THE EFFECTS OF PRINCIPALS' INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES ON THE PROMOTION OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES IN OSHANA REGION, NAMIBIA

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A B S T R A C T

The aim of the study was to explore the effects of principals' instructional strategies on the promotion of professional learning communities. Data was collected through interview schedule, field notes and open-ended questionnaire. Criterion purposeful sampling technique was used to select ten principals and ten teachers from ten schools. Data analysis was conducted using typological analysis, content analysis and Atlas.ti. The findings have established effects of principals' instructional strategies on the promotion of professional learning communities, the dominant instructional strategies used and the association between the instructional strategies and the existing professional learning communities at the schools. Principals need to study and learn the application of instructional strategies, apply the strategies to optimise their success and enhance teaching and learning which result on positive student academic outcomes. This article concludes by suggesting two models for training program for professional development areas of both school principals and the schoolteachers respectively.

1. INTRODUCTION

Studies indicate that contemporary societies should learn how to respond immediately to crises in environment, the economy, in health as well as to the rapid socio-economic, demographic and technological developments on a global level. Education has been placed at the centre of this effort and teachers are at the forefront. Within this context, it is believed that educational administration promotes teachers' lifelong Professional Development (PD), the transformation of school units into Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) and the strengthening of principals' capacity for pedagogical leadership (Alexopoulos & Dimas, 2023). Studies indicate that schools function to moderate degree as PLCs while school principals have moderately developed

the appropriate leadership practices which would support teachers' PD through PLCs. Studies highlight the importance of collaborative, supportive and pedagogical role of principals, the need for reforms and for establishing support for learning networks in schools (Lomos, 2017). In this context, there is a need to investigate the extent to which efforts schools in Oshana Region to become learning communities that support teachers' lifelong PD have been successful, and how teachers, as recipients of these changes, perceive them.

School leaders seeking to improve student academic performance are often inundated with well-intentioned programs and support that promise to produce rapid results. Determining the best structures, supports, and approaches to advance student learning outcomes while fostering an improved school culture and developing

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teachers' instructional expertise can be a substantial undertaking (Novkovic, 2022). Various researchers have noted that the use of PLCs offers effective, learning-focused process that can foster improvement in teaching/learning (Postholm, 2018). The use of PLCs in schools offers a powerful infrastructure where teachers can engage in constructive dialogue, reflect on, improve instruction, and learn how to become more effective in the classroom to improve student learning. In addition, research indicates that there is a strong correlation between the use of effective PLCs in schools and improved teacher learning and instruction and student learning (Alexopoulos & Dimas, 2023).

Education is at the centre of common interest due to its important role in preparing young people for a world that will be characterised by extraordinary, critical events and permanent changes. The importance given to education is so strong that the education system was perceived as a key facilitator of economic development (Novkovic, 2022). This recognition of education as a means of preparing for impending changes refutes arguments that the modern school cannot meet the current demands of labour market in a modern society (Caplan, 2018). In addition, education draws the attention of scholars and politicians to the role of the teacher. This role is recognised as pivotal for the quality of the pedagogical and teaching work of the school unit. It is related to the cultivation of soft skills needed by society and market (Ferreira et al., 2023), more importantly, communication, cooperation and trust within the group.

The task of preparing society and teachers, through education, for world of constant, sudden and sometimes extreme changes cannot be taken easy. It is characterised as difficult primarily due to cultural and social differences from country to country and from person to person which make coexistence of an individualistic and collective spirit extremely difficult (Triandis, 2018). These difficulties arise from the need to manage series of many multidimensional issues like control of student leakage, adaptation of technological and environmental challenges to teaching/learning, management of behavioural problems, inclusion, and leadership in the classroom.

Lifelong PD, that is how teachers learn to learn and how they apply their knowledge in practice to support students' learning (Postholm, 2018), is perhaps the most significant way that schools and teachers can respond to the multidimensional nature of the modern school and the demands placed upon it. This is because teachers' PD has been linked to an improvement in the quality of teaching/learning provided in schools, the responsiveness of the school unit to local specificities, the needs of students, the quality of school life, and success of educational reforms (Hofman et al., 2015). Therefore, interest of scholars, researchers, community in this field has remained strong for almost two decades (Sancar et al., 2021). From the primary teachers' perspective, PD is considered crucial because it is the means to enhance their pedagogical content knowledge, science content knowledge and the use of the new

curriculum materials and to respond to challenges to teachers pertaining to classroom life (Postholm, 2018).

