

Status of Instructional Leadership Practices in Botswana's Public Technical and Vocational Education and Training: A Case of Brigades

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Abstract:- This qualitative multi-case study explores instructional leadership practices at Botswana's brigades, a key provider of semi-skilled Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) programmes. This study investigated the perspectives of instructional leaders and lecturers at two institutions in the Southern District to understand their experiences with leadership practices. Drawing on Hallinger and Murphy's (1985) framework, this research examines how instructional leadership unfolds within brigades, focusing on defining the mission, managing curriculum and instruction, and fostering a positive learning environment. Furthermore, it explores the collaborative practices of the leadership team, including principals, deputy principals, and department heads. The findings reveal a general understanding of instructional leadership among participants, with some evidence of practices, such as curriculum management and stakeholder involvement. However, concerns have been raised regarding communication gaps, limited shared leadership, and ineffective evaluation. The study also identified essential competencies for instructional leaders, including communication, planning, and resource management. Key challenges include information overload, resource shortage, and staff training gaps. The participants suggested strategies for improvement, emphasizing streamlined expectations, consistent monitoring, leadership development, and adequate resourcing. Overall, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of instructional leadership in Botswana's TVET sector and provides insights for enhancing programme quality and graduate employability.

Keywords:- Brigades, Instructional Leaders, Instructional Leadership, Practices, TVET.

I. INTRODUCTION

The role of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) in providing individuals with the practical skills, knowledge, and abilities needed for employment across different economic sectors of a country cannot be overemphasised (SADC, 2022; UNESCO, 2021; ILO, 2021). In Botswana, the learning programmes provided by TVET institutions have been central in attempts to address skill imbalances, promote industrialization, and advance

sustainable development. The origins of TVET in Botswana can be traced to the establishment of the brigade movement in the mid-1960s, and more particularly the Serowe Brigades Centre by Patrick Van Rensburg in 1965. This concept rapidly spread throughout Botswana, providing for semi-skilled vocational training with low entry requirements, combined with income-generating activities and rural development projects (Republic of Botswana, 1993).

Building on this rich history, the brigade centres in the Southern District of Botswana stand as prominent actors in the contemporary TVET landscape. These two public TVET institutions are categorised as certificate-offering institutions. They, together with their learning programmes, undergo accreditation by the Botswana Qualification Authority (BQA) after adhering to stringent Quality Assurance Standards 1 and 3 of 2016. The contribution of these institutions to Botswana's economic development is measured by the graduation rate and the quality of their graduates. To achieve this, the management should ensure the enactment of effective instructional leadership. Research has demonstrated that effective instructional leadership practices correlate positively with improved student academic achievement (Musumi and Mkulu 2020) in basic education and high skill acquisition in TVET (Ojera et al. 2021).

Instructional leadership is the tasks that a principal conducts or delegates to others in order to facilitate advancement in students' academic attainment (Shaked 2020; Hallinger 2012; Hallinger 2005). This is done through encouraging and supporting good practices through curriculum development, continuing professional development and continuous feedback (Guo 2020; Ismail et al. 2018; Southward 2002). In Botswana's public TVET institutions instructional leaders comprise principals, deputy principals and heads of department. Research has demonstrated that effective instructional leadership practices correlate positively with improved student academic achievement in elementary schools, and little is known about TVET institutions given their unique context.

Despite a robust body of research exploring instructional leadership practices in elementary schools (Li, Chan, and Hu 2023; Munyunda 2022; Bakokonyane 2022), a comparable focus on TVET institutions, particularly the

Brigades, remains scarce. This research gap hinders a comprehensive understanding of leadership dynamics within this crucial sector and limits the potential for targeted improvements in programme quality.

Furthermore, this study transcends the current research tendency to focus primarily on principals' leadership (Nyangweso, Ngeera and Thuba 2022; Dania and Andriani 2021; Maponya 2020). Instead, it examines the collaborative practices of the entire leadership team, including deputy principals and department heads. This broader perspective provides a more holistic understanding of how instructional leadership is enacted within the Brigades.

