

# Chapter 5

## SUMMARY, FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

When a person is appointed into the principalship position in any school, that person is immediately entrusted with many different important roles to play at the school of one's appointment. Instructional leadership is one of the very important roles that must constantly receive the principal's attention at school because it is the principal's role that directly focuses on the main mission of the school, namely, the teaching and learning which culminates in the quality of the learners' academic achievement.

However, from experience as both teacher and principal, the researcher has observed that in some schools instructional leadership is unfortunately not given sufficient attention. The differences in the extent to which principals pay attention to their instructional leadership role is viewed by the researcher, in the current study, as having a great impact on the learners' academic achievement at secondary schools in the Vryheid region in KwaZulu-Natal.

In the present chapter, the summary of the study, the findings, conclusions, recommendations, limitations of the study, and the suggested topics for further research on the instructional leadership are given in the following sections.

## 5.2 SUMMARY OF THE STUDY

The problem of the study, as formulated in chapter one, was to determine the relationship between the practice of instructional leadership by principals of secondary schools and the academic achievement of learners (Grade 12 learners in particular) in the Vryheid region (KwaZulu-Natal).

In chapter two, a detailed discussion of the nature of instructional leadership and what it entails was given. An attempt was made to gain deeper understanding of instructional leadership by looking at instructional leadership in both the international as well as South African literature (section 2.2). To facilitate the understanding of instructional leadership, the models as well as the characteristics of instructional were also given attention in chapter two (sections 2.3 and 2.4 respectively). The characteristics of instructional leadership with high frequency among the views of different authors on instructional leadership were then discussed in detail (sub-sections 2.4.1 to 2.4.7).

In chapter two, the core as well as the additional general management functions (section 2.5) were discussed because the principal practises instructional leadership within the broad general management of the school. Also considered, in the study, as very significant to the principal's instructional leadership at school is his/her role in the motivation of both the educators and the learners to work towards the achievement of the school's academic mission and goals (section 2.6).

The dual relationship that the principal ought to maintain with the parents and the state, and as such has impact on the practice of instructional leadership was also discussed (section 2.7). Chapter two, finally presents the estimation of the principal's instructional leadership practice on the learners' academic achievement (section 2.8).

Chapter three presents the detailed explanation of research design, methods and procedures followed in carrying out the study, and the research instrument used for collection of empirical data. The sampling procedure and the selection of cases for the study as well as the hypotheses formed part of chapter three.

Chapter four presents the analysis of data and interpretation of results. The null-hypotheses formulated in chapter three were also tested in chapter four. In chapter five, the study is finally concluded with the presentation of the findings, conclusions, recommendations, limitations and the topics for further research. The findings of the study are given in the following section.

### **5.3 FINDINGS OF THE STUDY**

According to Burns and Grove (1994: 573), the findings in a research study are the interpreted results of the analysis of data gathered in the whole study. The assertion by Ary, Jacobs and Razavieh (1985: 73) is that the research findings become more meaningful when presented as the results of the hypothesis testing (if any). Kumar (1999: 249) supports the view of basing the research findings on the hypotheses when he says that from each hypothesis containing one significant theme or variable of the study, a finding should be generated. This assertion is followed when generating the research findings in sub-section 5.3.2 below.

Because the findings in a study can be based on both the literature review and the analysis of empirical data, in the current study on instructional leadership by principals, the findings are divided into two categories. There are those that are solely based on the literature study, and those that are based on the analysis of empirical data and hypotheses testing. What is common in both categories of

findings is that they all attempt to provide answers to the stated research problem or sub-problems of the study.

In the light of the above background on the research findings, the findings for the study conducted on the instructional leadership are given as follows:

### **5.3.1 Findings based on the literature study**

#### **Finding 1**

#### **The relationship between learners' academic achievement and instructional leadership**

There is relationship between the learners' academic achievement and the practice of instructional leadership by principals. The relationship between the learners' academic achievement and the practice of instructional leadership is indirect. That is, by performing certain instructional leadership tasks, the principal indirectly influences the learners' academic achievement positively. The models of instructional leadership, containing the different ways by which the principals can influence the effective teaching and learning and in turn the learners' academic achievement, give the evidence of the indirect relationship between the practice of instructional leadership and the learners' academic achievement (see sections 2.3 and 2.8.1).

