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INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP PRACTICES OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT TEAMS IN IMPLEMENTING THE CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT POLICY STATEMENT (CAPS) THROUGH HALLINGER AND MURPHY'S INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP MODEL IN GAUTENG SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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Abstract

This article examines the role of School Management Teams (SMTs) in Gauteng secondary schools in implementing their mandate regarding Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements. Although crucial to the teaching process, very few studies have examined the extent to which schools implement instructional leadership through the use of SMTs in South Africa. Using a qualitative approach, the study was conducted to provide data on understanding the functions of SMTs through surveys conducted among Heads of Department, teachers, and principals, as well as through interviews, observations, and document analysis. The results point to the fact that, despite the importance placed on implementing instructional leadership, SMTs in schools have been executing crucial tasks related to teaching, moderating assessments, participating in teamwork, and implementing other teaching aspects. However, administrative fragmentation, lack of resources, inconsistencies in district support, lack of development opportunities, differentiation according to resource schools and lack of development opportunities for principals have contributed to these limitations.

Keywords: Instructional leadership, School management teams, Curriculum and Assessment policy statement, Curriculum implementation, Distributed Leadership, Teaching and Learning

1. Introduction

The Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS), introduced nationally in 2012, is at the centre of South Africa's efforts to reinforce curriculum coherence, standardise assessment and enhance the quality of teaching and learning. However, fully enacting it will depend on SMTs, who must provide not only administrative coordination but also instructional leadership, teacher support and monitoring of curriculum delivery. Research indicates that SMTs are crucially positioned at the heart of policy translation into classroom practice, but their capacity to lead instructional improvement varies across school contexts. Recent research suggests that SMTs are often unprepared for the instructional leadership challenges brought about by CAPS. For instance, Maifala (2024) observed that at a rural Limpopo secondary school, SMTs had a limited understanding of their curriculum leadership roles in driving instructional planning and pedagogical engagement at the classroom level. Indeed, Mofoka and Mokhampanyane (2024) discovered that administrative overload and a lack of clarity in performance expectations limit principals and SMTs from affording primacy to teaching and learning in township secondary schools. These studies highlight the persistent tensions between managerial tasks and instructional roles, particularly in under-resourced schools.

These challenges have led to an increase in leadership development initiatives. In 2025, a new SMT training programme was introduced at the Matthew Goniwe School of Leadership and Governance, emphasising curriculum management, strategic planning and the integration of digital tools into school leadership. However, despite such efforts, research studies such as Subramoney (2022) indicate that SMTs in underperforming schools continue to face difficulties around role clarity and seldom practice shared instructional leadership due to structural constraints and an overburden of administrative tasks. Simultaneously, Theron (2025) provides evidence that collaborative SMT leadership can positively influence learner outcomes in low-resource settings, particularly when externally supported.

Collectively, these studies indicate that while SMTs are vital to the effective implementation of CAPS, their instructional leadership is shaped – and often constrained – by contextual bottlenecks, insufficient training, and competing organisational demand. The capacity of SMTs to lead curriculum implementation requires targeted, context-responsive professional development, especially in curriculum planning, assessment leadership, data-informed decision-making and collaborative school improvement. Against this backdrop, this study explores how SMTs in secondary schools in Gauteng enact instructional leadership within the CAPS framework, the challenges

they face and how these practices influence teaching, learning and assessment. By investigating SMT practices across diverse school settings, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the enabling and constraining conditions for effective instructional leadership and provides insights for policy implementation, leadership development programme development and school-level support systems.

2. Literature Review

We examine the literature on instructional-focused school leadership, the roles and functioning of School Management Teams (SMTs), and CAPS implementation in secondary schools in South Africa. This study aimed to compile information from local and international literature to place this research within existing debates in academia regarding school leadership, SMTs and CAPS implementation. We address eight thematic matters, namely: instructional-focused school leadership; SMT roles and functioning; CAPS implementation; distributed school leadership practices and their role in SMT functioning; schooling in South Africa; school autonomy; school improvement practices; and instructional leadership practice in SMTs in implementing CAPS.