Today, the school is recognised as a key location (physical and conceptual) for teachers' lifelong PD (Patton et al., 2015). The reason is that each school constitutes a unique space dedicated to pedagogical, teaching work in which teachers make key and important individual and collective decisions. It is the place that gives teachers stimuli to revise attitudes and perceptions, strengthen skills and update knowledge with which they can manage problems encountered during their school teaching career. The model of teachers' PD based on in-house education that takes place once or twice during their career with the aim of retraining and updating knowledge, skills of the teaching community, mainly in formal context, based on binary relationship between trainee and trainer is no longer useful. The dominant model is Continuous Professional Development (CPD) of teachers in workplace through PLCs that is through cohesive group of educators that focus on collective knowledge and occurs within ethic of interpersonal caring that permeates the life of teachers, students and school leaders (Postholm, 2018).

Despite differences in how the term is used and the need for a comprehensive understanding of its elements (see Moosa et al., 2022), most scholars seem to agree that PLC refers to a group of teachers who share and critically question their practice to improve school, the school's vision, values, and perceptions for both students and society. This kind of questioning should happen in ongoing, reflective, collaborative, inclusive ways which take professional growth and orientation on learning into account. It is pointed out (Christensen, 2024) that applying PLCs for PD of teachers is not easy due to the large number of competing theoretical perspectives applied to it, which make its definition and measurement a hard task.
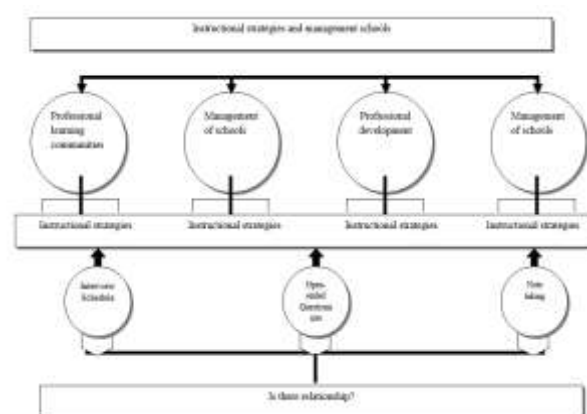
Figure 1. Conceptual framework for instructional strategies and management of schools
Author's conceptualisation

Therefore, many schools across the world have not succeeded in its implementation (Lomos, 2017; Pang & Wang, 2016). But this may also be due to the absence of a particular factor or combination of factors that characterise school PLC (Hofman et al., 2015) such as

the inherent characteristics of teachers (their difficulty to join, function in groups and their attitudes towards them), the management system of each educational system, lack of supporting structures, logistical infrastructure, and the absence of pedagogical leadership. Taking above into consideration, the current study is aimed at gathering and analysing data on the instructional strategies of the principals, examines principals' practices that contribute to the teachers' PD and the schools functioning as a PLCs. Figure 1 sums up conceptual framework for the instructional strategies and management of schools.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Professional learning communities and management of schools

The implementation of effective PLCs depends on engaging teachers in ongoing conversations about teaching and learning that are directly related to their daily work with students. For this to happen, school leaders must provide support and feedback and cultivate an atmosphere of trust, and the conditions in which PLCs can thrive. Only when teachers reflect on their instructional practice, consider the effect instruction has on students, and implement insights gained from a meeting to improve their teaching performance, can this process be called PLCs (Brown et al., 2021).

PLCs, a name given to teachers' collaborative professional learning, as they are often called have become overused that the term's meaning is often lost (Chediaki et al., 2018). This study would define it as continuous, an evolutionary process of acquiring experiences and revising knowledge and skills with a research-based disposition that enhances and enriches school life (Alexopoulos & Dimas, 2023). It takes into account first the needs of the system and, secondly, the specific needs of teachers as shaped by their daily life at school. In contrast, the non-formal category is not characterised by strict framework. It includes topics that are close to the teachers' interests and is open, both in terms of its goals and its audience. Its providers tend to be from outside the formal education system and participation in them is optional. The informal is recognised as a form of PD that includes everything teachers acquire on daily basis through their interaction with the school environment, dominant educational ideology, school culture and their independent, personal research.

Despite the strengths and benefits of each of the categories, today the emphasis seems to be more on non-formal, informal forms featuring innovative alternative approaches, teachers' educational work/their research, a sense of collectively, collegial and cooperative mood in the school. These formats include peer-to-peer discussions, school networks, distance learning, blended learning models using ICT, research activities, peer learning, self-directed learning, mentoring, and in-school learning through PLCs (He et al., 2024).