#### **Finding 2**

#### **Instructional leadership impacts on effective teaching and learning**

Through his or her instructional leadership practice the principal demonstrates his/her concern for effective teaching and learning at school. This in turn enhances the

learners' academic achievement. The evidence of this finding is the fact that all definitions of instructional leadership contain the elements which in one way or the other concern teaching and learning with the ultimate objective of promoting the learners' academic performance (see sections 1.6.2 and 2.2).

### **5.3.2 Findings based on the empirical data analysis and the hypotheses testing**

The findings presented in this sub-section are based on the interpretation of the results of testing of the four hypotheses stated in chapter 3. That is, the findings given hereunder are for each hypothesis for this study. Each hypothesis stated in chapter 3 and then tested as null-hypothesis in chapter 4 is restated in this section. Then the results of the statistical treatment of the empirical data and the interpretation thereof are also given. The purpose of giving the hypothesis, the results of the statistical treatment of data and the interpretation thereof is to present the findings in the way that is more meaningful and easy to understand.

#### **Finding 3**

##### **School's academic goals and the learners' academic achievement**

#### **Null-hypothesis 1**

There is no significant difference between the learners' academic achievement in schools where principals clearly formulate and communicate the school's academic goals and the learners' academic achievement in schools where principals do not clearly formulate and communicate the school's academic goals.

#### **Results and interpretation:**

The null-hypothesis was tested using the Chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) test, with the alpha set at 0.05, degree of freedom (df) being 3, and was rejected because the obtained  $\chi^2$  value of 62.00 is greater than the critical value of 7.82, that is,  $\chi^2 (62.00) > \chi^2_{crit} (7.82)$ . There is, therefore, a significant difference between the learners' academic achievement in schools where principals formulate and communicate the school's academic goals and the learners' academic achievement in schools where principals do not formulate and communicate the school's academic goals.

The practice of formulating the school's academic goals by principals and then communicating such goals to teachers and learners have a great positive impact on the learners' academic performance. Hopefully, this is due to the fact that once the teachers and the learners are aware of the school's targeted academic goals, they pay special attention to all that is required in order to achieve the stated school's academic goals. In other words, the teachers as well as the learners align their energy and actions to the targeted school's academic goals.

**Finding:** The clearly formulated academic goals for the school have a positive impact on the learners' academic achievement.

#### **Finding 4**

**The discussion of learners' academic progress has a positive impact on learners' overall academic achievement**

#### **Null-hypothesis 2**

There is no significant difference between the learners' academic achievement in schools where principals and educators discuss the learners' academic progress in the various school subjects and the learners' academic achievement in schools where

the principals and educators do not discuss the learners' academic progress in the various school subjects.

**Results and interpretation:**

The null-hypothesis was tested using the Chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) test, with the alpha set at 0.05, degree of freedom (df) being 1, and was rejected because the obtained  $\chi^2$  value of 47.54 is greater than the  $\chi^2$  critical value of 3.84. There is a significant difference between the learners' academic achievement in schools where principals and educators discuss the learners' academic progress in the various school subjects and the learners' academic achievement in schools where principals and educators do not discuss the learners' academic progress in the various school subjects.

Through regular discussion of the learners' academic progress in the various school subjects, the principal(s) together with the teachers are able to identify, in time, the learners that need extra assistance from the teachers. The discussion of the learners' academic progress can take place at the interval jointly decided upon by the principal and the teachers, for example, it could be on a monthly or quarterly basis. The regular discussion of the learners' academic progress has advantages for both the educators and the learners. For example, the educators can learn from one another the skills of handling the learners with learning problems as well as the techniques of setting the test question papers that befit the different learners' level of understanding and reasoning ability. Moreover, through the regular discussion of the learners' academic progress, the principal and the educators can conclude whether the targeted school's academic achievement would be realised at the end of the year.

If educators, through the discussion of the learners' academic progress, share skills and better methods of teaching their subjects, then learners receive better teaching from almost the entire school's teaching staff. Thus, for the learners the ultimate

advantage of better teaching by the entire school's teaching staff is the balanced learners' academic performance.

**Finding:** The discussion of the learners' academic progress in the various school subjects, by principal and the teachers, has a positive impact on the learners' academic achievement.