2.1 Instructional Leadership: Definitions and Global Perspectives

Instructional leadership is viewed as an approach that aims to improve teaching and learning through curriculum management, evaluation, support for teachers and fostering an appropriate atmosphere for learning. In South Africa, a lack of goals, communication and differing levels of organisational leadership skills have been identified as factors that negatively influence instructional leadership in township schools (Mofoka & Mokhampanyane, 2024), while school principals play an important role in developing their teaching staff (Adams, Sayed, Esau & Arendse, 2025). Instructional leadership is also responsible for enhancing curriculum implementation and school atmosphere in rural schools (Enebe, Heystek & Matashu, 2025). These findings are supported by the global literature. Meta-analyses show that the role of leadership influences learner outcomes indirectly through teacher performance. Evidence from local research shows that there remains a divergence between principals' views of their educational role and their active role in educational activities, thus revealing their interest in more collaborative, joint models involving SMT membership, especially Heads of Departments (HoDs).

Instructional leadership has increasingly emerged as a key force in enhancing the quality of education and reducing inequalities. Recent literature indicates that ambiguity in role expectations, lack of communication and inequitable use of learners' data impair the effective functioning of SMTs (Frontiers in Education, 2025). Class observations are still sporadic and principals fail to offer significant support to the classes. Researchers propose that resource-constrained schools should transition from principal-centric to distributed forms of instructional leadership, with a shared vision from district administration (Theron, 2024). The improvement of instructional leadership starts with role clarity, shared organisation and continuous development. SMTs, comprising principals, deputy principals and HoDs, play an important role in coordinating curriculum, assessment, moderation, teacher support and classroom supervision (Mofoka & Mokhampanyane, 2024). HoDs play an important role in teacher induction, moderation of assessments and coverage of the curriculum. However, in under-resourced schools, administrative congestion and lack of staff development are challenges that limit the potential of SMTs (Mahome & Mphahlele, 2024). In contrast, in well-resourced schools, cycles of systematic observations, moderation of assessments and teacher support are offered (Ralebese, Jita & Badmus, 2025).

2.2 Opportunities and Challenges in CAPS Implementation

CAPS ensures uniform implementation and evaluation of the curriculum. However, its implementation is uneven in many ordinary secondary schools due to tight pacing calendars, wide coverage and regular assessments (Dlamini & Zulu, 2024). The School-Based Assessment (SBA) approach also presents an extra burden to SMTs concerning planning, moderation and documentation of assessments; yet, there is little mastery of SBA among many SMTs (Enebe & Matashu, 2025). The lack of resources, such as textbooks, laboratories and ICT facilities, limits curriculum implementation (Spaull, 2019) in such schools. Support from districts is also patchy in terms of curriculum monitoring and policy implementation (Mofoka, 2024), while varying levels of equipping teachers compound SMT work in closing development gaps (Mabunda, 2023; Ntshangase & Mabusela, 2023).

Distributed Leadership views leadership as an interactive process that involves various actors in the social field (Spillane, 2005). Examples from South African contexts reveal the potential and difficulties encountered in the process. In Limpopo, distributed leadership occurs either vertically (HoD and school principals) or horizontally (teachers as leaders), depending on the context (Manzini, 2023). In the Johannesburg Central school, the shared understanding within the SMTs regarding the concept of distributed instructional leadership for the school is

absent and fragmentation exists in the approach (De Klerk, 2024). Authority-level problems, administrative tasks and lack of preparation are constraints in shared curriculum leadership (Shabalala, 2025). Gauteng presents stark disparities between well-funded Model C schools and resource-scarce township schools (Spaull, 2019). Schools in wealthy communities enjoy better infrastructure and mechanisms supporting improved instructional leadership; challenges faced by township schools include over-enrolment, lack of funding and socioeconomic factors that hinder CAPS implementation (Kubheka & Naidoo, 2025). The realities of context must be considered to comprehend instructional leadership in SMT schools in Gauteng.

2.3 Gaps in Literature

Although research on instructional leadership has increased (Enebe & Mokhampanyane, 2024; Enebe & Matashu, 2025), more research is needed. There is a lack of secondary-level studies, analyses of SMTs with respect to collective leadership structures and investigations of instructional leadership in a CAPS-influenced context (Mahome & Mphahlele, 2024). There is little research on Gauteng secondary-level schools or the use of DLT in SMT structures (Madonsela, Jita & Badmus, 2025; Spillane, 2005). The current piece will shed some light through its investigation of instructional leadership in SMTs, challenges faced.

