Examining principals' instructional leadership practices at the middle schools in Banja Woreda, Ethiopia

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Abstract

Principals' instructional leadership is considered as an essential component to school success. The purpose of this study was to investigate principals' instructional leadership practices at the Middle Schools in Banja Woreda, Ethiopia. To meet its aim, the study employed a convergent parallel mixed method research design. In this investigation, 98 subject teachers, 5 woreda education experts, 4 vice principals and 7 cluster supervisors were selected. Through random sampling technique, 14 middle schools and their principals were selected. Questionnaire, interview and FGD were data gathering instruments used for the study. One sample t-test statistical tool was conducted for analysis of quantitative data and qualitative data was analyzed thematically. The findings demonstrated that the middle school principals were ineffective at carrying out the specified instructional leadership job functions and were unable to effectively manage the instructional program, define the school mission, and develop a positive school learning climate. The findings lead to the conclusion that the ineffectiveness of middle school principals in executing key instructional leadership tasks in Banja Woreda, Ethiopia, can significantly hinder student academic achievement. This finding of the study suggested that middle school principals should successfully exercise their roles as instructional leaders.

Keywords: instructional leadership, instructional leadership practice, middle school, subject teachers

Introduction

Unquestionably, education is the best way to impart the knowledge and abilities people need to properly engage in and contribute to the advancement of a nation's social, political, and economic activities (Chiedozie & Victor, 2017). These days, a nation's progress depends heavily on its educational system (Ali, 2017). Hence, strong institutions and strong leadership are necessary to attain the purpose of educational system. The primary activity in school is teaching and learning.

Therefore, teaching and learning should be properly managed since all other activities are secondary to those basic goals (Ahmad, 2018).

Currently, principals bear the greatest responsibility among educational leaders for ensuring that daily school objectives are met (Adam, 2012). As a result, principals must demonstrate the instructional leadership skills and competencies necessary to implement the changes required for schools to thrive (William, 2008). One of the primary responsibilities of school principals is the organization of teaching and learning, a complex process that demands their full attention as the instructional leaders of the school (Ahmad, 2018). Stronge et al. (2008) identified instructional leadership as a key characteristic of successful principals. Given the global trend toward heightened school accountability, the findings of Bellibas and Liu (2018) have further emphasized the importance of instructional leadership as a critical area of focus for school policymakers and practitioners. Consequently, it is crucial to investigate the instructional leadership practices of principals.

From a conceptual standpoint, instructional leadership cannot be defined separately. Academic writers have produced a vast array of works that define and investigate instructional leadership (Alsmadi, 2017). For instance, according to Hallinger and Wang (2015), there are three main aspects of a school principal's job functions: defining the school's mission, managing instructional program, and developing a positive school learning climate. In addition, enormous research findings recommended that effective school principal must engage in instructional leadership roles of developing the school goals, communicating those goals, supervision and evaluation of instruction, coordination of the curriculum, monitoring of students' progress, protection of instructional time, maintaining high visibility, promoting professional development, and providing incentives for teachers and students (Ahmad, 2018; Alsmadi, 2017; Dilekci & Limon, 2022; Hallinger & Wang, 2015; Lingam et al., 2021; Rosa & Dwi, 2021).

As the national context of the study, the Ethiopian government has been engaged in a major effort to transform the society and place the country on a trajectory to become a lower middle-income economy by the year, 2030 (Ministry of Education [MoE], 2018). Education is instrumental in attaining these

development goals through the application of science, technology, and innovations. Achieving these visions requires, among other things, further expansion of access to high-quality basic and general education and special leadership efforts to improve the overall efficiency and effectiveness of respective educational structures (MoE, 2023).

In addition, the primary issue facing Ethiopia's education system today, among other things, is the system's decline in quality, which has led to students' lower academic performance at their separate educational levels (MoE, 2023). Despite the efforts made, there was a lack of quality learning outcomes to go along with the higher primary school enrollment (MoE, 2018). MoE (2023) claims that elementary school graduates lack competency, which calls for the integration of knowledge, skills, and essential values. This is the reason that the majority of students are unable to meet the required 50% pass rate in the education policy (MoE, 2023), which was deemed the primary justification for the revision of the present Education and Training Policy in the country. As a result, the goal of the policy was set to improve the overall measure of educational quality by focusing on teaching and learning improvement. Therefore, unless principals put forth effort in instructional leadership practice, this new policy and its desired goal may be pose a challenge to achieve.