PLCs maintain a dominant position in the literature related to PD of teachers (Feldman, 2020). This is because they are fully responsive to the cooperative operating contexts of modern school and they contribute to the management of current educational issues which improve the quality of education offered. They provide continuous support to the teacher, they are linked to teaching practices, they enable the immediate application of new knowledge in the field, they are easily aligned with the priorities and goals of the school, they strengthen organisation's commitment to school unit and self-confidence of teachers, and they save time and material resources. Teachers working in PLCs operate more cooperatively, autonomously, are more student-centred; acquire motivation for further effort and self-improvement (He et al., 2024).

PLCs provide enabling environment which encourage PD, collaboration and innovation among teachers. Research suggests positive school reform occurs when teachers participate in authentic PLCs, with improved student achievement as by-product (He et al., 2024). Supportive principals are essential to successful development of PLCs in schools, and student achievement is affected by school leadership. Positive experiences with PLCs can promote teacher leadership both within and beyond the classroom, highlighting the importance of providing professional development opportunities, collaboration, activities through PLCs. PLCs meets the demands for management model which can empower teachers, promote well-being, provide lifelong learning opportunities and improve quality of students' learning. However, power dynamics, and hierarchies in schools may negatively affect teacher leadership (Lee et al., 2023).

PLCs has become a widely recognised strategy for school development and student achievement whereby principals play an active role in the progression of schools as PLCs. Shared leadership, collective learning, vision, and supportive conditions influence effective development of PLCs (High, 2020). Positive leadership behaviour can have a positive leadership effect (Antinluoma et al., 2021). Principals should possess skills that help to set expectations for collaborative work but the problem was that little was known about collaboration-building behaviour principals use that promote effective collaboration between members of the school community.

Studies indicate that there is a need to investigate the intricate relationship between principals' instructional strategies and their practices and the effects that they have on teacher PD, school culture, and educational environment. These instructional strategies should be ongoing process which encourages trust, collaboration, and adaptability in rapidly evolving educational landscape (Tahir & Fatima, 2023). Leadership development initiatives which focus on enhancing principals instructional strategies create conditions conducive to effective teacher PD.

2.2 Professional development and management of schools

The national external school evaluation annual report of 2007 revealed that there is an urgent need for the training program in all aspects of school management (Ministry of Education, 2007). The report revealed that principals should not use yesterday's tools for today's job and expect to remain in schools tomorrow. Ministerial policies should also encompass attention to professional development opportunities and greater participation of the teachers in decision making via social dialogue. Effective professional preparedness of principals enhances successful management and leadership in schools. However, studies indicate that there is little professional preparation and development for school principals (Mwila et al., 2022).

The traditional in-service discourse advocates for a highly centralised approach that is top-down and may not be empowering of principals as all is left in the hands of external experts (Nyambe, 2012). This discourse is underpinned by a simplistic view of professional development as merely an exercise of dispensing technical skills to participants by external experts. By comparison, the bottom-up approaches accord principals their long denied voice in the identification, planning, analysing and addressing of their professional development needs.

The drive to have properly trained principals is a very commendable action because haphazardly recruit principals would destroy the school. By comparison, people do not become accountants just because they can work with ledger books; neither does holding stethoscope and the wearing of white jacket make a doctor. As the old Latin proverb says *cuculs non facit mancum.* The gown does not make monk. Principals should receive professional development training before teachers in new teaching methods, supervision and school management to enable them to become instructional leaders in schools. Studies indicate that there is a necessity for the professional development needs of principals to be analysed and categorised into professional development areas including knowledge and skills, attitudes, values, actions and behaviour (Mushaandja 2010). Professional development needs are as sensitive to time as they are to place as the knowledge and skills of principal change with time the way principals manage their schools should also change. Technical aspect of competence is neither the sole nor the most important dimension of professional development needs (Nyambe, 2012).

Values are broad inclination to give preference to certain state of affairs which involve feelings and emotions that are regarded as good or bad (Mushaandja, 2010). By comparison, relationship is characterised by positive or negative attitude between parties. The former is characterised by trust, respect, admiration and great regard for other party. The parties believe in each other, have tacit understanding not to betray each other and may even become custodians of each other's secrets and belongings. The opposite is true where negative attitudes exist between parties.

