) asserted that strong instructional leaders are consistently involved in addressing instructional issues and implementing the curriculum. In the following paragraphs, the researcher explores some key principles of instructional practices that can ultimately enhance literacy learning.

Establishing Clear Goals and Expectations

Perhaps the initial step in the supervision process is for supervisors to establish clear goals and expectations. Arrieta et al. (2020) proposed that standards should be clear and rightfully valid as they are fundamental to elementary instruction proficiency. Kieleko (in Naidoo, 2021) pointed out the necessity for underlying requirements that accommodate collaboration as a prerequisite for guidance. Criteria, therefore, should be designed to the requirements and proficiencies of individuals, assisting them in achieving mutually approved, qualified targets. Additionally, teachers should engage in self- and peer-assessment practices (Arrieta et al., 2020). However, this process should not be characterised by autocratic practices, a punitive approach, or inappropriate behaviour from supervisors. It is essential to participate with teachers rather than "stand over them", as emphasised by Kieleko (2015). The goal of instruction supervision should therefore never be to condemn or to control teachers, but rather to work together with them.

Observing Instruction in the Literacy Classroom

The Standard for Principalship policy document stipulates that principals should "identify problems and challenges and find solutions that enhance teaching and learning" (DBE, 2016, p. 12). According to Gashe and Rao (2019), managing the instructional program is part of the evaluation process of instruction. This can be achieved through observation. In this regard,

Awan et al. (2022) argued that principals, as custodians of instruction, should be present and visible in classrooms, regularly observing to assess teachers' performance and then providing feedback on areas of strength and those that need improvement. This intervention should not be one-sided but must be characterised by inclusive and intense engagement. Hence, Mestry (2017) urged principals as instructional leaders to establish partnerships with teachers, increase time spent in classrooms and engage in conversations about learning and teaching. This type of engagement is aimed at managing the instructional program, which is the technical core of the school (Gashe & Rao, 2019). When it comes to the actual presentation of lessons, Naidoo (2021) suggested that the observation process requires supervisors to be vigilant and take note of points during the lesson where teachers should assess its success or failure. This may allow for immediate adjustments to the lesson to address learners' misunderstandings and ensure that all of them can grasp the learning material.

Providing Feedback and Support for Literacy Improvement

Observations should be accompanied by feedback from principals on how they experienced the lesson, demonstrating genuine interest and support. Moreover, it will enhance dialogue and knowledge exchange (Admiraal et al., 2021). This type of feedback – if not perceived as intrusive or punitive – may result in a conducive relationship between principals and teachers. Supervision can therefore only be effective once transparency, trust, and sincerity are established (Arrietta et al., 2020). Utilising a checklist as an evaluation tool during the lesson observation process can help ensure that all essential elements are addressed. This argument is consistent with the work of Blasé and Blasé (in Kovač & Pažur, 2021) who asserted that successful instructional principals prioritise discussions about teaching. These criteria-based discussions include feedback on performance, offering clear suggestions for improving teaching practices, demonstrating examples of successful teaching, analysing teaching practices, and rewarding effectiveness (see also Grissom et al., 2021).

Furthermore, Awan et al. (2022) emphasised that support should include regular monitoring, evaluation, and coaching to enhance performance. It is crucial to thoroughly consider teachers' feelings about the supervision process and ensure that they are not overwhelmed or feeling oppressed by excessive demands. Otherwise, this may lead to a lack of enthusiasm, withdrawal, or passive resistance towards the process. In this regard, Awan et al. (2022) declared that effective instructional leaders work harmoniously, respecting teacher autonomy. Naidoo (2021) added that principals should encourage self-development and peer learning, while tailoring their support efforts to create a culture of shared beliefs and cooperation, ultimately fostering close and satisfying relationships. Principals should thus utilise various development strategies, actions, and resources to emphasise goal achievement in literacy. Finally, Kwan (2020) concluded that principals should play a lesser role as inspectors of teacher competence and instead focus on facilitating teacher growth.

Monitoring of Student Progress

The monitoring of student progress in literacy is another important facet of the supervision exercise. It helps evaluate the effectiveness of instruction and identifies areas where additional support may be needed. Gashe and Rao (2019) also highlighted the importance of monitoring the progress of learning in line with the set-out vision which, according to Osborne-Lampkin et al. (2015), forms part of the principal's role in supervision. One popular tool used by instructional leaders to monitor student progress and curriculum delivery is school walks (Naidoo, 2021). This method involves brief visits to multiple classrooms, normalising observation, nurturing direct conversations between teachers and supervisors, and enhancing management visibility. Teachers perceive school walks as positive and non-threatening (Naidoo, 2021).