Moreover, the principal's leadership in teaching and learning is the most important factor contributing to the school's success in Ethiopia (Matebe, 2020). He interprets this to mean that the principal's primary responsibility as an instructional leader is to facilitate effective teaching and learning both within and outside of the classroom. Leading the school's instructional program is, thus, the most significant of the principal's responsibilities, as other authors have also observed that a school's success rests mostly, if not entirely, on the quality of education its students receive. That is to say, instructional leadership highlights how important it is for principals to concentrate more on the core duties of education, which are teaching and learning, rather than on managerial or administrative tasks like keeping the peace, placing equipment orders, planning events, handling finances, managing the physical plant, and so on (Matebe, 2020). It is therefore imperative that principals, in their capacity as instructional leaders, work to enhance teaching and learning within their schools (MoE, 2013).

Despite the significant positive impact of instructional leadership practices on school success and the growing global attention to this role, research indicates that while some principals effectively perform their instructional leadership duties (Alsmadi, 2017; Dilekci & Limon, 2022), others neglect this critical responsibility. For example, Mestry (2017) found that many principals did not view managing teaching and learning as their primary responsibility. Similarly, Noor and Nawab (2022) noted that principals often prioritize administrative tasks, leaving little time for instructional leadership. However, principals who focus on managing instructional programs, clearly define their school's mission, and foster a positive learning environment tend to have a positive influence on school outcomes (Ahmad, 2018; Ali, 2017; Noor & Nawab, 2022; Shafeeu, 2019). These contrasting findings highlight the need for further investigation, especially in specific contexts such as Banja Woreda, Ethiopia.

Research on Ethiopian school principals has revealed generally inadequate instructional leadership practices (Abebe, 2017; Anteneh, 2018; Belay, 2017; Dina, 2018; Geremew, 2018; Medhanie, 2019; Serkalem, 2018; Yohannes, 2018). These studies often relied on descriptive survey designs and lacked strong theoretical or conceptual frameworks. Limited research has been conducted in localized contexts, such as Banja Woreda, necessitating further exploration to determine whether current findings align with or differ from previous studies.

Furthermore, recent studies (Cox, 2021; Hunt, 2020) have underscored the need for continued research on the instructional leadership practices of school principals. Ahmad (2018) and Shafeeu (2019) specifically called for more investigation into how principals implement their instructional leadership duties as outlined in the PIMRS framework. With this in mind, this study examined the instructional leadership practices of principals at middle schools in Banja Woreda. It aimed to assess the extent to which principals in this area practiced the three dimensions of instructional leadership. The findings are expected to motivate principals to improve their instructional leadership roles, contributing to enhanced school performance in Banja Woreda, Ethiopia. Thus, the study addressed the following research question: What is the status of principals' instructional leadership practice at the middle schools of Banja Woreda?