Attitudes and values are important aspects in PD of principals. Attitudes determine performance whereas values, morals and ethics are important aspects of educational management, the heart of educational management. There is little argument about whether values and attitudes should form part of the development program for principals, but the contentious issue is what values and/or attributes should be inculcated in principals and how (Ministry of Education, 2007)? Knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values are of little use if principals unable to influence student academic performance (Nyambe, 2012).

In principals' PD, action is considered as more important than knowledge (Nyambe, 2012), the most complex, most worrisome and often the most exhilarating. It is not difficult to know but difficult to act. While action and knowledge are inseparable as knowledge is direction for action and the action effort of knowledge and that knowledge is the beginning of action and action completion of knowledge. There is an association and correspondence between knowledge and action (Moosa et al. 2024).

The efficacy of PD designed for principals in meeting their needs and their ability to translate content of PD to knowledge and skills is vital. Designing principals' PD that is on-going, job-embedded connected to school improvement goal on learning, teaching and continued leadership behaviour is commendable. To have better schools, principals should be empowered to harness them with skills that would also filter through the entire school (Doering, 2023).

PD is a universally needed process as poor performing schools need it to improve practice while excellent performing schools need it to sustain/improve good practices. However, identifying, analysing and defining professional development needs is not an easy exercise. Asking workshop participants to write down their expectations of workshop and requesting participants to fill out evaluation forms after workshop do not provide sufficient information (Mwila et al. 2022). While they give indications of what their professional development needs are they may not be able to define or articulate their needs.

As in the case of a medical doctor diagnosing patients' disease, instructors of principals training, in consultation with principals, should identify, analyse and define the professional development needs of principals (Mushaandja, 2010). More often than not, inappropriate analysis results in inappropriate definition of the problem at hand and inappropriate professional training is offered. School management team should meet regularly to identify their development needs, classify these needs in appropriate development areas, use appropriate development strategies to learn, practice what they have learned, monitor their practice and evaluate their performance in relation to teaching and learning (Mwila et al. 2022). This current discourse shift is consistent with international trends in professional development as seen in the literature (Doering, 2023). The role of principals in

teachers' professional development in a system of plant and plough is vital.

2.3 Professional learning communities and professional development

Capacity building refers to organisational, technical, abilities, and relationship values that enable individuals to carry functions and achieve their development objectives over time (Chaka, 2018) whereas CPD is a systematic maintenance, development and broadening of teachers' knowledge, skills, and attitudes to ensure continuing competence as professional throughout their career (Mestry 2017a). By contrast, quality teacher is a teacher who knows his/her subject matter, understands how students learn and what it takes to reach them (Mestry 2017b). This quality can be measured in terms of input like qualifications and characteristics, processes such as practices and output such as student academic achievement. CPD is a means of achieving capacity building and improving teacher quality. Teacher continual advancement and renewal is important and quality education makes sustainable CPD easier to achieve. The quality of education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers. It is time to pay attention to quality.

CPD provides teachers with opportunities to develop skills and competences through teamwork, interact in online system, supporting them to enrich their teaching practices and strengthen their self-efficacy. In an era of globalisation and digitisation, educational system is constantly subject to changes like utilisation of new technological means, the need to expand the school community beyond the narrow boundaries of the school and the need for CPD for all teachers (Sasaki, 2019).

Postmodern education is characterised by democratic principles, flexibility and a tendency to involve individuals and social groups in the educational process. Due to these important changes, teachers should adapt to these new conditions. Adaptation of teachers involves not only teaching practices, but also affects the way and the means that teachers will use to be informed, to develop new knowledge and skills and finally to develop themselves at a personal and professional level.

In this context, beyond traditional methods of teacher PD, online training models enable teachers to interact with colleagues, exchange ideas and keep up-to-date. Training methods are now more active, each step towards owns development is an experience not just new information (Pateraki, 2018). In a world of instant communication and knowledge explosion, information has become less an end in itself than a means to an end. The learning of facts is becoming less important than the ability to effectively access information.

Studies indicate that the problem in education is not that teachers are not ready to teach, neither is it that learners are not ready to learn but the problem is how to make principals want to lead; teachers want to teach effectively and to the best of their ability. The problem is that of negative attitude (Engelen 2018). Attitude problem imply

lack of responsibility, commitment, urgency to take decisions and solve problems immediately.

