

Influence of Primary School Head Teachers' Instructional Leadership on Teachers' Professional Practices in Musanze District, Rwanda

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to assess the influence of head teachers' instructional leadership on teachers' professional practices in primary schools of Musanze district in Rwanda. The study employed the correlational research design. A questionnaire made of close-ended items was used to collect data related to head teachers' instructional leadership as well as teachers' professional practices. Descriptive statistics including mean and standard deviation were used to describe head teachers' leadership practices and teachers' professional practices. Furthermore, regression analysis was used to determine the influence of head teachers' instructional leadership on teachers' professional practices. Based on the findings, the study concludes that head teachers in primary schools of Musanze District rarely implement practices related to instructional leadership. Furthermore, professional practices were not satisfactory as teachers rarely or sometimes acted professionally. Finally, poor professional practices are explained by the poor instructional leadership practices of their head teachers. The following recommendations have been made: Policymakers should build the capacity of primary school head teachers in terms of instructional leadership in order to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Furthermore, head teachers should make more use of instructional leadership to improve professional practices of teachers.

Keywords: Instructional leadership; head teachers; primary school; teacher; professional practices.

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Introduction

The principal's instructional leadership is a key element in the success of school improvement initiatives and the overall performance of the school (Lunenburg, 2010). For Hoy and Hoy (2003), teaching and learning come first and foremost in

schools; all other endeavors are subordinate to these fundamental activities. Numerous academics concur that the principal's level of leadership inside the school determines the school's performance and efficiency (Sekhu, 2011). Strong leadership as well as efficient teaching methods and the ability to

enhance students' learning characterize high performing schools. Head teachers play a key role as instructional leaders in directing effective teaching and assisting teachers and students in their pursuit of intended educational achievement (DeMatthews, 2014).

As emphasised by Dinham (2013), Alam and Ahmad (2017) as well as Robinson (2007), head teachers' instructional leadership influences students' outcomes by putting an emphasis on teachers and the calibre of instruction that schools offer to students. This suggests that the primary role of school head teachers is to guide and support teachers to be much more equipped with required skills and resources needed to successfully implement curriculum in classroom. As learners 'success depends on teacher competence, teachers' competence in turn relies greatly on the ability of head teacher to support and influence effective teaching approaches. This is why, at all costs, head teachers need to ensure that teachers remain professionally and pedagogically competent and that they use the best practices for the sake of improved learning in the classroom (Coldren & Spillane, 2007; Oplatka, 2017).

According to Leithwood et al. (2002), instructional leadership is a strategy utilized by school leaders to improve teachers' professionalism which in the long run have a direct impact on students' academic progress. The responsibilities of school head teachers, which include formulating and communicating school goals, establishing clear standards, coordinating the curriculum, observing and evaluating teachers' classroom activities, inspiring students to learn and fostering teachers' professional development are a key part of the instructional leadership (Ismail et al., 2018).

A study conducted by Martin (2018) on quality of instructional leadership among principals in high performing Christian schools in the USA revealed that the three facets—creating a supportive school atmosphere, overseeing the teaching plan and establishing the school mission— as described in Hallinger's instructional leadership model which was developed in 1990 were all actively pursued by principals to improve professionalism among teachers. Furthermore, Supovitz, et al. (2010) in their study of how school principals influenced effective teaching and learning in 38 middle and elementary schools in the South-Eastern United

States found that school leadership is a good predictor of effective teaching.

In Canadian schools, head teachers are highly effective instructional leaders. They build and effectively communicate common goals, common sense of purpose and clear vision. Vision and goals are shaped into collaborative work and tasks are clearly defined to facilitate their accomplishment. Head teachers further create family-based working and learning environments, care, listen and support teachers in professional and personal matters. They enable teachers to work together, plan, and collectively decide what is to be done to bring about positive changes in teaching and learning. Head teachers are always available to teachers.

In England, head teachers applied instructional leadership by providing learning resources and helping teachers to work in teams in order to support one another through professional openness. This was due to the fact that head teachers recognised the effort of everyone for school success. Hence, they become more approachable, available to teachers and learners and they talked and listened to hear from them about instructional issues. Furthermore, they monitored teachers by looking at their weekly plans, visiting them in classrooms, promoting professional dialogues and conducting joint plan meetings and informal discussions. These practices helped to boost effective teaching practices (Southworth, 2002).