Theoretical Framework of the Study

This study is grounded in the instructional leadership framework initially proposed by Hallinger and Murphy (1985). Their model identifies three core dimensions of instructional leadership: defining the school mission, managing the instructional program, and promoting a positive school learning climate. Murphy (1990) expanded this framework into four dimensions, while Weber (1989) proposed five dimensions, highlighting consistent elements that remain central to the field (Ahmad, 2018). The study adopts Hallinger and Wang's (2015) updated theoretical model, which is assessed using the Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale (PIMRS). This instrument includes three dimensions (defining the school mission, managing the instructional program, and promoting a positive school learning climate) and ten elements of instructional leadership (framing school goals, communicating school goals, supervising and evaluating instructions, coordinating curricula, monitoring student progress, protecting instructional time, providing incentives for teachers, providing incentives for student learning, promoting the professional development, and maintaining high visibility), making it a widely used tool for evaluating principals' practices globally (Ahmad, 2018; Ali, 2017; Shafeeu, 2019). The model's relevance to Ethiopia's educational context and its extensive global application justify its use in this investigation (Ahmad, 2018; Cox, 2021; Hunt, 2020; Ikram et al., 2021; Shafeeu, 2019; Shaked, 2018).
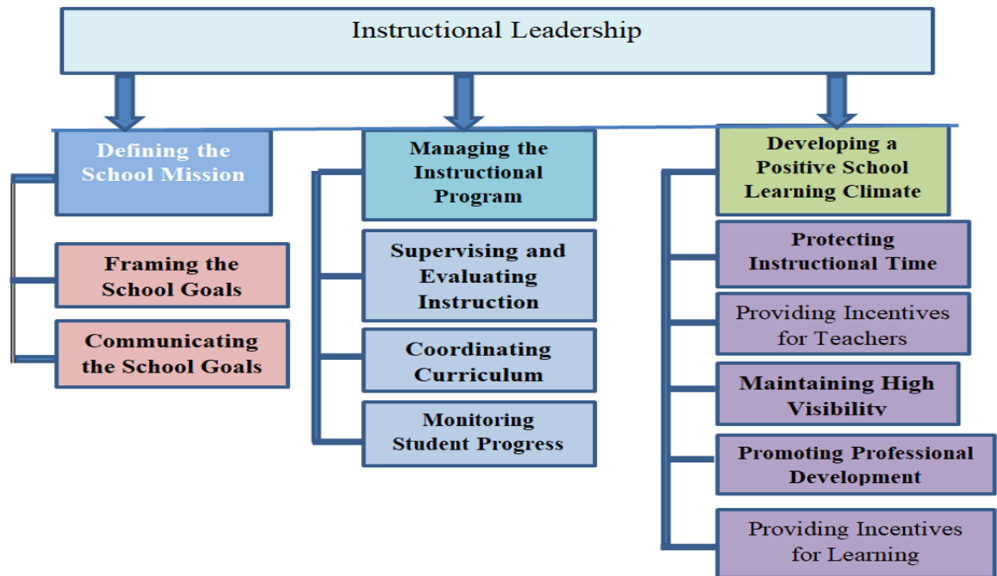
Figure 1: PIMRS Instructional Leadership Theoretical Model (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985)

Research Methods

Research approach

This investigation used a mixed-methods research approach. This approach is a way of researching to combine the collection of quantitative and qualitative data, integrate the two types of data, and employ a unique design in order to produce insights that go beyond what can be obtained from either type of data alone (Creswell, 2018; Creswell, & Creswell, 2018). Mixed methods research provides a robust philosophical underpinning for addressing complex social science research problems by integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches. As noted by Creswell and Plano Clark (2018), this approach emphasizes the significance of focusing on the research problem and utilizing pluralistic methodologies to generate comprehensive insights. In alignment with this paradigm, the current study employed a closed-ended questionnaire to collect quantitative data, complemented by open-ended interviews and focus group discussions to gather qualitative data. By combining the strengths of both

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quantitative and qualitative data sources Creswell & Plano Clark (2018), the study sought to develop a more nuanced understanding of the research question while mitigating the limitations inherent in each approach individually.

Research design

For this investigation, a mixed-method research design was used. By finding ways to combine data through mixed types of research design, mixed methods geared toward the systematic integration of quantitative and qualitative data, and triangulating data sources as a means of pursuing convergence across qualitative and quantitative methods (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). Thus, using a convergent mixed research design, a researcher gathered and examined quantitative and qualitative data in isolation before comparing the results to determine whether they supported or contradicted one another. Therefore, for this study, participants' detailed perspectives from the FGD and interviews were quqlitatively given comprehensive information, while participants' ratings of questionnaire items gave numerical information quantitatively. Taken together, these methods produced largely consistent results. Due to this convergent mixed research design, both quantitative and qualitative databases received equal weight, and both types of data were gathered for the same variables at the same time, and both databases were valued equally and regarded as roughly equal sources of information for the study.