Attitudes and values are critical in PD of teachers. By comparison, values, morals and ethics are ingredient of leadership, administration (Mgandi et al., 2017), the heart of leadership. Decision carries moral value than technical implication, distinguishes administrator from technocrat. Each administrative decision carries restructuring of human life. Thus, administration is a resolution of moral dilemmas.
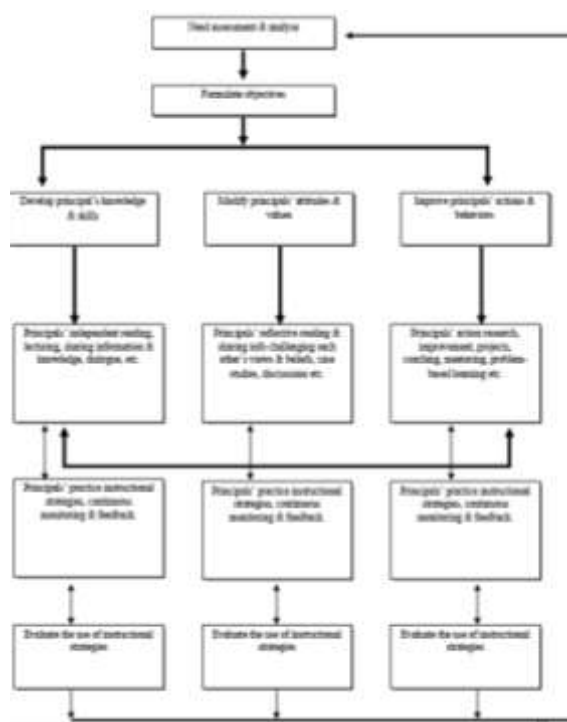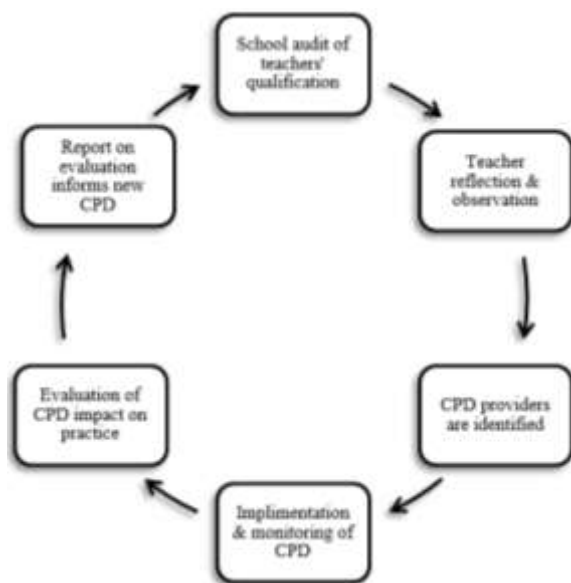

Figure 2. Model of Continuous Professional Development for School Principals
Adapted from Mushaandja 2010

Principals' actions are influenced by assumptive world. In any given situation, principals create an understanding of what happen and how they fit into it by turning to their knowledge of similar circumstances, personal attitudes and values which cause them to regard certain elements of the situation as important than the others. This determines what decision they take and what they do. These personal beliefs might be different from, conflict with the public's values and expectations and principals need to learn how to strike the balance between the two. If principals' practices are a reflection of an understanding of circumstance and their perceptions of what their job involves, it follows that they can only improve what they are doing if they are clear about that understanding and prepare to put it under review, which is described as double loop learning (Mushaandja 2010). It calls for learning by reflecting not only on what principals do but also considering reasons why they do what they do, and allowing for possibility that those assumptions about their practices may need to be revised (Lambaino et al., 2016).

CPD should not only focus on provision, improvement of management, leadership, knowledge and skills but should also focus on attitude and value modification and put into practice what was learned (Mestry 2017b). Effective CPD exercise should include need assessment in order to identify professional development needs, categorise these needs into professional training areas (Karim et al., 2017). Figure 2 sums up a model of CPD for school principals.

Effectiveness of this model is determined by the extent to which it can prepare school principals to improve teaching/learning in schools. Professional development exercise should be evaluated to determine the extent to which it has achieved its area of development and to serve as a source of area of development for future CPD. Monitoring mechanisms should be built into CPD system to continually assess impact and progress made. By contrast, the goal of CPD for teachers is to build capacity by enhancing their professionalism and competence to improve both their quality and students' learning. To determine whether this goal is achieved, CPD should be continually evaluated. This calls for quality assurance mechanisms that need to be built into each program. Report on evaluation of CPD is important in shaping CPD policy and future CPD plans. They are important to those providing funding for CPD thus encouraging further support. Figure 3 below sums up a model of CPD for schoolteachers.