The study highlighted that head teachers were much more involved in managerial activities such as reporting, financial management, ground building and maintenance and handling relations with parents to the extent that it was impossible for them to provide enough time for instructional issues. Consequently, unprofessional behaviours were observed among teachers (Raj et al., 2013; Hoadley, et al., 2009; Taole, 2013).

Studies in Kenya revealed that top performing schools had principals who focused on instructional leadership. They ensured the achievement of established goals and mission by creating good environment in which teachers and learners feel comfortable to teach and learn. They supervised teachers 'work and encouraged them to regularly update their professional documents. They provided teaching resources, conducted staff meetings, organised and ensured joint planning activities and

these were among factors which contributed to teachers' effectiveness and learners' success.

In Rwanda, instructional leadership has not been given a significant attention as limited studies on instructional leadership were conducted in the country. For instance, secondary school teachers perceived instructional leadership as a priority of the head teacher (Sibomana, 2019). Therefore, this study was prompted by the fact that there is need to provide a holistic insights into head teachers' instructional leadership and its influence on professional practices of teachers in primary schools. Therefore, the study sought to establish the influence of head teachers' instructional leadership on teachers' professional practices in primary schools of Musanze District in Rwanda.

Related Literature

This section presents the literature review related to the problem under investigation.

Instructional Leadership

Instructional leadership is a strategy used by school administrators to lead teachers' actions in specific situations that have impact on students' academic progress (Leithwood, et al., 2002). Studies conducted to assess head teachers' activities that have impact on school performance in excellent schools showed that those activities are related to instructional leadership practices. As the result, numerous conceptual models of instructional leadership were developed (Southworth, 2002; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985).

This study was underpinned by the Instructional Leadership Model developed by David (2019). This model suggests three key areas where the principal can exercise the instructional leadership: defining the school mission, managing instructional programs and creating a positive school learning climate. The three key areas are developed into eleven leadership functions as appears in table 1:

Table 1: Instructional Leadership Framework

Instructional Leadership Dimension	Instructional Leadership Functions
1. Defining the school mission	1. Framing the school goals
	2. Communicating school goals
2. Managing the instructional program	3. Supervising and evaluating instruction
	4. Coordinating curriculum
	5. Monitoring student progress
3. Promoting a positive school learning climate	6. Protecting instructional time
	7. Promoting professional development
	8. Maintaining high visibility
	9. Providing incentives for teachers
	10. Developing and enforcing academic standards
	11. Providing incentives for learning

Teachers' Professional Practices

Teachers' professional practices play an important role in promoting students' learning. To this end, Danielson (2007) developed a framework for teaching that outlines four aspects of teachers' professional practices that promote students' learning. Since teaching is a very complex activity, the Danielson' framework of professional practices for teaching is helpful in pointing out the numerous areas of competence in which professional instructors need to develop expertise. It is in this perspective that Danielson presents the following four teachers' key responsibilities: planning and preparation, classroom environment, instruction and professional responsibilities as expounded below:

Planning and Preparation

Teachers have to plan teaching. The planning and preparation includes setting instructional goals, displaying knowledge of resources, showcasing understanding of the students, demonstrating knowledge of the content and methodology, creating cohesive instruction, and evaluating students' learning.

Classroom Environment

Professional teachers have to set classroom environment for effective learning. Classroom environment is all about teacher' activities that take place in a classroom which are not instructions but which promote effective interactions between the teacher, learners and content. These activities include developing a culture of learning, overseeing classroom processes, controlling students' conducts, arranging the physical space and cultivating an

atmosphere of mutual respect and rapport between the students and the teacher.

Instruction

The instruction aspect involves employing various teaching strategies, involving students in learning, giving students feedback, exhibiting flexibility and responsiveness and communicating intelligibly and correctly.

Professional Responsibilities

Professional responsibilities include the extensive variety of duties that teachers perform outside the classroom. These include evaluation of one's own teaching, keeping correct records, getting in touch with parents, acting as a role model, giving back to the community and acting professionally by abiding with the teachers' code of conduct.