Sample size and sampling techniques

The population of this study consisted of individuals working in the Banja Woreda Administration in Ethiopia. This included 26 middle school principals, 352 teachers, 4 vice-principals, 7 cluster supervisors, and 18 experts from the Woreda Education Office. Using a simple random sampling technique, middle schools and their corresponding principals were selected as the study area and participants respectively. Out of the 26 middle schools, 14 (53.8%) were specifically targeted as the sample size. Accordingly, 14 (53.8%) principals—13 men and 1 woman—were chosen from these middle schools to participate in in-depth interviews. Additionally, 98 subject teachers—47 male and 51 female—were purposefully selected to complete a questionnaire from the total pool of 352 teachers (154 male and 198 female) across the middle schools under study. Grade 8 students in the region do not take regional exams for all the

subjects they study. Therefore, out of the ten subjects taught to Grade 8 students, Awngi, Amharic, English, Mathematics, General Science, Social Studies, and Citizenship were tested in the 2015 E.C. Amhara regional exam. Consequently, teachers of these specific subjects were directly selected to complete the questionnaire, as they were expected to provide more relevant insights into the principals' instructional leadership roles than teachers of other subjects. To this end, a purposive sampling technique was employed to select Grade 8 subject teachers who taught the aforementioned subjects for the regional exam. Corresponding to the number of subjects and teachers in each subject, 7 sample teachers were selected from each of the respective sample middle schools to participate in the study.

In addition, 4 vice principals and 7 cluster resource center supervisors were selected using purposive sampling techniques. Since these groups of individuals were limited in number, the entire population (100%) was included in the study to participate in focus group discussions (FGDs). Furthermore, 5 out of 28 Woreda Education Office experts were selected as direct participants for FGDs. These experts were chosen due to their experience and leadership positions as team leaders within the office, as they were expected to provide valuable insights regarding the instructional leadership practices of middle school principals.

Data collection instruments

Both quantitative and qualitative data collection instruments were employed in this study. These instruments came in the form of focus groups, interviews, and questionnaires.

Questionnaire

The survey instrument for this study was adapted from the Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale (PIMRS) developed by Hallinger and Wang (2015). The PIMRS was adapted to the context of this study to gather data regarding the instructional leadership practices of school principals. After revisions in recent years, the PIMRS has 50 items and 10 subscales (Hallinger & Wang, 2015). The PIMRS was created, in accordance with Hallinger & Wang (2015), to evaluate three major dimensions of instructional leadership. They were: (1) managing the instructional program; (2) defining the mission of the school; and (3) developing

a positive school learning climate. The PIMRS is a valid and trustworthy instrument that has been used extensively in several studies conducted worldwide over the past few years to measure the instructional leadership of principals (Ali, 2017; Rosa & Dwi, 2021; Shafeeu, 2019). For this reason, the PIMRS survey instrument was chosen.

As a result, the purpose of this questionnaire was to gather information regarding the instructional leadership practices of principals from the viewpoint of the subject teachers. Subject teachers were given access to a 50-item survey about instructional leadership practice ratings. The rater evaluates how frequently the principal uses a behavior or practice related to that specific instructional leadership function for each item. Every item was scored using a Likert-type scale, with the scores ranging from (1) almost never to (5) almost always. The reliability of the instrument was tested and the result indicated that the Cronbach alpha coefficient values of the PIMRS instrument were above 0.86. This suggestes that the items measured similar constructs.

Interview

Fourteen school principals participated in an in-depth interview in to get the necessary information verbally from them about their experiences, thoughts, and viewpoints. Seeking a thorough knowledge of the experiences of middle school principals in Banja Woreda was the main reason for conducting interviews (Creswell, 2018). Moreover, the interview questions were formulated in accordance with the research question to offset the limitations of quantitative data. The main research question regarding the status of principals' instructional leadership practice was thus the basis for the contents of this mixed study interview.

Focus group discussion

Two groups of seven cluster supervisors, four vice principals, and five woreda education experts participated in the focus group discussions. A total of sixteen participants were chosen as a sample in to benefit from the range of shared understanding that these interacting individuals might provide. The two interactive focus groups (with eight members in each session) provided an avenue

for participants to freely express their opinions about instructional leadership and their practices. The researcher facilitated focus group discussions (FGDs) by posing discussion questions and providing opportunities for each participant to provide their ideas with the questions posed.