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Figure 3. Model of Continuous Professional Development for Schoolteachers
Adapted from Mwila et a; 2022

Teachers should regularly monitor how well students are doing and give guidance and assistance were necessary. Schoolteacher who does not carry out his/her monitoring duties is not in charge (Nyambe, 2012).

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research design
This was a qualitative case study, which emanates from constructivist worldview, was conducted to explore effects of principals' instructional strategies on the promotion of professional learning communities. The term constructivism as applied to learning theory is an interpretivist notion, it represents untruth about ways individual learn (Ling & Ling, 2017). This study was qualitative case study, meaning the kind of information that was collected was presented in words expressed as feelings, perceptions and attitudes of the participants that narrated account about the study in detail. This study utilised case study to provide insight into role participants played in the study. Information collections provide in-depth information and variety of perspectives, describe many facets and clarify perceptions in problem being explored. Case study emphasises understanding through careful documentation, thoughtful analysis of participants' words, actions and records (Meyer & Willis, 2016) based on experiences of researchers and selected participants to explore problem in interpretive view and investigation using case study research design.

Studies point out that case study allows researchers to focus on unit of study known as bounded system for in-depth exploration of actual case (Creswell, 2014). Case study was, therefore, used to gain in-depth knowledge and understanding of the issues, problems and challenges associated with the effects of principals' instructional strategies on the promotion of professional learning communities in Oshana Region in Namibia.

The effects of principals' instructional strategies on the promotion of professional learning communities cannot be studied outside of its natural setting with its focus on this contemporary issue. The issue is that control or manipulation of subjects, namely the effects of principals' instructional strategies on the promotion of professional learning communities is not possible. The theoretical knowledge on the issue under investigation is limited and not yet mature. Case study method was thus suitable method for this study. Study without qualitative component cannot be used as basis to recommend actions to teachers nor to inform policy, contribution that research into the effects of principals' instructional strategies on the promotion of professional learning communities often seeks to deduce.

3.2 Participants
Using Oshana directorate of education's latest statistics of 2023, the population of ten principals and ten teachers from ten schools in junior/senior primary, junior and senior secondary schools in Oshana Region was utilised. Based on Oshana regional directorate, many schools are poorly managed (Shikongeni & Nakafingo 2016), which may lead to many dysfunctional schools.

3.3 Sampling
Criterion purposeful sampling was used, based on the researcher exposure to, engagement of ten principals and

ten teachers in ten schools in Oshana Region. According to Oshana directorate of education's latest statistics of 2023, there are five Circuits in Oshana Region; they are Eheke, Oluno, Ompundja, Onamutai and Oshakati circuits. The researcher selected two principals and two teachers per Circuit.

3.4 Data collection
Data was collected through the interview schedule, field notes and open-ended questionnaire. Individual in-depth interviews were conducted using the interview schedule in which the same interview schedule was used to find participants' views on the effects of principals' instructional strategies on promotion of professional learning communities in Oshana Region in Namibia.

3.5 Procedure
After all the required permission were sought and granted, all instruments were pilot tested and re-adjusted. Participants were interviewed individually because they come from different schools and every participant is different.

3, 6 Data analysis
Typological analysis and content analysis were used to analyse qualitative data from interviews. As recommended by Leedy and Ormrod (2015), the researcher also used a computer software programme namely Atlas.ti to accommodate multiple, possibly overlapping coding of data.

3.7 Ethical considerations
After all the required permission were sought and granted, anonymity and confidentiality were obtained when reporting on the utterances and narratives of the participants, whose names were not mentioned. Instead, pseudonyms were opted for to protect their identity. Ethical measures, which include informed consent, guarding against manipulating participants were applied during data collection and reporting processes.

4. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

This section presents findings on effects of principals' instructional strategies on the promotion of the professional learning communities in Oshana Region in Namibia. The section comprises views of ten principals and ten teachers that were collected from interview schedule, notes taken during fieldwork and open-ended questionnaire. Some participant responses were summarised and presented in descriptive forms while others were reported verbatim and presented in italics. Participants' responses were then compared with the empirical literature in the field. Although combining the two sections could have compromised key findings, it might be a good practice to collapse two sections to allow the researcher to talk to data presented, improve clarity and make it easier for the reader, hence combining of the two in this study

4.1 Instructional strategies and professional learning communities
The theme presented in this section is derived from the thematically analysed data obtained from the interviews, open-ended questionnaires and field notes, with selected ten principals and ten teachers from ten schools in Oshana Region. The theme is on effects of principals' instructional strategies on the promotion of professional learning communities in Oshana Region. It is worth-noting that the theme relates to the manner in which the relationship between the principals' instructional strategies and measures of promotion of professional learning communities could be constructed and developed to find association between the two. In this study, the researcher has to determine whether principals and teachers understand effects of principals' instructional strategies on the promotion of professional learning communities. This was done to respond to the question: What effects do the principals' instructional strategies have on the promotion of professional learning communities in Oshana Region? The responses of the principals showed that principals should use instructional strategies to create working environment for teachers. For example, one principal at senior secondary phase said:
"It is about creating an enabling environment for teachers."
Various researchers have noted that the use of PLCs offers an effective, learning-focused process that can foster improvement in teaching and learning (Lee et al., 2023).
Nevertheless, another principal at senior primary phase, when asked on effects of instructional strategies, said:
"It helps teachers to continuously keep learning."
A school management model which focuses on the teacher professional development aligns with the demands of the 21st century and school management regarding the maintenance of PLCs is vital (Chediaki et al., 2018).
On the other hand, teachers said that principals' instructional strategies could boost teaching and learning at school. One teacher at junior secondary phase was sceptical about the process said:
"It helps teachers to cope with the contemporary dynamics in teaching, learning and assessment practices in an educational setting."
Co-teaching practices have been identified as an effective form of collaborative work-embedded professional learning which is related to the core principles of PLCs (Antinluoma et al., 2021).

4.2 Instructional strategies used by principals in Oshana Region
In order to determine instructional strategies used by the principals, the researcher asked the question: What instructional strategies do principals use in Oshana Region? The responses of the principals indicated that majority of principals did not use instructional strategies. One principal at senior secondary phase said:
"There have been few principals who did that."

Studies indicate that schools function to moderate degree as PLCs while school principals have moderately developed the leadership practices which would support teachers' PD through PLCs (Alexopoulos & Dimas, 2023).

Equally important, teachers indicated that it was not the principals' responsibilities. For example, one teacher at junior primary phase said:

"The responsibilities lie outside the principals' agential powers and properties."

Another teacher at junior secondary phase, when asked on the prevailing instructional strategies, said:

"The instructional strategies are more in the hands of subject advisors."

One teacher at senior primary phase said:

"However, subject advisors are raised concern of lack of funds to run the workshops training for teachers."

The use of professional learning communities in schools offers a powerful infrastructure where teachers can engage in constructive dialogue, reflect on and improve instruction, and learn how to become more effective in the classroom to improve student learning. In addition, research indicates there is a strong correlation between the use of effective PLCs in schools and improved teacher learning and instruction and student teaching (Antinluoma et al., 2021) and this is clearly depicted in Figure 2 and Figure 3 respectively. That said, it should be noted that the concern in this study was on effects of principals' instructional strategies on promotion of the professional learning communities not vise-versa (cf. Methodology Section). However, possible interpretation for this finding could be that this arrangement can be attributed to the change landscape and the implication of ministerial mission and vision statement within educational setting (Ministry of Education, 2007). As a result of the top-down cascades of ministerial mission and vision, many principals might have difficulty to change the status quo.

4.3 Existing instructional strategies which promote professional learning communities

In order to determine existing instructional strategies which promote the professional learning communities researcher asked the question: What existing instructional strategies which promote the professional learning communities? Principals made concrete suggestions about how current practices could be improved. One principal at junior primary phase said:

"These include subjects' workshops and facilitation of teachers' study leaves."

Another principal at senior secondary phase was sceptical about the process said:

"The latter does not benefit schools in the end."

On the other hand, teachers indicated that it depend on reaction from staff members. One teacher at junior primary phase said:

"Once a teacher gets a higher qualification they hardly stay in the classroom."

Yet another teacher at senior secondary phase said:

"They will search for better opportunities outside the classroom."

Studies found that while some teachers enjoy teaching and learning process, others are frustrated because of insufficient preparation and/or training workshops, unclear procedures, coupled with poor academic literacy skills and lack of commitment shown by some students (Benjamin, 2023). A possible interpretation for this finding could be the fact that their participation in these training workshops is criterion either for salary incentive or for their selection in better positions outside the teaching profession. The clarion call is that teachers should be given enough training workshops. Coupled with this, is that there is a need to review training workshops guidelines, benchmarked them against best practices in this area and this is clearly depicted in Figure 2 and Figure 3 respectively.