2.4 Theoretical Framework

This research is grounded in instructional leadership Theory and Distributed Leadership Theory, which together provide a comprehensive understanding of how SMTs implement curriculum leadership within the CAPS framework. While instructional leadership outlines the responsibilities of SMTs regarding teaching, learning and assessment, distributed leadership focuses on how leadership practices are carried out, shared and shaped by the organisational and contextual circumstances within schools. The integration of these two theoretical perspectives is particularly important in the South African context, where SMTs operate under policy demands, face unequal resources and contend with significant administrative burdens. This framework allows exploration of both leadership roles and the execution of those practices, shedding light on the gap between the expectations set by policies and the actual practices at the school level.

2.4.1 Hallinger and Murphy's Instructional Leadership Model

Instructional leadership, as defined by Hallinger and Murphy, focuses on key aspects of teaching and learning within school leadership. This model highlights leadership activities that directly impact classroom instruction by coordinating the curriculum, managing assessments, supporting teachers and fostering a positive learning environment. Within the context of the CAPS, instructional leadership goes beyond administrative duties; it also encompasses a pedagogical and developmental role. This requires SMTs to translate policies into effective classroom practices.

In this research, instructional leadership is viewed as a collaborative effort primarily carried out through SMT structures, rather than being the sole responsibility of the principal. The school's mission reflects how SMTs understand and prioritise the requirements of CAPS, while the management of the instructional programme indicates the extent to which HoDs oversee the curriculum, moderate assessments and monitor classroom instruction. Fostering a positive learning environment encompasses relational and developmental aspects of leadership, including teacher motivation, professional development and support in challenging situations. This theoretical framework provides an analytical lens for examining differences in SMTs' instructional leadership behaviours across well-resourced, township and under-resourced schools. It emphasises how contextual limitations can affect the consistency and effectiveness of CAPS implementation.

2.5 Limitations of Traditional Instructional Leadership in South Africa

While instructional leadership provides a valuable conceptual framework, its implementation in South Africa is often hindered. SMTs of township secondary schools struggle with role clarity; educational leadership, due to instructional leadership leaning toward being the principal's problem rather than a collective one (Mofoka & Mokhampanyane, 2024). CAPS exacerbates this problem by placing heavy demands for deep subject matter knowledge on HoDs, which are crucial in helping realise policy in classroom practice (Enebe & Heystek, 2025). Such contextual barriers include administrative workload, lack of resources and large class sizes that limit SMT capacity. Hierarchical school cultures make collaboration difficult and effectively prevent or limit the distribution of leadership roles. These dynamics point toward a distributed leadership perspective for assisting shared instructional leadership by strengthening middle leadership and building capacity within SMTs.

2.6 Spillane's Distributed Leadership Theory

Distributed Leadership Theory enhances instructional leadership by shifting the focus from specific leadership roles to the practice of leadership itself. It views leadership as a collaborative interaction among individuals, resources and organisational frameworks, rather than merely a series of tasks performed by those in formal positions. This perspective is particularly useful for understanding how School Management Teams (SMTs) operate, where leadership responsibilities related to curriculum and assessment are assigned to various stakeholders, including deputy principals and HoDs.

In this research, distributed leadership is used to assess how effectively instructional leadership is collaboratively exercised within SMTs and beyond, along with the structural and cultural factors that either facilitate or hinder such collaboration. The theory highlights the impact of tools like CAPS documents, annual teaching plans, assessment policies and monitoring templates on leadership practices. Additionally, factors such as workload, resource availability and school culture influence the implementation of leadership. By employing distributed leadership as an interpretive framework, the research not only examines how leadership is delegated but also investigates how it is collaboratively practised, understood and supported within the structures of the senior management team.

2.7 Relevance of Distributed Leadership to SMT Functioning

Distributed leadership can also serve as an insightful framework for studying the instructional practices of SMT in implementing CAPS. Distributed leadership focuses on shared accountability, which is imperative considering the complexity of CAPS and the importance of collaborative curriculum planning. The key importance of HoDs as departmental experts is recognised. Distributed leadership is in line with the policy guidelines of cooperation in learning, which are embraced in South African policy. It also supports divergence based on context, where variations in the practices of SMT can occur based on the context of each province.