Data analysis techniques

For this study, quantitative data analyzed through a one-sample t-test to compare the observed mean with the expected mean. On the other hand, the researcher employed the six-step theme analysis method to analyze the qualitative data from the interviews and shared ideas from focus group discussions (FGDs). To begin, the researcher became acquainted with the data that were gathered from the participants; understanding the participants' actual social experiences requires qualitative data analytical approaches that determine the themes, under which the data were labeled, sorted, compared, and synthesized. Secondly, preliminary codes were produced using the data; each respondent's response was classified into relevant groups, coded, and identified as P#1, P#2, P#3... to P#14 for interviews and P#A, P#B, P#C... and P#N for FGD participants, where "P" stands for the individual participants. Third, the investigator looked for recurring motifs. Four, a review of the possible themes were conducted. Five, themes were identified and given names. Sixth, during the report (the results), the researcher employed several strategies to protect the privacy and confidentiality of the participants by referring to the findings with broad phrases such as "one principal," "vice principal," "one cluster supervisor," "one woreda education office expert," etc. therefore, thematic analysis was used because it helped researchers identify, arrange, and shed light on meaningful patterns (themes) in a dataset, allowing them to categorize those that were essential to answer a particular research question.

In general, the researcher tried to triangulate the results by examining the quantitative and qualitative data independently, contrasting the results of the study of the two data sets, and determining if the results were consistent or inconsistent with one another. Consequently, a "convergence" of data resulted from the researcher's direct comparison of the two sources of data sets. To accomplish this, the researcher first presented quantitative data results, and then

provided qualitative quotes and concepts to either confirm or disconfirm the statistical results.

Results

The overall results of both quantitative and qualitative study are presented below.

Quantitative results

The presentation of the study results based on the information gathered using the PIMRS survey instrument is the primary focus of this section. The study examined how middle school principals in Banja Woreda practiced instructional leadership. Consequently, a one-sample t-test has been employed to ascertain the status of instructional leadership practice by contrasting the expected mean score, which is considered to be the typical instructional leadership practice, with the calculated mean score of each scale. As a result, the analysis result is shown in Table 1.

The results of a one-sample t-test revealed that the mean values for the instructional leadership dimensions—defining the school mission ($M = 2.48$, $t(97) = -5.55$, $p < .001$), managing the instructional program ($M = 2.50$, $t(97) = -6.40$, $p < .001$), and developing a positive school learning climate ($M = 2.48$, $t(97) = -7.20$, $p < .001$)—were significantly lower than the expected mean value of 3. Besides, compared to the expected mean (3), a one-sample t-test analysis result showed that overall principals' instructional leadership practice mean value (2.49) was significantly lower $t(97) = -7.903$, $p < .001$. Furthermore, the result of the study indicated that, in contrast to the expected mean value (3), the mean value (2.65), $t(97) = -2.640$, $p < .001$, for the instructional leadership function of coordinating curriculum was comparatively less often practiced (see Table 1).

Table 1: A one-sample t-test for the status of instructional leadership practices

Variables	Mean	SD	t	Mean D/nce	Sig.
Frame school goals	2.51	1.1	-4.406	-0.49	0.000
Communicate school goals	2.46	1.06	-5.042	-0.54	0.000
Supervise and evaluate instruction	2.42	1.17	-4.924	-0.58	0.000
Coordinate curriculum	2.65	1.3	-2.64	-0.35	0.010
Monitor student progress	2.43	0.9	-6.207	-0.57	0.000
Protect instructional time	2.6	1.09	-3.602	-0.4	0.001
Maintain high visibility	2.41	1.23	-4.739	-0.59	0.000
Provide incentives for teachers	2.42	0.92	-6.285	-0.58	0.000
Promote professional development	2.52	1.05	-4.501	-0.48	0.000
Provide incentives for learning	2.44	1.02	-5.439	-0.56	0.000
Define school mission	2.48	0.92	-5.549	-0.52	0.000
Manage instructional program	2.5	0.77	-6.401	-0.5	0.000
Develop positive school learning	2.48	0.72	-7.203	-0.52	0.000
Overall instructional leadership	2.49	0.64	-7.903	-0.51	0.000

N= 98, df= 97, Test Value=3

Accordingly, the results of a one-sample t-test analysis, in particular, showed that middle school principals in Banja Woreda rarely exercise their instructional leadership in terms of framing and communicating the school goals, supervising and evaluating instruction, coordinating the curriculum, monitoring student progress, protecting instructional time, maintaining high visibility, promoting professional development, providing incentives for teachers and learning. This finding suggests that in to support students' learning accomplishment, a significant amount of work needs to be done to ensure that the principals' instructional leadership responsibilities are properly implemented in schools.