Supervision of Administrative Tasks

The DBE (2014) states that supervision practices should also include attention to lesson planning, demonstration, evaluation, and the enhancement of teachers' capabilities. Furthermore, it should also focus on monitoring teacher records, observing and moderating assessment tasks, analysing learner performance, and conferencing with teachers (Naidoo, 2021). Understanding these facets will empower principals to understand and provide attentive support in all these specific areas related to literacy. By thoroughly scrutinising them, principals will gain a solid understanding of teachers' expertise, enabling them to provide targeted support where needed (see also DBE, 2019). Naidoo (2021) observed that a key concern in lesson planning is whether the supervisor consistently reviews the lesson plans and offers guidance. In terms of CPD, supervisors should support their teacher's ongoing professional development in literacy practices by providing opportunities for training, workshops, and collaboration with other teachers, and encouraging them to study ideas about teaching and learning as well as supporting initiatives that promote cooperation (Kovač & Pažur, 2021).

METHODOLOGY

Patel and Patel (2019) defined methodology as the orderly and academic analysis of the techniques employed in a specific field. It concerns the complete investigation of the procedures and assumptions associated with a particular field of knowledge.

Research Approach and Design

This study employed a qualitative research approach. Creswell (2014) stated that one of the main rationales for conducting qualitative research is when the study aims to investigate a particular phenomenon. Neuman (2014) also concurred that qualitative researchers ascribe meaning to data and subsequently engage in a process of translation to ensure comprehensibility. Utilising a desktop research design, data was primarily gathered from reputable academic sources. These data sources were pertinent to the research question under investigation (Shanikaa, 2022). The researcher did not directly engage with individuals or collect new data. Thus, these data sources can also be considered as unobtrusive measures – a term

denoting data obtained through methods that do not involve direct elicitation of information from research participants (Piotrowski in Miller & Yang, 2008).

Data Collection and Trustworthiness

Data collection methods in desktop studies typically involve reviewing and analysing existing literature, reports, and other documents available online or in libraries. This data has already been gathered from published sources by someone else (Taherdoost, 2022). Researchers may also utilise online databases, government websites, and other resources to gather information on the topic of interest. However, Taherdoost (2022) cautions that, while secondary sources can be useful, they may not be as reliable as primary sources. Thus, the credibility of the sources was carefully considered, and the search for credible sources was prioritised. In terms of inclusion and exclusion criteria, the researcher focused his search on credible sources published in English. Furthermore, the focus was on the supervision function of principals in instruction, research conducted over the past decade, and research that is accessible and published in scholarly journals. Studies that did not specifically address the supervision function of principals, and inaccessible or non-referenced works were excluded. Key terms related to the topic were used to guide the internet search. These included "literacy leadership", "instructional leadership" and "classroom supervision". Academic databases such as ERIC, Directory for Open Access Journals (DOAJ), Scopus, and Google Scholar were explored. Boolean operators such as AND, OR and NOT were entered to ensure that the most applicable sources were located.

The trustworthiness of the data was ensured by consulting peer-reviewed academic journals and reports from the South African Department of Basic Education. In some cases, information was cross-referenced to verify its accuracy. The researcher followed the advice of Piotrowski, as cited in Yang and Miller (2008), who suggested using triangulation to validate the data by comparing it with other sources. For instance, while the researcher examined the findings presented in the PIRLS reports by Howie et al. (2017), he also scrutinised data from the Department of Education (2023) and the original research reports of the PIRLS studies written by Mullis and Martin (2019), Mullis et al. (2023), and Reynolds et al. (2024).

The data was collected and analysed using various levels (1-4) to examine patterns, trends, and relationships within the dataset.

Analysis of the Data

The analysis of the data was guided by the aim of the study, as stipulated above.

Level 1: Primary Sources

Cohen et al. (2018) claim that it is important to identify your research purposes and research questions when working with secondary data. At level one, the researcher focused on using primary sources, which involved collecting direct, firsthand data from sources that align with the study's purpose. This search specifically targeted primary documents related to the instructional leadership role of principals, with a specific focus on literacy instruction. Plaatjies (2019) notes that this obligation of principals covers various sub-topics, but our study specifically concentrated on their role in supervising literacy teaching.