By shedding light on instructional leadership practices within the Brigades, this study aims to contribute to a richer understanding of TVET leadership in Botswana. The findings have the potential to inform strategies for strengthening instructional leadership practices, ultimately leading to improved programmes quality, enhanced graduate employability, and a more competitive national workforce.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Instructional leadership is a critical concept in educational leadership, focusing on promoting and improving teaching and learning processes (Liu, Bellibaş, and Gümüş 2022; Adam 2018; Ma'mun and Suryana 2019.). This review explores the concept of instructional leadership, its core competencies, practical challenges, and potential strategies for enhancement within the context of Botswana's Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) institutions.

➤ *The Concept of Instructional Leadership*

The concept of instructional leadership has undergone a significant transformation over time, driven by a confluence of factors. Changes in educational philosophy, the evolving landscape of educational research, and the ever-shifting social and political contexts have all played a role in shaping this vital aspect of school administration.

Initially emerging in the United States during the mid-20th century, instructional leadership was viewed primarily through a practical lens, focusing on efficient school management (Hallinger & Wang, 2015). This perspective gradually shifted towards a more proactive approach, with instructional leaders actively fostering effective pedagogical practices within their schools (Hallinger & Wang, 2015). This evolution stems from the growing recognition that successful educational institutions are often spearheaded by exceptional principals, a notion reinforced by the shared experiences of educators and parents (Hallinger & Wang, 2015).

➤ *Core Competencies of Instructional Leaders*

Effective instructional leaders require a multifaceted skill set encompassing a deep understanding of pedagogy, curriculum design, and data analysis (Hallinger & Wang, 2015; Teacher Leadership Institute, 2023). They leverage this knowledge to support teachers through coaching,

mentoring, and professional development (Teacher Leadership Institute, 2023). Instructional leaders also foster a collaborative school culture while articulating a clear vision and inspiring stakeholders towards shared goals (Hallinger & Wang, 2015; Teacher Leadership Institute, 2023). In today's diverse settings, cultural competence and commitment to lifelong learning are essential (Teacher Leadership Institute, 2023). Finally, effective instructional leaders excel in resource management, change management, and uphold ethical standards (Teacher Leadership Institute, 2023). By cultivating these competencies, they have established a foundation for educational excellence.

➤ *Challenges to Effective Implementation*

While instructional leadership presents a promising approach to educational improvement, it faces significant hurdles that can impede its effectiveness (Leithwood et al., 2019). These challenges limit the time that instructional leaders can dedicate to core activities, such as classroom observations and curriculum development, due to competing administrative demands. Furthermore, budgetary constraints and a lack of dedicated support staff often hinder efforts to secure additional resources that are crucial for effective implementation, such as professional development for teachers or instructional coaches (Norbu and Lhabu 2021).

Shifting to a more collaborative and data-driven instructional approach can also lead to resistance from educators who are accustomed to traditional methods (Rahman et al. 2020). Building trust, fostering a sense of shared purpose, and ensuring that teachers feel valued is critical for successful implementation. Additionally, emphasis on standardized testing creates pressure for instructional leaders to prioritize short-term test scores to foster a well-rounded educational experience (Norbu and Lhabu 2021). Determining a balance between these competing priorities remains an ongoing challenge.

A skill gap among leaders can further hinder successful implementation. Leaders may require additional training and support to develop expertise in pedagogy, curriculum design, and data analysis (Wieczorek and Manard 2018). Finally, sustained instructional leadership requires ongoing support. This necessitates continuous efforts to build teacher capacity, maintain a collaborative culture, and secure continued leadership commitment (Norbu and Lhabu 2021).

➤ *Theoretical Framework: Hallinger and Murphy's Instructional Leadership Model (1985)*

This study examined instructional leadership in Botswana TVET institutions (brigades) through the lens of Hallinger and Murphy's (1985) model. This influential model proposes three key dimensions of effective instructional leadership.

- *Defining the School Mission:*

This focuses on establishing a clear and shared vision for student learning outcomes. The principal plays a central role in articulating the school's goals (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985), communicating them effectively to stakeholders (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985), and ensuring alignment with the teaching and learning practices (Ng, 2019).