2.8 Complementarity of the Two Theories

The integration of instructional leadership and distributed leadership provides a robust framework for examining the practices of SMTs in Gauteng secondary schools. Instructional leadership outlines the normative expectations set for SMTs by the CAPS, while distributed leadership highlights the practical dynamics of implementing leadership within complex and unequal educational environments. This combined approach allows the research to move beyond a deficit view of SMT performance. Instead, it focuses on how leadership practices are shaped by organisational structures, contextual limitations and collective capacity. As a result, this cohesive framework guides both the analysis of the findings and the understanding of the variations in CAPS implementation across different school environments.

3. Research Methodology

The research approach primarily utilised qualitative methods, employing various techniques to generate comprehensive, contextually rich insights into the instructional leadership practices of SMTs. The core of the research design consisted of semi-structured interviews, classroom observations and document analysis. These methods enabled an in-depth investigation of how SMTs enact instructional leadership within the CAPS framework across diverse school environments in Gauteng. In addition, a structured questionnaire was distributed to teachers and Heads of Department to collect descriptive qualitative data regarding their perceptions of SMT instructional leadership. The goal of the survey was not to achieve statistical generalisability or to analytically combine it with qualitative data, but rather to provide supplementary insights that informed and contextualised the qualitative findings.

Information from various sources was analysed independently, with qualitative results serving as the primary analytical focus of the research. The findings were used illustratively to either support or challenge the emerging qualitative themes, without any claims of triangulation or integration of the methods. The research is framed within a pragmatic approach, allowing the researcher to use various methods as appropriate, while maintaining a focus on the research questions and the practical context of the school environment. Pragmatism does not demand equal weighting or merging of methods; instead, it allows complementary strategies to deepen understanding of complex educational issues such as instructional leadership and CAPS implementation across diverse school contexts. In this study, interviews, observations, and document analysis were the primary sources of data used to thoroughly investigate the SMT instructional leadership practices. The survey component played

a supplementary role, providing a summary of teachers' and HoDs perspectives on SMT practices, without suggesting any alignment or triangulation of methods.

3.1 Qualitative Component

The data was generated using semi-structured interviews with school principals, their deputies and HoDs. Document analysis and observations were also employed. The data were contextual. The study's population consisted of four secondary schools in Gauteng, with categories that included former Model C schools (well-resourced), township schools (moderately resourced), Quintile 1-3 schools (under-resourced) and one independent school. Including schools from such diverse contexts ensured that the findings reflected the inequalities that shape SMT instructional leadership and CAPS implementation. A multistage sampling method was used. Four secondary schools were purposively sampled to provide diversity in terms of socioeconomic surroundings and performance levels. Using stratified random sampling, school administrators (four principals, four deputy principals), HoDs (16) and teachers (16) in each school were sampled to provide equity in terms of representation in departments. Finally, in a qualitative study, research participants were purposively sampled to achieve saturation of thematic representation, as per the new guidelines (Hennink, Kaiser & Marconi, 2017).

3.2 Data Collection Methods

A structured questionnaire administered to the teachers and HoDs helped gather information regarding the SMT's instructional leadership behaviours. The instrument consisted of five sections: demographic data, perceptions of the SMT's instructional leadership, curriculum management, CAPS implementation, assessment practices and collaborative leadership/distributed roles. A five-point Likert scale was used. The pilot test of the research apparatus was conducted in two institutions. Interviews conducted with principals, deputy principals and HoDs examined practices on instructional leadership, management of the curriculum and assessment, distribution of leadership, problems associated with the implementation of CAPS and initiatives for teacher support. The interviews lasted a total of 45-60 minutes, with recording done through consent. This was a semi-structured interview. Observations in the classrooms emphasised an organised schedule that aligned with CAPS guidelines and included aspects such as lesson planning and focus on topics, instruction strategies, assessment for learning practices and the involvement of SMT in monitoring the classrooms. This type of observation yielded insights into how management impacted instruction. These were annual teaching plans, meetings of departments, reports on marking, teacher files, School Improvement Plans and reports from the districts being monitored.

