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12215 PRINCIPAL LEADERSHIP AND SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT: EXPERIENCES FROM SOUTH AFRICAN SCHOOL CONTEXTS.

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Abstract

Principal leadership issues are becoming increasingly debated and explored in international and comparative contexts due to the changing context of educational provision. In the South African education context and the world over, there is unprecedented interest in how school leadership influences the performance of learners. Teaching and learning environments in schools have become more complex and diverse, where effective principalship is required to achieve high standards of educational success. The quality of leadership in schools is the cornerstone for driving transformational change that is required in schools. In this article, we argue that principals need to adopt leadership styles that would enhance the culture of teaching and learning. It was the goal of our qualitative study to explore the role of school principals in improving learning outcomes. Six schools in the North-West province, South Africa, were purposively selected to participate in this study. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with principals and teachers from the selected schools. We found that principals use several leadership styles to enhance the culture of teaching and learning in their schools. The study concluded that leadership in schools plays a significant role in improving learner performance.

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Introduction:-

Education is widely held to be crucial for the survival and success of individuals and countries in the emerging global environment. South Africa has placed education at the centre of their economic activities, and education has been at the centre of many African policy agendas. Many schools in South Africa are underperforming, as indicated by the Matric results. Most of the schools are located in challenging contexts, including poverty, unemployment, and experiencing different social and economic challenges (Shava & Heystek, 2016). According to the Department of Basic Education (2015) in South Africa, only 2 631 schools out of 6 772 schools achieved a pass rate higher than 80% in the 2015 Matric school-leaving examination, while 1 018 schools' pass rate were below 40%. In South Africa, many schools consistently struggle to exceed 40% pass rate. School leadership, to a great extent, is regarded as a key factor in accounting for the differences in the success with which schools foster the learning of their students. While other factors within the school also contribute to school turnaround, effective leadership is the principal catalyst (McCarley, Peters, & Decman, 2016). The context of school leadership has been rapidly changing and this is reflected particularly in educational reforms and school restructuring movements – not only in Africa, but the world over. Currently, school leadership has been gaining growing attention from educational policymakers as research evidence indicates that the principal's role is crucial for improving students' academic achievement (Hoy, 2012; Moos, Jahannsson, & Day, 2011). Comparable agreement is evident about the contribution of leadership to the implementation of virtually all initiatives aimed at improving student learning and the quality of schools

(Cosner, 2011; Hallinger, 2013a; Printy, 2008; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008). Leadership in schools is seen as an essential element in sustaining educational development (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Leithwood & Mascal, 2008). Differentiation in leadership behaviour seems to be essential for optimal employee behaviour. For instance, leadership communication and giving instruction to teachers and learners have important consequences for school innovations (Cosner, 2011; Bush & Glover, 2003; Heystek & Minnaar, 2015). In addition, various types of leadership styles have been distinguished in previous studies (see Aryee, Walumbwa, & Zhou, 2012). In this study, we opted for transformational leadership, because this type of leadership is explicitly directed at the developmental capacity and personal commitment of employees in an organisation as well as its goal of increasing productivity (Bass & Avolio, 1994). Principals who are transformational leaders can be able to identify and articulate a school vision, motivating others through supporting a culture of intellectual stimulation, and providing support and development to individual staff members (Robinson, Lloyd & Rowe, 2008)