- *Managing the Instructional Programme:*

This dimension emphasizes the principal's role in directly overseeing instructional activities. Effective leaders supervise and evaluate instruction (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985), coordinate curriculum development (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985), and monitor student progress (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). They require strong instructional expertise and commitment to continuous improvement.

- *Promoting a Positive School Climate:*

This dimension highlights the importance of fostering a supportive learning environment. Instructional leaders can achieve this by communicating goals and expectations (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985), protecting instructional time (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985), providing incentives for teachers and students (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985), and promoting opportunities for professional development opportunities (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985).

- *Strengths and Limitations of the Model:*

This model offers a valuable framework for understanding instructional leadership because of its clarity, validity, and emphasis on a leader's role in school success (Ng, 2019). However, it focuses primarily on principals (Goldring et al., 2019), neglecting the potential contributions of other leadership team members (deputy principals and heads of departments). Additionally, the model does not fully address TVET-specific aspects such as accreditation and quality assurance, work placement, and integration of emerging technology. While the Hallinger and Murphy model provides a foundation, it may require adaptation to fully capture the complexities of instructional leadership in the TVET context.

III. METHODS

This study focused on instructional leadership practices in Botswana's brigades, specifically from the viewpoints of both instructional leaders and lecturers. To explore the subjective experiences and interpretations that shape these practices, the study adopted a qualitative approach with a multiple-case study design. This aligns with a constructivist/interpretivist paradigm, which emphasises understanding how individuals construct meaning from their experiences (Creswell, 2014). Since instructional leadership within brigades is likely influenced by these subjective interpretations and contextual complexities, qualitative methods were best suited to capture the richness and depth of these perspectives (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018:37). This qualitative approach allowed researchers to explore the phenomenon within its natural setting.

➤ *Participants*

Macmillan and Schumacher (2006) define a population as "the set or group comprising all of the elements to which the research findings will be applied." The target population included all principals, deputy principals, heads of department, and lecturers (n=40) at the two institutions. Purposive sampling was used to select instructional leaders (n=5) based on their positions (principal, deputy principal, head of department, senior lecturer 1). Convenience sampling was employed to select lecturers (n=8) from each brigade. This resulted in a final sample of 13 participants.

➤ *Data Collection*

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with all the participants to gather in-depth data on instructional leadership practices. The interviews lasted a maximum of 30 minutes to allow for detailed responses (Cohen et al., 2007). Data saturation (Guest et al., 2006) was sought throughout the interview process. This involved ongoing analysis of transcripts after each interview to identify emerging themes and determine when no new or significantly divergent themes arose from subsequent interview. To ensure consistency, all participants received the same set of questions in the same order. However, the researcher employed inductive probing on key responses gleaned from participants' narratives.

Additionally, document analysis was employed to examine official documents related to the institutions' instructional leadership practices. A document analysis form was developed based on Hallinger and Murphy's (1985) instructional leadership practices to assess the extent of their implementation.

➤ *Data Analysis*

Thematic analysis explored recurring patterns and themes within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Following established practices (all interviews were transcribed verbatim and documents systematically organized (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Bowen, 2009). Open coding identified a comprehensive initial set of codes (Saldaña, 2016). Codes were then organized into themes and sub-themes reflecting central ideas (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Themes emerged inductively through an iterative process ensuring they accurately captured the data's essence.

Themes and sub-themes were interpreted in relation to the research questions, theoretical framework, and existing literature (Guest et al., 2012). Triangulation strengthened credibility by comparing data from interviews and documents (Denzin, 1970). A coherent narrative will be presented in a subsequent section, synthesizing the findings and supported by illustrative quotes (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Maintaining reflexivity throughout analysis ensured rigor and transparency (Charmaz, 2014). This systematic approach offers valuable insights into instructional leadership practices in the TVET sector, informing educational practices and policy development in Botswana.

IV. RESULTS

This study explored instructional leadership practices at the brigades situated at the Southern District of Botswana using a qualitative approach with a multiple-case study design. Data collection involved semi-structured interviews with instructional leaders (n=5) and lecturers (n=8), and document analysis of institutional documents related to instructional leadership.