Impact of instructional leadership practices on teachers' professional practices

In a study conducted in Primary schools of England about characteristics of successful head teachers and their influence on quality of teaching and learning (Southworth. 2002), findings revealed that characteristics and functions of head teachers as instructional leaders are much more observable. The study revealed that teachers' professional practices were higher where head teachers give much time to teaching and learning through: provision of learning resources and building structures and systems that are supportive to teaching and learning. Moreover, teachers are more professional where head teachers organise and help them to work in teams to support one another through professional openness, unity as well as clear and shared goals. Likewise, the study revealed that teachers' professional practices are better in schools where head teachers are approachable and are available for teachers and learners and take time to talk and listen to both teachers and learners about instructional issues. Finally, the study showed that teachers' professional practices increase in schools where head teachers promote professional dialogue among staff, promote joint planning and have informal discussions with teachers.

A study by Dina (2016) in four private schools of Dubai revealed that head teachers played a significant role in enhancing teachers' professional practices by observing teaching and learning, supporting teachers' professional growth, enhancing their instruction and developing necessary skills for

delivering curriculum, adjusting its content and implementing assessments.

Studies conducted in South Africa revealed low level of involvement in instructional leadership by head teachers. For instance, a study revealed that although head teachers consider instructional leadership to be their primary responsibility, they are swamped with administrative tasks as they spend much more time in office doing managerial activities such as reporting, finance management and handling relations with parents to the extent that it is impossible for them to provide enough time on instructional issues. As a result, many cases of unprofessional practices among teachers were observed (Raj, et al., 2013; Hoadley, et al., 2009; Taole, 2013).

A study by Sibomana (2019) in secondary schools of Nyamagabe District in Rwanda revealed a significant positive relationship between instructional leadership and teachers' performance. School principals invested effort and time in developing annual school goals and encouraging teachers to take part in the process. In that way, they nurtured the profession growth of teachers.

Methodology

Design

The study employed a correlational research design to establish whether and the degree to which a relationship exists between head teacher's instructional leadership and teachers' professional practices. According to Creswell (2012), correlational research design is used to measure the association between two variables. In the case of this study, association between instructional leadership and professional practices of teachers.

Population and Sampling

The target population in this study was 117 head teachers of primary schools located in Musanze District in Rwanda and 2146 teachers teaching in those schools. Eighteen schools and their head teachers were sampled using stratified and random sampling. Among 451 teachers in the 18 sampled schools, 216 teachers, constituting 21% of teachers were selected. Since population does not constitute a homogeneous group, the stratified and simple random sampling techniques were applied to obtain a representative sample.

Instruments

A questionnaire made of close-ended items was used to collect data related to head teachers' instructional leadership as well as teachers' professional practices.

Validity and Reliability

The validity of the instruments was checked through expert judgement whereby two experts in education were given the instruments to judge their appropriateness. Through statistical analysis, the questionnaire was reliable as it obtained correlation coefficient of 0.89.

Statistical Treatment of Data

Descriptive statistics including mean and standard deviation were used to describe head teachers' leadership practices and teachers' professional practices. The questionnaire used a five-point Likert scale ranging from "never" to "always" where *one* represented 'never', *two* represented 'rarely', *three* represented 'sometimes', *four* represented 'frequently' and *five* represented 'always'. The scale was given points; *five* points were given to 'always' while *one* point was given to 'never'. The following interpretation of the mean was used: 4.50-5.0= always, 3.50-4.49 = frequently, = 2.50-3.49 = sometimes, 1.50-2.49 = rarely and 1.00-1.49 = never. Furthermore, regression analysis was used to determine the influence of head teachers'

instructional leadership on teachers' professional practices.

Ethical Considerations

Before collecting the data, research permission was first obtained from the University of Rwanda and then from Musanze District officials. Informed consent was also sought where by a written consent form was to be signed before one fills in the questionnaire. Information from the field was treated confidentially and anonymously as the researcher did not mention any name of school or respondent in this study.

Results and Discussion

This section presents results of the study and discusses the results in the light of literature.

Research Question 1: To what extent did head teachers implement various instructional leadership practices?

This research question sought to establish the extent to which various instructional leadership practices were exercised by school heads in the field. The research question was analysed through descriptive statistics in terms of mean scores whereby 4.50-5.0= always, 3.50-4.49 = frequently, = 2.50-3.49 = sometimes, 1.50-2.49 = rarely and 1.00-1.49 = never. The findings and interpretation are presented in table 2.