### **Finding 5**

#### **Staff development impacts positively on the learners' academic achievement**

#### **Null-hypothesis 3**

There is no significant difference between the learners' academic achievement in schools where principals conduct staff development and the academic achievement of learners in schools where principals do not conduct staff development.

#### **Results and interpretation:**

The null-hypothesis was tested using the Chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) test, with the alpha set at 0.05, degree of freedom (df) being 1, and was rejected because the obtained  $\chi^2$  value of 28.76 is greater than the critical value of 3.84. There is, thus, a significant difference between the learners' academic achievement in schools where principals conduct staff development and the academic achievement of learners in schools where principals do not conduct staff development.

It appears that regular staff development by principals is an effective way of minimising the teachers' teaching weaknesses and promoting the teachers' teaching strengths. Promoting the teachers' teaching strengths, beyond doubt, should have a positive influence on the learners' academic achievement.

**Finding:** Staff development has a great positive impact on the academic achievement of learners.

### **Finding 6**

#### **Networking amongst the schools can improve the learners' academic achievement**

#### **Null-hypothesis 4**

There is no significant difference between the learners' academic achievement in the schools that maintain academic networks with other schools and the learners' academic achievement in the schools that maintain no academic networks with other schools.

#### **Result and interpretation:**

The null-hypothesis was tested using the Chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) test, with the alpha set at 0.05, degree of freedom (df) being 1, and was rejected because the obtained  $\chi^2$  value of 52.56 is greater than the critical value of 3.84. There is a significant difference between the learners' academic achievement in schools that maintain academic networks with other schools and the learners' academic achievement in schools that maintain no academic networks with other schools.

The school with low academic achievement can emulate the best practices of the school with high academic achievement, namely, the teaching strategies, the academic monitoring system, and the policies and procedures. These, in turn, would assist the school with low academic achievement to improve its academic performance level.

**Finding :** The existence of academic networks between the school with low and the school with a high academic performance can lead to the improvement of the academic performance of the school with a low academic performance.

In the following section, the researcher presents the summary of the conclusions of the study. The conclusions are presented in an integrative manner, that is, the findings on the related aspects of instructional leadership are combined in order to make one conclusion on those instructional leadership aspects.

#### **5.4 CONCLUSIONS OF THE STUDY**

Based on the findings of the current study, the following conclusions are made about the relationship between the instructional leadership practice by principals and the learners' academic achievement in the selected secondary schools in the Vryheid region.

All the findings of this study indicate that the principal, by taking certain actions and decisions or adopting certain practices, directly influences the academic activities at school. Then the principal's direct influence on the school's academic activities in turn indirectly influences the learners' academic achievement. Hence the first conclusion drawn is that there is a very strong positive relationship between the principal's instructional leadership practice and the learners' academic achievement.

The second conclusion is that, by giving sufficient attention to the instructional leadership role, the principal can positively influence the learners' academic achievement. At the same time, by not giving sufficient attention to the instructional leadership role, the principal can negatively influence the learners' academic achievement.

The third conclusion that one can make is that the degree of difference in the practice of instructional leadership by principals of different schools seems to contribute significantly to the differences in the academic achievement of different schools in the Vryheid region. Thus, there are high and low performing schools academically in this region. Based on the findings as well as the conclusions of the study, the following recommendations are made.

## **5.5 RECOMMENDATIONS**

The aims of the current study were (a) to determine the nature of instructional leadership and its influence on the learners' academic achievement, (b) to determine the extent to which principals carry out the instructional leadership tasks in the selected secondary schools of the Vryheid region (KwaZulu-Natal), and (c) to describe what principals need to perform as part of their instructional leadership role at schools. In order to realise these aims, an in-depth literature review and an empirical research were conducted so as to lay the foundation for the findings of the study. On the bases of the findings and the conclusions of the study, the researcher makes the following recommendations.

### **Recommendation 1**

Since the information obtained from the literature review and the empirical research suggests that there is a strong and positive relationship between the learners' academic achievement and the practice of instructional leadership by principals, the researcher strongly recommends that the principals of schools should continuously receive in-service training on instructional leadership. The Department of Education should set aside the funds that should be used for such in-service training of principals. For the in-service training of principals on instructional leadership, the

Department of Education should request the service of expert lecturers from the universities.