Level 2: Secondary Sources

Moving on to level two, the researcher examined the use of secondary sources, such as books and articles in academic journals, which also contributed to the richness of the study. According to Smith (2011) and Heaton (2008) in Cohen et al. (2018), this type of data adds value to a research project. However, despite its availability on the internet, it is not often used in research (Smith, 2011). Secondary sources have significant potential for providing important insights and research focal points. These sources were obtained using the same search engines described above, by entering the following key phrases:

(i)   Why supervision of (literacy) instruction?

(ii)   Principal's understanding of supervision (in literacy).

(iii)   Establishing clear goals and expectations during supervision of (literacy) instruction.

(iv)   Observing of instruction (in literacy).

(v)   Providing feedback and support (in literacy).

(vi)   Monitoring of student progress (in literacy).

(vii)   Supervision of administrative tasks related to instruction (in literacy).

(viii)   Building a culture of collaboration and reflective practice (in literacy).

It was challenging to find literature that directly aligned the monitoring role of principals with literacy. This further indicates that there is a lack of literature that connects this role specifically with subjects.

Level 3: Source Reduction

At level three, sources were critically evaluated and selected, with a focus on the most relevant and reliable ones. Cohen et al. (2018) state that researchers should assess and evaluate the data to determine if it is suitable for secondary analysis and relevant to their current research. This includes considering factors such as sufficiency, validity, relevance, appropriateness, reliability, level of detail, and breadth of coverage. Through this approach, bias was minimised, and the accuracy of the information used in the study was ensured.

Level 4: Higher Order Analysis

To guide the higher-order analysis at level four, the researcher synthesised and interpreted all the information intending to identify patterns, trends, and themes that were relevant to the objective of the study. These insights allowed him to gain fresh perspectives on the topic of supervision of instruction, specifically in the context of literacy instruction. Additionally, the alignment between this study and the original study was continuously assessed in terms of context and purpose (Cohen et al., 2018).

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS OF THE FINDINGS

This study emphasised that supervision is a crucial aspect of instructional leadership (IL) and encompasses various sub-facets. As a result, it must be approached with meticulous planning and execution. Castleton et al. (in Le et al., 2011) confirm that the challenges of providing literacy leadership are evident in the formal documentation and planning by school leaders.

However, it is common knowledge that the comprehensiveness of South African school principals' formal documentation and planning regarding literacy leadership may vary significantly (Plaatjies, 2020; Naidoo, 2021). These findings align with a previous study conducted by Zimmerman et al. in 2011 (cited in Zimmerman, 2017), which suggested that the poor management of the literacy programme in schools may hinder the establishment of conducive professional teaching environments for reading literacy. This situation prevails even though there are policies in place such as the South African Standard for Principalship (SASP), which outlines the roles and responsibilities of school principals. Some researchers also ascribe this situation to a lack of understanding from principals of their instructional leadership role (Mestry, 2017). Hence, it is suspected that even while formal documentation and planning exist, their comprehensiveness and practical application may not always meet the desired standards in practice. This, in turn, may highlight the issue of principals having limited content knowledge in literacy, making it challenging for them to provide effective support and guidance on the subject. Therefore, principals must commit themselves to a culture of continuous improvement in developing their literacy content knowledge (Shay, 2020).

Additionally, this review illustrated the importance of effective supervision by establishing clear goals and expectations for literacy instruction, which aligns with the work of Arrieta et al. (2020). Well-defined goals provide guidance and focus, while clarity helps teachers to align teaching practices with desired outcomes. However, setting criteria for establishing goals and expectations for improvement, planning, and evaluation should be approached in a manner that emphasises collaboration and mutual respect. Liu et al. (2021) noted that this, in turn, may enhance job satisfaction, self-efficacy and a positive culture. In fact, "Strong instructional leaders focus on setting clear goals focused on student learning, establishing a culture of continuous improvement" (Shay, 2024, p. 25).

The study also confirmed that emphasising criteria-based improvement in literacy is particularly important during classroom observations. Agih (2015, as cited in Naidoo, 2021) distinguished that during a supervisor's evaluation, a checklist can be used to determine if the lesson objectives were achieved and to identify reasons for success or failure, thereby informing the feedback given. Therefore, the checklist should not be merely superficial but should promote in-depth discussions about specific areas for literacy improvement. Considering this, a study by Plaatjies (2020) revealed disappointing results, showing limited evidence of classroom visits, lesson observations, and principal visibility in some schools. This absence of strong principal instructional leadership in literacy will most undoubtedly impede the implementation of sound class observation processes, as solid instructional leaders can distinguish high- from low-quality pedagogical practices (Grissom et al., 2021).

This study also highlighted the importance of principals approaching the literacy supervision process with great mindfulness, especially in their interactions with teachers who have an independent mindset.