Transformational leadership is defined as a style of leadership that transforms employees to raise above their self-interest by altering their morale, ideas, interests and values, motivating them to perform better than initially expected (Bass, 1985; Yukl, 1998). It refers to a set of behaviours of leaders that should lead to higher motivation. Different researchers have reported consistent findings regarding the link between transformational leadership and employee behaviour (Pieterse, Van Knippenberg, & Schippers, 2010). Thus, school leadership has been the focus of intense scrutiny in recent years as researchers try to define not only the qualities or style of effective leadership, but the impact of leadership on the operations of schools, and even on student achievement. The variables associated with improved student achievement, and more generally, with improved school performance, have been a focus of research for many years. The assumption is that the presence of effective school leadership, positive school climate, and positive attitudes of teachers can, directly or indirectly, influence school performance and student achievement (Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Kruger, Witziers, & Slegers, 2007; Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2004; Witziers, Bosker, & Kruger, 2003). However, we argue that, whilst the equation of effective or principal leadership and improved school performance appears to be relatively simple and straightforward in theory, it is complex and unpredictable in practice. According to Cotton (2003) and Harris (2004), whilst it is evident that a fundamental connection between the principal's leadership style and school performance in terms of student achievement exists, research on this relationship begins and ends with that concept. Harris (2004) adds that although the leadership field is replete with often largely descriptive studies of effective leadership, these studies have rarely tracked or explored, with sufficient rigour, the relationship between leadership and school performance. This research holds the possibility of making several contributions to the global literature on principal leadership and school improvement. Thus, the present study seeks to obtain the opinions of principals and teachers working in South African schools as to the influence of transformational leadership by principals and the effects this leadership style has on learner performance.

Literature review and conceptual framework: the influence of transformational leadership on learner achievement.

Transformational leadership has its origins in James McGregor Burns's 1978 publication in which he analysed the ability of some leaders, across many types of organisations, to engage with staff in ways that inspired them to new levels of energy, commitment, and moral purpose (Burns, 1978). It was argued that this energy and commitment to a common vision transformed the organisation by developing its capacity to work collaboratively to overcome challenges and reach ambitious goals. The literature on transformational leadership sees the quality of school leadership as a key to continued organisational learning and improvement (Datnow, 2005; Hargreaves & Fink, 2006). Of 33 studies reviewed by Leithwood, Jantza & Mascal (2002), about half were judged to show that transformational leadership had a direct influence on academic or social student outcomes. According to Kouzes (2009, p. 100), transformational leadership refers to "leadership skills in those principals who can pioneer" the school to a new level at the hinge of school development. Transformational leadership entails moving people to a common vision by building trust and empowerment (Datnow, 2005). Transformational leaders are motivating, influential, and proactive. Laying emphasis on transformational leadership, we expect principals could create conditions and inspire all school members with their highest level of leadership for school improvement at the very time, finally make school get out of a mess, and realise transition in difficulties (Yang, 2014). They optimise people's development and innovation and convince them to strive for higher levels of achievement (Avolio & Bass, 2004). Transformational leaders form a relationship of mutual stimulation and elevation that converts followers into leaders (Burns, 1978). As articulated by Bass (1985), four main factors characterise the behaviour of transformational leaders: individual consideration, intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation, and idealised influence. Individual consideration denotes giving personal attention to members who seem neglected. Intellectual

stimulation focuses on enabling members to think of old problems in new ways. Inspirational motivation is typified by communicating high performance expectations. On the other hand, idealised influence emphasises modelling behaviour through exemplary personal achievement, character, and conduct. This model of leadership is most often associated with vision, setting directions, restructuring and realigning the organisation, developing staff and curriculum, and involvement with the external community (Hallinger, 2003).