3.3 Data Analysis

Qualitative data collected from interviews, observations, and document analyses were examined thematically using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework. This process involved getting familiar with the data, conducting initial coding, developing themes, reviewing those themes, defining and naming the themes, and producing the final report. NVivo Version 14 was used to assist in organising and systematically coding the qualitative data. The data collected from the questionnaires were analysed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies, means and standard deviations, with the help of SPSS Version 28. These results illustrated contextual trends regarding opinions on SMT instructional leadership and the implementation of CAPS. The results did not undergo advanced inferential analysis for explanatory purposes, nor were they combined with qualitative data; instead, they were used to enhance and enrich the qualitative interpretation.

4. Findings and Discussion

The paper presents findings on how SMTs apply instructional leadership to ensure the implementation of the CAPS in secondary Gauteng schools. The findings are organised into five categories: SMT instructional leadership practices; CAPS implementation; assessment leadership; distributed leadership and collaboration; and challenges in implementing CAPS. The findings from the research indicate that there are big differences between the well-resourced, the township and the under-resourced secondary Gauteng schools.

4.1 SMT Instructional Leadership Practices

The findings show that the enactment of SMT instructional leadership practices is uneven across Gauteng secondary schools. The qualitative findings showed a moderately positive attitude toward the effectiveness of SMT, with 68% agreeing that SMT communicated clear academic goals consistent with CAPS, 72% agreeing that

they monitor the coverage of the curriculum regularly, and 66% agreeing that they offer guidance on strategies. Moreover, only 49% agreed that they offer adequate support for teachers experiencing difficulties with the implementation of CAPS. Significantly higher scores were found in better-resourced schools ($p < 0.05$) than in the other groups, underlining the role of resource availability in leadership enactment. The findings from the case study supported the pivotal role of HoDs in the day-to-day enactment of SMT instructional leadership.

HoDs in better-resourced schools kept regular class observations, provided constructive feedback and conducted collaborative planning with teachers. Conversely, administrative, disciplinary and resource-related roles limited class monitoring or support in townships, as well as in under-resourced schools. These findings support the concluding argument by Hallinger & Murphy (1985) about the role of HoDs in the role of managing the school programme. Current findings align with recent South African studies (Bush, 2023; Mestry & Moonsammy-Koopasammy, 2024), which show that HoDs play a central role in SMT enactment but are frequently overburdened. The findings confirm that SMT enactment practices are imbalanced, with better practices among better-resourced schools and serious limitations within the under-resourced school context, supporting the views cited by Spaull (2022) on systemic disparities.

4.2 Curriculum Management and CAPS Implementation

The study has found that curriculum management within the CAPS continues to be a core, albeit variable, function of SMT instructional leadership. The data indicate that 74% of participants agreed that the SMT promoted accountability for CAPS pacing and 63% viewed departmental planning as effective, while only 52% felt curricular gaps and learner backlogs were addressed. Although under-resourced schools reported lower levels of support, the small standard deviation suggests resource disparities had a limited overall impact on SMT capability ($p < 0.05$). The findings have identified three core areas for administering the curriculum. First, the pacing and coverage of the curriculum were formally assessed against annual teaching plans and term Plans in well-resourced institutions, although township and under-resourced institutions were constrained by teacher absenteeism, overcrowding and disruptions. Second, departmental planning occurred across all institutions, although overall quality varied: well-resourced institutions used data-driven planning, while under-resourced institutions focused largely on administration. Third, classroom observation, as a form of instruction monitoring, occurred episodically, whereas walkabout monitoring occurred in all institutions. The findings indicate that, despite the efforts of the SMT, certain challenges, largely related to work pressure and resource constraints, limit the effective implementation of the CAPS offer (Dlamini & Zulu, 2024; Hallinger, 2011; Mofoka, 2024).

4.3 Assessment Leadership

Findings support the notion that assessment leadership is a vital, albeit unequal, aspect of the SMT's instructional practice in the context of CAPS. They further revealed that 70% of the respondents felt that the SMT ensured assessment compliance, 64% thought that there was frequent assessment moderation and only 47% were satisfied that the SMT offered support for the design of quality assessment tasks. A difference across the school categories revealed that the best-performing, well-resourced schools significantly outperformed the others in assessment quality, thus underpinning the impact of resource challenges within the context of the SMT. The process of moderation, as shown by the findings, had been institutionalised across the various educational institutions, although there were variations in its nature and extent.