Qualitative results

The qualitative information gathered from the participants in the FGD and interviews was examined to assess the state of instructional leadership practices at the middle schools. The researcher created a thread of recurrent themes and concepts using participant responses from both the FGD and interviews. The primary instructional leadership functions implemented in the middle schools were commonly recognized and identified as these themes. The qualitative data

analysis revealed the following key themes related to instructional leadership practices: *1) Developing a shared school plan; 2) Maintaining visibility within the school environment; 3) Conducting classroom supervision; 4) Preventing the wastage of instructional time; 5) Ensuring a safe and conducive school learning climate; 6) Establishing a system for rewards and recognition; 7) Monitoring student learning progress; 8) Setting academically focused goals; and 9)Leading and managing co-curricular activities.*

The analysis in Table 2 focuses on the distribution and prevalence of key instructional leadership practices identified through interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) across 14 middle schools.

Table 2: Summary of Instructional Leadership Practice Identified by Interview and FGDs

Instructional Leadership Practice identified by interview and FGD	Name of Middle School														Total	Percentage
	# 1	# 2	# 3	# 4	# 5	# 6	# 7	# 8	# 9	# 10	# 11	# 12	# 13	# 14		
Developing school plan	√				√	√	√	√			√		√		7	50
Maintaining visibility		√				√	√		√	√			√		6	43
Classroom supervision	√		√		√			√		√		√	√	√	8	57
Protecting instructional time	√		√	√		√	√		√				√		7	50
Safe school learning climate	√	√				√	√	√	√		√	√	√		9	64
Rewarding and Recognition	√		√	√					√		√	√	√	√	8	57
Monitor student progress	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	14	100
Setting academic goals		√				√	√						√		4	29
Lead Co-curricular activity				√	√				√				√		4	29
Total instructional leadership practice	6	4	4	4	4	6	6	4	6	3	4	4	9	3		
Percentage	67	44	44	44	44	47	47	44	47	33	44	44	100	33		

As the qualitative data analysis result summary in Table 2 showed, the most consistently observed instructional leadership practice was monitoring student progress, identified in all 14 middle schools (100%). Other commonly identified instructional leadership practices included ensuring a safe school learning climate

(64%), classroom supervision (57%), and implementing a rewarding and recognition system (57%). Practices such as developing a school plan and protecting instructional time were observed in 50% of the schools. Less commonly reported practices included maintaining visibility within the school (43%), setting academic goals (29%), and leading co-curricular activities (29%).

Regarding variations across middle schools, the total number of instructional leadership practices implemented varied across schools, ranging from 3 (33%) to 9 (100%). The highest percentage of practices was observed in School #13, which implemented all 9 instructional leadership practices (100%). In contrast, schools #10 and #14 implemented the fewest practices (3 practices, 33% each). Thus, only school (#13) principal was effective to practice the identified all instructional leadership roles. In contrary, the majority of principals from middle schools practiced only 3 or 4 instructional leadership roles. Therefore, this study was unique in identifying those aforementioned nine principal instructional leadership roles in middle schools of Banja Woreda, Ethiopia that were identified based on information gathered from the interview and responses from FGD participants. The examination of the qualitative data revealed that the middle school instructional leadership roles held by the identified principals were not being carried out effectively (see Table 2).

Integrating quantitative and qualitative findings

The qualitative findings are consistent with and support the quantitative results. The information obtained from respondents of the questionnaire about school principals' instructional leadership practices was analyzed quantitatively. In other ways, the participants of the qualitative study were principals, vice principals, supervisors and woreda education experts. The FGD and interview sessions participants were asked open-ended questions derived in relation with basic question for this study. As a result, the participants commonly identified 9 themes of instructional leadership functions. Although about nine responsibilities were identified as principals' duties by Woreda according to responses from interviews and FGD participants, these identified duties were not implemented uniformly in all schools. While some school principals performed them in certain circumstances, most principals did not know these duties and did not implement

them. Therefore, the qualitative data result suggests that the instructional leadership practices are different from principal to principal.