**Recommendation 2**

The Superintendents of Education (Inspectors of Schools) should, at the beginning of each year, request all principals of secondary schools with the Grade 12 class to submit to the Inspectors' offices the targeted school's academic achievement in the final Grade 12 examinations. The targeted schools' academic achievement should be jointly formulated by the principals and the teachers in each school. Thus, the targeted school's academic achievement becomes the school's academic goal. The school's resources should be utilised to achieve this goal.

**Recommendation 3**

The principals and the teachers, in all schools, should regularly meet in order to discuss the learners' academic progress in the various school subjects. The regular and joint discussion of the learners' academic progress in the various school subjects keeps the principal and the teachers updated about the academic progress the learners make in different subjects. Furthermore, through regular discussion of the learners' academic progress, teachers can share the skills of managing their subjects which in turn benefits the learners.

**Recommendation 4**

In all schools, teachers should regularly be subjected to staff development. The staff development can be conducted by the principal per se or by the Staff Development Team (SDT) as, according to the document called Developmental Appraisal for Educators (1999: 04), each school is expected to have a Staff Development Team. The staff development exercise should be preceded by the staff appraisal activity. Through the staff appraisal, the principal or the staff development team can design

the staff development activities that address the identified teachers' professional weaknesses. The purpose of staff development should be the minimizing of teachers' professional weaknesses and increasing the teachers' professional effectiveness.

### **Recommendation 5**

The principals of lower performing secondary schools should strongly encourage the teachers in their schools to form academic networks with the teachers in the higher performing secondary schools. Where academic networks exist between the lower and the higher performing schools, the teachers in the lower performing schools are able to learn many things from the teachers in the higher performing schools, for example, setting test and examination papers that are of the required standard, designing the composite time-table that keeps the school functioning properly, and methods and procedures for effective preparation of learners for writing examinations successfully.

Although the study succeeded in generating the findings on which the recommendations of the study are based, the following limitations were noted during the course of the study.

### **5.6 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

Limitations of the study, according to Treece and Treece (1993: 447), are the weaknesses noted in the entire study. Accordingly, the following limitations were identified in the current study :

- # The number of educators who served as the respondents for the study was not large enough to make data collected from them sufficient to be used to make

conclusions that can be generalised about the principals' practice of instructional leadership in all secondary schools of Vryheid region.

- # There were some aspects or dimensions of instructional leadership that were not represented by items in the questionnaire, for example, setting academic standards and curricular co-ordination, while these aspects are also important for the learners' academic achievement.
- # The grade 12 final examination results, namely, the schools' pass rates for the years 1997, 1998 and 1999, used as the point of departure for the study were less relevant to the study conducted in 2002/2003 because of the time space between the years 1999 and 2002. However, the researcher commenced the study in 2001 and these were the results available at the time.
- # The study was carried out as a case study in one out of eight educational regions making up the province of KwaZulu-Natal, therefore, the findings of the study cannot be generalized to the whole province of KwaZulu-Natal.

## **5.7 TOPICS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

It is recommended that further research be conducted on the following topics relating to the principals' instructional leadership role:

- # The impact that the principals' instructional leadership practice has on the school's academic excellence.
- # The relationship between the principals' instructional leadership practice and the principals' qualifications, age, gender and years of teaching experience.

- # The influence of the principal's instructional leadership practice on the school's climate.
  
- # The factors that prevent principals from being effective instructional leaders.

## **5.8 CONCLUSION**

This study indicated that, by paying more attention to the instructional leadership role, principals can significantly and positively influence the learners' academic achievement. The instructional leadership tasks given special attention in the literature study and empirical research included (a) the formulation of the school's academic goals, (b) the regular discussion of the learners' academic progress in the various school subjects, (c) the practice of staff development, and (d) the existence of academic networks amongst the schools. The impact of these instructional leadership tasks on the learners' academic achievement was investigated in the current study, though other aspects of instructional leadership were also included.

The findings of both the literature study and the empirical research on the above-mentioned instructional leadership tasks revealed the existence of the positive and significant relationship between the learners' academic achievement and the practice of instructional leadership by principals. It can, therefore, be concluded that effective instructional leadership by principals is, to a large degree, responsible for the differences in the academic achievement of learners in the different secondary schools in the Vryheid region.