The best-resourced institutions conducted level two and level three moderation, whereas township and Resource-poor institutions were constrained by time, knowledge and human resources. The value and application of students' performance data were not uniformly consistent: some institutions provided remedial education, whereas others offered only minimal support. Finally, literacy issues, including the allocation of cognitive levels, the design of the rubric and the taxonomy, further constrained the capacity of the SMT. These findings emphasise the core importance of assessment leadership within the context of CAPS, thus warranting the need for special capacity building within the sector (DBE, 2011; Enebe & Matashu, 2025; Kubheka & Naidoo, 2025; Mofoka, 2024; Mathonsi & Nkambule, 2023).

4.4 Distributed Leadership and Collaboration

Data indicated that, in practice, distributed leadership was patchy and highly variable across Gauteng secondary schools. Data showed that, while 59% of teachers reported shared leadership in SMTs, only 48% felt that teacher leadership was encouraged actively and only 41% reported actual collaboration in decision-making processes. Distributed leadership was significantly stronger in well-resourced schools, thus suggesting that resources and the support derived from them are clearly significant to collaboration practices. It is confirmed

through the qualitative evidence that, though somewhat supported by collaboration mechanisms in place, such as departmental meetings and task teams, leadership remained mainly hierarchical.

For example, one HoD noted, "Most decisions come from the top. Teachers are not always involved." Principals acknowledged efforts towards distributing the workload but identified impediments arising from heavy workloads and firmly entrenched cultural norms. Findings run contrary to Spillane's 2005 model of distributed leadership, which emphasises shared expertise, collective responsibility and leadership as a socially constructed phenomenon. Hierarchical norms, role ambiguity and limited trust constrained effective distribution of leadership, consistent with recent South African research findings (Mathonsi & Nkambule, 2023; Mofoka, 2024). Conversely, schools that did distribute leadership responsibilities to HoDs and teacher leaders exhibited higher teacher morale, improved curriculum coherence and more effective assessment management (Harris, 2023; Hulpia, Devos & Van Keer, 2022; Nkambule & Amsterdam, 2024).

4.5 Challenges Encountered by SMTs in Implementing CAPS

In general, from the various data resources, five main factors limited the instructional leadership by SMTs in Gauteng secondary schools. Administrative overload was widespread, with bureaucracy constraining SMTs' capacity to focus on teaching and learning, consistent with recent South African studies by Bush (2023) and Mofoka (2024). This explains how gaps created by inequalities in resources limited instruction and the implementation of CAPS in under-resourced schools due to inadequacies of textbooks, ICT resources, laboratory facilities and educational resources for leading instruction and learning by SMTs. Also, teachers' competence and readiness for instruction varied, where inadequacies in teachers' main subjects or pedagogical and content understanding increased support and responsibility for SMTs in leading instruction and learning for schools.

Assessment demands under CAPS created workload strain, making it difficult for teachers to follow curriculum requirements and for SMTs to lead and monitor instructional quality and compliance effectively. Limited district support further constrained School Management Teams (SMTs). Participants reported insufficient guidance from subject advisors, which limited effective curriculum implementation. The absence of sustained professional engagement weakened schools' capacity to provide coherent instructional direction.These limitations contributed to disparities between schools, particularly in their ability to lead teaching and learning strategically. Differences in staff availability, teacher expertise, and access to instructional resources further intensified these inequities. Overall, the findings underscore the need for stronger and more consistent district engagement to enhance instructional leadership and improve learner outcomes.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

This concluding section summarises the key findings on SMT instructional leadership in implementing CAPS in Gauteng secondary schools, draws inferences from the research objectives, and offers recommendations. It also points out the significance of this article, its originality, as well as areas where more research can be conducted. This paper focused on the specific SMT practices at Gauteng secondary schools on the management of the curriculum, assessment and their practices related to the distribution and implementation of CAPS. The SMT leadership practices are understood by the management, with HoDs playing an important role on the ground, though less-resourced schools are constrained by support and disciplinary responsibilities. The management of the curriculum and associated assessments is applied in an irregular way, with less-resourced schools showing lower implementation of CAPS guidelines. The application of distribution of leadership is still low, though less-resourced schools showing positive attitudes towards distribution impact morale and consistency of the curriculum. The SMT practices are constrained by factors associated with workload, support, leadership capacity and culture, specifically, less-resourced schools being most challenged.