One of the most important findings is that there was a high consistency between the teachers' responses of the quantitative data and those of interview and FGD participants' response analysis results of qualitative research findings. Overall, survey respondents indicated that principals do not practice the 10 instructional leadership functions of the PIMRS (Principal Instructional Management Rating Scales). As indicated in Table1, the aggregate instructional leadership practices were found to be below average. Similarly, qualitative data revealed that most school principals were not effective to exercise their instructional role as identified by principals themselves and FGD participants' point of view (see Table 2). Therefore, the linked overall findings of both quantitative and qualitative results support for one another.

Discussion

The fundamental objective of this study was to ascertain the status of instructional leadership practices among middle school principals. The subject teachers' answers to the Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale (PIMRS) survey about how much their school principals practiced instructional leadership, as well as the key themes that emerged from the interviews and FGD participants' responses, are the main components to be presented under this section.

Overall, the results of the quantitative and qualitative data analysis indicated that the middle school principals in Banja Woreda, Ethiopia, were ineffective at exercising instructional leadership. Several studies support this finding. In his research on the instructional leadership role of Dire Dawa, Antene (2018) found that school principals were not effectively carrying out their responsibilities of instructional leadership. Similarly, Abebe (2017) conducted a study on the roles and practices of school principals as instructional leaders. The findings of the study show that Assosa Zone school principals were ineffective at motivating and inspiring staff, fostering a teaching and learning environment, encouraging professional development, and monitoring and assessing classroom instruction. According to Belay (2017), the majority of school principals are ineffective in both their overall and individual instructional leadership positions. Additionally, a study by Medhanie (2019) revealed the inadequate ways that principals of schools

manage the curriculum, communicate and frame the vision, collaborate with stakeholders, provide supervisory visits, and create a supportive learning environment.

More recently, Lingam et al. (2021) sought to ascertain the extent to which Fijian teachers believe their principal demonstrates a competent role in instructional leadership. According to the study's findings, the principals received the lowest ratings for monitoring and evaluation of their roles as instructional leaders. Moreover, Shaked (2018) discovered that principals now engage in instructional leadership to a limited extent in his study, which sought to understand why principals avoid it. According to Shaked (2018), some principals in this study maintain a non-academic understanding of schools' primary goals that emphasize students' welfare, social skills, values, etc. As a result, they argue that increasing teaching and learning effectiveness shouldn't be the top priority for school principals.

As a result of this study, the principals of the Banja Woreda middle schools in Ethiopia, on the other hand, were ineffective in monitoring student progress, supervising and evaluating instruction and framing and communicating school goals. In contrast, Banua et al. (2022) discovered that principals' instructional leadership was extremely satisfying in their study based on school administrators' instructional leadership for pedagogical advancement in the Philippines. Their findings indicate that principals were successful in carrying out their main duty of advancing every student's success. By concentrating on learning, promoting teamwork, utilizing data to enhance learning, helping, and coordinating curriculum, assessment, and training, they were able to meet their target.

In a similar vein, the findings of this study did not agree with those of studies conducted by Ahmad, (2018), Ikram et al., (2021), Tedla & Kilango, (2022). Ahmad (2018) conducted a research on the instructional leadership strategies used by Aceh, Indonesia, excellent school principals. The results of his investigation led to the conclusion that instructional leadership roles are performed by the principals of Aceh, Indonesia's excellent schools. In their systematic evaluation of instructional leadership methods among Asian school principals, Ikram et al. (2021) discovered that principals in Asian nations give

instructional programs, student achievement, school mission and vision, and school climate a higher importance than principals in other Asian nations give.

Furthermore, Sukarmin and Sin's (2022) findings, which focused on the impact of principal instructional leadership on teacher organizational commitment in Malaysia, indicate that teachers' commitment to the school has been strengthened by principals' extensive use of instructional leadership, which has in turn raised students' academic achievement. Moreover, Banks (2019) found that highly effective principals' instructional leadership approaches in support of learners included making sure that teachers offered pupils something distinctive in the classroom. Since instructional leadership by school principals affects students' academic progress both directly and indirectly, the research findings from the literature were clear. Nevertheless, the middle school principals in Banja Woreda, Ethiopia, were ineffective in using instructional leadership techniques to promote professional development and provide incentives for teachers.