Establishing the existing professional learning communities which associate with instructional strategies was one of the critical aspects which were investigated in this study. One principal at junior primary phase expressed this aspect thus said:

"The PLCs that foster collaborative learning and continuous improvement is vital."

Studies indicate that principal instructional leadership play a vital role on school culture and organisational environment (Chaka, 2018). Principal instructional leadership practices positively correlate with welcoming environments and culture of continuous improvement (Tahir & Fatima, 2023).

Another principal at senior primary phase said:

"There are also subjects' workshops and leadership workshops for heads of departments and Principals."

From the primary teachers' perspective, PD is considered crucial because it is the means to enhance their pedagogical content knowledge, science content knowledge and the use of the new curriculum materials and to respond to challenges pertaining to classroom life (Postholm, 2018).

On the other hand, the teachers in the study indicated that it depend on situation at school. One teacher at junior primary phase expressed this aspect thus said:

"This does not necessary falls within the lines of principals."

There are four key functions to manage schools effectively such as management of curriculum, management of organisational structures, management of financial and physical resources, and management of human resources. In managing human resources, principals should be competent in human resource provision; human relations appraisal and the development of human resources (Cornell, 2015).

Another teacher at senior primary phase said:

"However, principal as instructional leaders ought to take this matter on."

Studies revealed the associations between the instructional leadership and teacher professional development and growth (He et al., 2024) and this is clearly depicted in Figure 1.

5. MAJOR FINDINGS AND OUTCOMES

This article investigated the effects of principals' instructional strategies on the promotion of the professional learning communities in Oshana Region in Namibia. The main question answered by the study was: What effects do the principals' instructional strategies have on the promotion of professional learning communities in Oshana Region? The prominent issues that emanated from the findings were that there is direct link between principals' instructional strategies and the promotion of PLCs which have direct effects on working environment, teaching, learning and assessment practices in an educational setting. The principal issue encompassing these findings is that this link is attributed to how principals use instructional strategies to create enabling environment for teachers to continue learning, thus confirming similar findings of earlier research study such as Benjamin (2023). Another principal issue noteworthy from study is that there are subjects' workshops, facilitation of teachers' study leaves and leadership workshops for heads of departments and Principals. This finding is consistent with those of previous studies that assessed the usefulness of management model which can empower teachers, promote well-being, provide lifelong learning opportunities and improve quality of students' learning (High, 2020; Lee et al., 2023). Findings point that the PLCs that foster collaborative learning and continuous improvement is vital. This finding correlates with earlier study by Ferreira et al. (2023) on the importance of communication, cooperation and trust within the group. Most obvious findings emerge from study is that this direct link between principals' instructional strategies and the promotion of the professional learning communities is also attributed to factors that determine choice of instructional strategies as clearly depicted in Figures 1, 2 and 3.

6. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the analysis of findings, and the design used in this study, it can be concluded that principals' instructional strategies has an effect on PLCs that affect the schools, principals and teachers' performance which result in positive or negative academic student outcomes. It was evident from this study that principals as instructional leaders should take PLCs head-on.

7. SUGESSIONS

In view of the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made: Firstly, principals should use instructional strategies to promote PLCs, improve and enhance their performance, the school, learner performance and allowing teachers to take responsibility for their work. Secondly, principals should use instructional strategies and PLCs to strike the balance between the two and to avoid manipulation of one particular construct against other one. This in turn will help them to strike the balance between authority of the teachers' expertise of curriculum and positional authority of the principals. Lastly, the study recommends an urgent need for principals to study and learn the application of instructional strategies, apply them to optimise their success and enhance teaching and learning which result on student academic outcomes. This can be done using Figure 2 and Figure.3.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE WORKS

While the current study offers valuable insights, the study could expand on how these findings compare with other regions, countries facing similar situation. Such comparisons might provide a broader perspective on effectiveness of instructional strategies at different educational setting. However, these efforts were beyond the scope of this study. Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made for future research: Firstly, the future research can be taken to establish correlation between principals' instructional strategies and the promotion of PLCs since this was beyond the scope of this study. Lastly, the two models suggested in Figure 2 and Figure.3 in this study provides platform for exploration pertaining to PLCs that have not yet been explored. Research on these characteristics holds potential benefits for educators who work in various management positions.

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