➤ *Understanding of Instructional Leadership*

Participants generally understood instructional leadership as guiding and influencing teaching and learning processes (e.g., curriculum management, setting goals, and communication). This aligns with the concept's focus on effective leadership in an educational setting. As one Deputy Principal A explained, "*Instructional leadership...means leading effectively the teaching and learning process in a school set-up*" (Deputy Principal A).

➤ *Evidence of Instructional Leadership Practices*

The participants offered mixed views on the existing practices. Some reported evidence, such as curriculum policies, the management of teaching and learning, and stakeholder involvement. A Principal A highlighted these aspects: "*availability of curriculum delivery and management policies, Management of the teaching and learning process, Student representation and Meetings (general, academic, students-lecturer meeting*" (Principal A). However, others have highlighted gaps in communication, shared leadership, and effective evaluation. A deputy principal from a different center expressed concerns: "*there is no evidence of Instructional Leadership Practices because the curriculum is not managed and keeps changing. Lecturer evaluation is not done to promote student learning and growth*" (Deputy Principal B).

➤ *Competencies for Effective Instructional Leadership*

Participants identified essential competencies for instructional leaders, including:

- Communication skills
- Instructional skills
- Trustworthiness
- Effective planning
- Resource management
- Interpersonal skills

These findings align with previous research emphasizing pedagogical expertise, planning abilities, and strong communication for effective instructional leadership (Kaisara, 2017; Kirk & Jones, 2004). An HOD elaborated on these competencies: "*instructional leaders need to be resource providers, serve as resource persons on current instructional trends, be good communicators, and be a visible presence in classrooms*" (Head of Department A).

➤ *Challenges Hindering Instructional Leadership*

Participants reported various challenges, including:

- Information management and paperwork burdens
- Disciplinary procedures and workload
- Resource shortages (e.g., classrooms, internet access)
- Staff motivation and training gaps
- Structural gaps within leadership teams

Lack of resources and training has emerged as a significant impediment to effective instructional leadership. A lecturer described the frustration: "*They are a shortage of resources like classrooms, and practical workshops at Kanye Brigades Centre*" (Lecturer A).

➤ *Strategies for Improvement*

Participants suggested strategies such as:

- Streamlining expectations and eliminating ineffective practices
- Consistent monitoring and evaluation
- Proper planning and setting realistic goals
- Adequate resourcing for staff
- Leadership training and development
- Addressing staff grievances

These suggestions highlight the need for improved communication, resource allocation, and leadership development to enhance instructional leadership.

➤ *Documentary Analysis*

The document analysis supported and expanded the interview findings. While some practices (e.g., learner assessment) showed evidence of implementation, others (e.g., curriculum committees) lacked documentation or clear usage. Notably, documents related to protecting instructional time and incentivizing staff development are largely absent. These findings suggest potential areas for improvement in aligning documented practices with effective instructional leadership principles (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Leithwood et al., 2010).

Overall, the study revealed both existing and potential areas for growth in instructional leadership practices in the Brigades Centers. Addressing the identified challenges and implementing suggested strategies can contribute to a more supportive and effective learning environment.

V. DISCUSSIONS

This study explored the instructional leadership practices within Botswana's Brigades, TVET institutions known for their semi-skilled vocational training. The qualitative approach employed here, focusing on interviews with instructional leaders and lecturers alongside document analysis, sheds light on the current state and potential for growth in this crucial aspect of TVET leadership.

The study shows a common understanding of instructional leadership among participants. They view it as guiding and influencing teaching and learning processes, encompassing elements like curriculum management, goal setting, and communication. This aligns with the established concept of instructional leadership as a driving force for effective educational settings (Liu, Bellibaş, & Gümüş, 2022; Adam, 2018; Ma'mun & Suryana, 2019). This finding reinforces the universality of effective instructional leadership across educational contexts, even within the unique environment of the Brigades.