Schools that achieve high levels of literacy success are characterised by a strong sense of teacher agency (Le et al., 2011, p. 92). It is also important to allocate enough time to carry out the process effectively. For this reason, Townsend and colleagues (2017) argued that allocating time to discuss the diverse needs of learners, solving problematic issues, and sharing teaching approaches in literacy is crucial. In providing feedback and support, principals should communicate with openness, respect and unquestionable integrity. Grissom et al. (2021, p. 54) emphasised that "Instructional leaders also must possess the skills that enable them to provide effective, structured feedback to teachers, with the goal of motivating them to refine their practices". To accomplish this, Naidoo (2019) suggested that to ensure structured and focused discussions, checklists are essential but should be supplemented with in-depth discussions and practical demonstrations on areas for improvement

Another critical aspect of supervision that requires scrutiny is the monitoring of learners' progress, which is ultimately the principal's responsibility (DBE, 2016). Visibility in the form of school walks and monitoring of their progress seems vital, and principals should be highly active in this regard (Awan et al., 2022). In fact, principal visibility may enhance school climate, improve learner outcomes, and increase accountability. Principals who are regularly present in classrooms can provide responsive and actionable feedback (see also Grissom et al., 2021). This type of support helps to build stronger relationships and create trust amongst teachers and principals.

The findings of this study reaffirmed the need for monitoring, moderation, and the analysis of instructional methods as well as learner performance, as confirmed by the work of Naidoo (2021). It is important to focus on the didactical component for sufficient instructional leadership support in literacy. The study's findings highlighted the need for building a positive culture of collaboration, support, and reflective practice in which literacy instructional practices can thrive. Kruger and Buley (2022) emphasised that collaboration supports critical reflection and thinking about practice. Therefore, the leadership persona of the principal is vital, displaying a distinguished professional presence that is evident in how he/she demonstrates competency in curriculum knowledge, pedagogy, communication in feedback, integrity, and inspiring staff to improve their instructional craft. Grissom and colleagues (2021) conclude that effective instructional leaders therefore have expertise in high-quality instruction.

Summary: Main Findings

This qualitative desktop study aimed to explore key strategies of effective classroom supervision by principals to support and enhance literacy instruction in Grades 4-6. Firstly, the study highlighted the importance of principals overseeing the teaching and learning process in literacy. Secondly, it emphasised the significance of principals' understanding of supervision practices in literacy, as this knowledge is essential for providing effective support. The third finding underscored the importance of applying the principles of effective supervision, which was found to be a comprehensive process requiring careful planning. The study further suggested that principals should establish clear goals for effective literacy instruction, promote

a culture of respectful collaboration, and exhibit exemplary behaviour when interacting with teachers during supervision.

CONCLUSION

This study highlighted the crucial role of supervision in instructional leadership, particularly in enhancing literacy instruction for learners in Grades 4-6. It emphasises that effective supervision goes beyond mere oversight; it requires principals to actively engage in the teaching and learning process, with a solid understanding of literacy supervision practices. The findings demonstrated that successful supervision is based on well-defined objectives, careful planning, and implementation. This approach not only encourages a culture of respectful collaboration between principals and teachers, but also expects exemplary conduct from principals during their interactions. The research emphasised the importance of regular classroom observations and the presence of principals to effectively monitor and evaluate literacy instruction. Additionally, it underscored the significance of continuous professional development (CPD) in equipping teachers with evidence-based literacy teaching methods, thereby empowering them to take charge of their teaching. The study concludes that, for literacy instruction to flourish, a positive culture of collaboration, support, and reflective practice is indispensable. Such an environment should be nurtured through leadership that possesses in-depth knowledge of the curriculum, pedagogical expertise, and the ability to inspire instructional improvement through integrity and effective communication.

Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

The topic of instructional supervision is broad. Therefore, providing an in-depth analysis of all its aspects was impossible. These findings suggest that each principle of supervision requires further investigation. While this desktop study is valuable for reviewing existing data, additional empirical studies on the same topic may offer new and objective insights on instructional supervision.

Recommendations for Teachers, Principals and Policymakers

The study suggests that teachers and principals need to engage in thorough planning and execution of the supervision process. For this to occur, principals must first embark on a deliberate journey to understand the importance of supervision and its key principles. Following this, the IL leader should implement and evaluate the process. Therefore, district officials must invest effort in continuously training principals and their SMTs in IL practices. Additionally, this study emphasises the need to make adjustments to policies, such as the PAM and the Standard, to provide clearer guidance on the expectations for principals as IL leaders.

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