Put another way, disruptions to the educational system may also result in a reduction in the amount of time students spend learning academically. To increase students' academic achievement, instructional leaders must protect instructional time to deal with disruptions (Leithwood et al., 2010). By shielding instructional time from disruptions that are publicly broadcast across the school, it is also possible to maximize student learning time and, consequently, student achievement. According to Goldring et al. (2019), instructional leaders make sure that every student has adequate time to master challenging material in every academic area. The results of this study, however, contradicted this fact by demonstrating multiple instances of instructional time wasting at middle schools in Banja Woreda, Ethiopia. In practical terms, this study discovered that at least one middle school in Banja Woreda wastes instructional time and continues to have 1-5% monthly periods neither taught nor tutored.

Above all, in an educational setting, teachers would respond favorably to principals who acknowledge their extraordinary efforts in supporting their students' achievement. Important practices of instructional leadership include routinely visiting classrooms and recognizing teachers for their exceptional work (Ahmad, 2018; Sukarmin & Sin, 2022). In this context, Ali (2017) emphasized the significance of rewards in raising the professionalism of the teaching staff and

reducing ineffective practices. However, the majority of middle school principals in Banja Woreda, Ethiopia, failed to adequately honor and acknowledge the contributions of their teachers. The teaching staff would be motivated to work more cheerfully and efficiently with this reward. According to Dilekci and Limon (2022), incentive systems are frequently utilized as compensation for specific accomplishments, which are typically realized by principals by recognizing teachers for completing a given task or goal.

Conclusion

The result of the study leads to the conclusion that the middle school principals in Banja Woreda, Ethiopia, failed to carry out their duties as instructional leaders in an effective manner. The findings of the study indicated that middle school principals' existing practice of instructional leadership was occasionally less than ideal. The middle school principals were not practicing instructional leadership to frame and communicate school goals, supervise and evaluate instruction, coordinate the curriculum, monitor student progress, protect instructional time, maintain high visibility, provide incentives for teachers and learning, and promote professional development. This conclusion suggests that efforts need to enhance principals' instructional leadership practice at middle schools in Banja Woreda.

Recommendations

Based on the study's findings, the following recommendations were made:

- The study findings indicate that middle school principals in Banja Woreda do not consistently practice key instructional leadership functions, such as framing and communicating school goals, supervising instruction, coordinating the curriculum, monitoring student progress, and promoting professional development. To address these gaps, the Woreda Education Office should regularly organize training and workshops focused on enhancing principals' instructional leadership skills, and establish a system to evaluate principals' effectiveness in fulfilling their instructional leadership responsibilities, ensuring accountability and improved student academic outcomes. These measures will support the transformation of principals into effective instructional leaders, ultimately enhancing educational quality.

- To enhance instructional leadership, principals should focus on key areas such as framing and communicating school goals, supervising instruction, coordinating the curriculum, monitoring student progress, protecting instructional time, maintaining visibility, and fostering teacher motivation and professional development. Strengthening these practices will improve overall school performance and student outcomes.

- Future studies should include a larger sample of middle school teachers, vice principals, principals, and cluster supervisors to provide a more comprehensive analysis of the relationship between principals' instructional leadership practices and academic achievement. Expanding the participant pool will enhance the reliability of findings and contribute valuable insights for practitioners and researchers studying instructional leadership in Ethiopian middle schools.

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Conflict of interest

I, Legesse Tessema Getahun, hereby declare that I do not have any personal conflict of interest that may arise from my application and submission of this manuscript. I understand that my manuscript may be returned to me if found out that there is conflict of interest at anytime.

By this declaration, I also commit to adhering strictly to the ethical standards and guidelines prescribed by Injibara Journal of Social Science and Business (IJSSB) for professional conduct. I understand that this declaration is a reaffirmation of my ongoing obligation to maintain the highest standards of integrity and transparency in all my professional undertakings.

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