The findings regarding existing practices paint a mixed picture. Some participants point to documented policies, leadership involvement in curriculum management, and efforts to engage stakeholders. This suggests a foundation for effective instructional leadership, echoing the importance of Hallinger and Murphy's (1985) dimension of "Defining the School Mission." However, concerns were also raised about communication gaps, a lack of shared leadership practices, and the ineffectiveness of current evaluation methods. These contrasting viewpoints highlight areas where instructional leadership practices could be strengthened. The literature review identified similar challenges faced by instructional leaders in elementary schools (Rahman et al., 2020), suggesting that these are not unique to the TVET sector but rather persistent issues that require ongoing attention.

The study identified a core set of competencies deemed essential for instructional leaders. These include strong communication and instructional skills, trustworthiness, effective planning abilities, resource management expertise, and well-developed interpersonal skills. This aligns with previous research emphasizing the importance of pedagogical knowledge, planning proficiency, and clear communication for successful instructional leadership (Hallinger & Wang, 2015; Teacher Leadership Institute, 2023). Participants like the Head of Department A emphasized the need for instructional leaders to be not only resourceful but also readily available to guide staff on current instructional trends and foster a positive learning environment through clear communication. This aligns with the notion of instructional leaders acting as coaches and mentors for teachers (Teacher Leadership Institute, 2023).

The research also revealed various challenges hindering effective instructional leadership within the Brigades. Information overload and administrative burdens were cited along with disciplinary procedures that take up valuable time. Resource limitations, including shortages of classrooms and internet access, further restrict leaders' ability to implement their vision. Staff motivation and training gaps emerged as additional concerns, aligning with the challenges outlined in the literature review (Leithwood et al., 2019; Norbu and Lhabu 2021). Interestingly, structural gaps within leadership teams were also identified, hinting at a potential need to re-evaluate leadership structures for optimal effectiveness. Addressing these challenges is crucial for creating an environment conducive

to strong instructional leadership, as noted by Leithwood et al. (2019) who highlight the importance of sustained support for instructional leaders.

Participants actively proposed strategies for improvement. These included streamlining expectations and eliminating practices deemed ineffective. A call for consistent monitoring and evaluation alongside proper planning with realistic goals suggests a desire for a more data-driven and goal-oriented approach, echoing the emphasis on data analysis skills highlighted in the literature review (Teacher Leadership Institute, 2023). The emphasis on adequate resourcing for staff, including leadership training and development programs, highlights the importance of investing in leadership capacity, as advocated for by Norbu and Lhabu (2021). Finally, addressing staff grievances demonstrates a recognition of the need to create a more positive and motivating work environment for all.

The document analysis provided valuable insights that both supported and expanded upon the interview findings. While some documented practices, such as learner assessment procedures, showed evidence of implementation, others lacked clear procedures or documented usage. Notably, documents related to protecting dedicated instructional time and incentivizing staff development were largely absent. This gap between documented practices and the principles of effective instructional leadership, as outlined by Hallinger and Murphy (1985) and Leithwood et al. (2010), suggests a potential area for significant improvement. The focus on "Managing the Instructional Programme" and "Promoting a Positive School Climate" in Hallinger and Murphy's model (1985) is particularly relevant here.

VI. CONCLUSION

This study contributes to a deeper understanding of instructional leadership practices within Botswana's TVET sector, specifically focusing on the Brigades. The findings revealed both existing strengths and areas for improvement. By addressing the identified challenges, such as communication gaps and limited shared leadership, the Brigades have the potential to strengthen their instructional leadership practices. This, in turn, can lead to enhanced programme quality, improved graduate employability, and a more competitive workforce in Botswana.

Future research could explore the effectiveness of specific leadership development programmes for instructional leaders within the TVET sector. Additionally, investigating the perspectives of employers and graduates could provide valuable insights for further refining TVET programmes to meet the needs of the labour market.

This research has provided a foundation for further exploration of instructional leadership within Botswana's Brigades. By fostering a more collaborative, data-driven, and communication-focused approach to leadership, the Brigades can continue to play a vital role in equipping

individuals with the skills and knowledge necessary for success in the ever-evolving job market.

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