6. Theoretical Implications

This paper focused on the specific SMT practices at Gauteng secondary schools on the management of the curriculum, assessment and their practices related to the distribution and implementation of CAPS. The SMT leadership practices are understood by the management, with HoDs playing an important role on the ground, though less-resourced schools are constrained by support and disciplinary responsibilities. The management of the curriculum and associated assessments is applied in an irregular way, with less-resourced schools showing lower implementation of CAPS guidelines. The application of distribution of leadership is still low, though less-resourced schools showing positive attitudes towards distribution impact morale and consistency of the curriculum. The SMT practices are constrained by factors associated with workload, support, leadership capacity and culture, specifically, less-resourced schools being most challenged.

6.1 Practical and Policy Recommendations

On the basis of the findings, the following recommendations are made that can bring about improvements in the SMT instructional leadership capacity and CAPS implementation in secondary schools. First, continuous leadership development programmes should be initiated that are focused on instruction, leadership, planning, assessment and CAPS. These programmes would equip SMT members with the skills to manage the teaching process. Secondly, mentoring or coaching programmes should be initiated for HoDs to improve middle management capability, enabling them to be actively involved in instructional leadership and thereby bridging the gap between SMT activities and the classrooms. To promote effective distributed leadership, schools should encourage shared leadership patterns with the allocation of duties among members of the SMT and subject teachers. Initiatives such as teacher-led leadership through the appointment of subject coordinators, professional learning communities, or collaborative task groups could help schools improve collaboration, enhance accountability and prevent the overcentralisation of leadership in the hands of principals. Such strategies would help schools promote a culture of shared responsibility so that the burdens of demands associated with teaching and learning could be handled by the SMTs with the help of middle and subject teachers

6.2 Enhancing assessment practices

In a bid to fortify assessment leadership in schools, training workshops focused on assessment literacy should be offered. Topics that can be covered under these workshops include task design, moderation and analysis of learners' performance. Furthermore, the implementation of moderated measures can go a long way in assuring the quality of assessment leadership in schools, as these measures can enable SMTs to adhere to the requirements of CAPS. These actions will go a long way in fortifying SMTs while also promoting equity and soundness in assessment practices. This can especially be the case when resources in these particular schools are limited. Systemically, policymakers need to promote equity in teaching and learning resources. The provision of textbooks, teaching materials and infrastructure is important to ensure that SMTs are able to run CAPS successfully in schools. It is also important to take advantage of technology in teaching to facilitate teaching in schools. It is important to note that these strategies will play an important role in ensuring equity in teaching and learning in schools. It will also help to improve teaching in schools. This will result in learners acquiring appropriate skills in their subjects.

6.3 Improving district and policy support

Finally, it is proposed that the respective district offices of education provide support structures for the SMTs through monitoring and, more specifically, through mentoring and capacity building. In addition, guidelines need to be formulated in the policy domain that could address the CAPS requirements in a manner that suits the practical constraints of different school settings, in terms of workload pressures and socioeconomic constraints. This would ensure the SMTs are provided with the needed structures in terms of implementation of instructional leadership in a manner that achieves the curriculum and assessment outcomes, despite the practical constraints in township and resource-constrained schools. Moreover, institutions must encourage reflective practices within the school. Some of the strategies that can be used to make the SMT and teachers reflect within the school include peer review, lesson observation and data-driven decision-making. These strategies will help the entire staff in the school to reflect, thereby ensuring that the curriculum is implemented and the instructors make improvements. Being reflective is core in helping professionals, like school administrators, become successful within the school.

7. Conclusion

This article has been further developed, based on the insights that SMTs are critical agents in the implementation of CAPS in secondary schools in Gauteng; their effectiveness in enacting curricular policies is influenced by contextual, structural and capacity-related factors. Instructional leadership practices are strongest in well-resourced schools and are more constrained in under-resourced and township schools. Distributed leadership is limited, pointing to opportunities for improved collaboration and shared responsibility. All these efforts will serve to strengthen instructional leadership: from policymakers, district office officials and school leaders through attention to developing leadership capacity, equity of resources, distributed leadership and capacity-building assessments. By addressing these areas, SMTs can better translate CAPS policy into effective teaching and learning, which can lead to improved learner outcomes in diverse school contexts.

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