Table 2: Head Teachers' Instructional Leadership Practices

SN	IL Dimension	Mean	Interpretation
1	Defining and communicating school goals	1.95	Rarely
2	Managing instructional programs	2.28	Rarely
3	Promoting a positive school learning climate	2.34	Rarely
Overall scores		2.26	Rarely

Table 3: Teachers' Professional Practices

SN	IL Dimension	Mean	Interpretation
1	Planning and Preparation	2.59	Sometimes
2	Classroom Environment	2.79	Sometimes
3	Instruction	2.77	Sometimes
4	Professional Responsibilities	2.33	Rarely
Overall scores		2.61	Sometimes

Results in table 2 indicates that definition and communication of school goals was rarely performed by the school heads (M=1.95). Likewise, management of instructional programs (M=2.28) and promotion of positive school learning environment (M=2.34) were rarely practiced by the school heads. The overall score for all the three items was 2.26 which also suggests rare case. Therefore, these results indicate that

implementation of various instructional leadership practices by heads of schools was poor. These findings go in line with the findings of other studies conducted in South Africa which revealed that despite the fact that head teachers considered instructional leadership as their primary responsibility, they were much more involved in administrative tasks (Raj et al.,2013; Hoadley, et al.,2009; Taole, 2013).

However, the findings in this study contradict those of Sibomana (2019) who observed moderate instructional behaviors among secondary school head teachers in Nyamagabe District. They also contradict the findings of Martin, (2018), Beauchamp and Parsons, (2012) and Southworth (2002) who found high level of instructional leadership practices among head teachers in the USA, Canada and England respectively. This implies that there is need to increase instructional leadership practices among head teachers of primary school in Musanze district.

Research Question 2: What were teachers' professional practices in primary schools of Musanze district?

This research question sought to establish the extent to which teachers practiced professional practices. The research question was analysed through descriptive statistics in terms of mean scores whereby 4.50-5.0= always, 3.50-4.49 = frequently, = 2.50-3.49 = sometimes, 1.50-2.49 = rarely and 1.00-1.49 = never. The findings and interpretation are presented in table 3.

Results in table 3 indicate that planning and preparation (M=2.59), classroom environment (M=2.79) and instruction (M=2.77) were sometimes implemented while professional responsibilities (M=2.33) were rarely implemented. Furthermore, the overall mean score (2.61) suggests that the teachers' professional practices were sometimes implemented. Therefore, teachers' professional practices were not satisfactorily implemented in Musanze district. The results in this study differ from those found by Sibomana (2019) in secondary schools of Nyamagabe District where the study showed that teachers' instructional practices are moderately enacted.

Research Question 3: How did the head teachers' instructional leadership influence teachers' professional practices?

This research question sought to establish how the head teachers' instructional leadership influenced teachers' professional practices as reflected in table 4.

Table 3: Regressions Matrix of head teachers' instructional leadership and teachers' professional practices

Head teachers' instructional leadership	Teachers' Professional Practices							
	Planning and preparation		The classroom Environment		Instruction		Professional Responsibilities	
	Coefficients	p-values	Coefficients	p-values	coefficients	p-values	coefficients	p-values
Defining and communicating school goals	0.878	0.000	0.785	0.000	0.752	0.000	0.779	0.000
Managing instructional programs	0.749	0.000	0.738	0.000	0.483	0.000	0.756	0.000
Promoting a positive school learning climate	0.843	0.000	0.858	0.000	0.791	0.000	0.851	0.000

Table 4 indicates a positive correlation between all the independent variables regarding the head teachers' instructional leadership and the dependent variables regarding teachers' professional practices.

Results in the table indicate that head teachers' instructional leadership aspects positively and strongly correlated with teachers' professional practices. The only weak, yet positive correlation was between management of instructional programs and instruction. Therefore, head teachers' instructional leadership positively influenced teachers' professional practices. The findings

support those of Enueme and Egwunyenga (2008) who found a strong relationship between principal's instructional leadership and teachers' job performance. These findings support those found in Sibomana (2019) which found that there is a strong correlation between instructional leadership behaviors of principals and teachers' instructional practices in secondary schools of Nyamagabe district.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study concludes that head teachers in primary schools of Musanze District rarely implement practices related to

instructional leadership. Furthermore, professional practices were not satisfactory as teachers rarely or sometimes acted professionally. Finally, poor professional practices are explained by the poor instructional leadership practices of their head teachers. The following recommendations have been made: Policymakers should build the capacity of primary school head teachers in terms of instructional leadership in order to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Finally, Head teachers should make more use of instructional leadership to improve professional practices of teachers.

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