In research on transformational leadership within school organisations, three dimensions of this type of leadership have been identified: vision development, individual consideration, and intellectual stimulation (Geijsel, Slegers, & Stoel, 2009). Individual consideration has to be understood from the perspective that a transformative leader acknowledges the individual aspirations, actions, beliefs and values, rather than favouring the individual. Such an acknowledgement implies that the transformative leader is giving autonomy and support to the individual. On the other hand, Aryee et al. (2012) argue that empirical research on transformational leadership in relation to individual behaviour has some contradictory results, and this can be explained by the perception of employees regarding leadership behaviour. Vermeulen, Van Acker, Kreijns, and Van Buuren (2015) argue that transformational leaders motivate their employees by articulating a vision and mission in terms of the values these leaders represent. Visionary and inspiring communication structures give meaning to the actions of employees (Gronn, 2006). In other words, by communicating the vision and purpose of the organisation or organisational unit, employees will develop a more common frame of reference (Cosner, 2011). Good leadership in schools can certainly contribute to school improvement by motivating and coordinating teaching activities (Shava & Ndebele, 2016). Principals need to create conditions to stimulate the morale of the school members with their higher level of leadership, making different members at different times feel motivated, respected, trusted, and gradually reaching a consensus with the overall objectives of the school (Yang, 2014). Thus, transformational leadership is a critical quality of principals and building shared vision is the core of transformational leadership development. Robinson et al., (2008) added the dimension of involving teachers in decision-making, promoting and participating in teacher professionalisation as a more important leadership dimension. Marks and Printy (2003) argued in favour of using transformational leadership in education leadership because it is focused on improving student outcomes in the daily routine. According to Bass (1985), transformational leaders are more likely to be proactive than reactive in their thinking, and more creative, novel, and innovative in their ideas. While some studies have suggested that transformational leadership practices primarily emphasise relationships, it is clear from this body of literature that effective transformational leaders also place an emphasis upon promoting better student outcomes through the use of pedagogical or instructional leadership, also sometimes referred to as leading for learning (Hallinger, 2011). Although there has been little research in South Africa into the role of the principal in establishing a school-wide climate that enables students to improve their learning, research by Benda (2000), though, conducted in a developed country, supports the understanding that principals using transformational leadership models is the most potent factor in determining school climate.

Transformational leadership is currently an extremely popular image of ideal practices in schools (Hallinger, 2003). It has been argued that transformational leadership is the ideal leadership style for principals of schools considering substantial reform, since change management is the strength of transformational leaders and has been associated with positive outcomes, such as improvements in school environment as well as teacher and staff relations. An important aspect of understanding the transformational leadership model is that it does not assume that a principal can independently create conditions that are necessary for effective teaching and learning, but that leadership is shared among teachers and does not rely solely on the principal.

South African educational planners and policymakers should exert more efforts to strengthen transformational leadership in schools if school improvement and student attainment is to be achieved. Furthermore, researchers and practitioners should not only be investigating the general or collective impact of leadership styles, but should also be identifying specific leadership attitudes and practices that have stronger impacts on school performance, student achievement, and teacher satisfaction, and commitment to work.

Research questions

The study answered the following key questions:

1. How do principals use transformational leadership to improve school performance?
2. What is the contribution of transformational leadership in enhancing the culture of teaching and learning?
3. How do principals contribute to effective teaching in the schools?
4. How are decisions made in the schools?
5. In what ways, if at all, does the principal assist teachers to enhance the performance of learners?

Research methodology:-

The current study employed a qualitative research design with the researchers as instruments (Creswell, 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 1990). According to Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2011), qualitative research provides an in-depth, intricate and detailed understanding of meanings, non-observable as well as observable actions, attitudes, intentions and behaviours. It gives a voice to participants and probes issues that lie beneath the surface of presenting behaviours and actions. Cohen et al. (2011) argue that the social and educational world is a disorganised place full of contradictions, richness, complexity, connectedness, conjunctions and disjunctions. It is multi-layered and not easily susceptible to the atomization process inherent in much numerical research. Qualitative studies allow participants' experiences to be understood in context. In a qualitative study, like the this study on principal leadership, meaning arises from social situations and is handled through interpretive processes. The principal sources of data were one hour-long face-to-face interviews conducted by the researchers (Patton, 1990). Qualitative data were collected from teachers and principals selected through purposive sampling techniques. The qualitative research design was used to capture the richness of the lived experiences of principals and teachers from six schools in one district in the North-West province in South Africa. The broad aim of the study was to understand the principals' role in improving school performance. A qualitative approach emphasises the qualities of entities, processes and meanings that are not experimentally examined or measured in quantity, amount or frequency (Creswell, 2013). Researchers suggest the need for adopting qualitative studies in order to capture the thinking and actions of participants within their context. The six schools were identified with the assistance of the district area manager. Purposive sampling was a valid form of sampling, with a phenomenological research design, where the researchers were assisted to identify information-rich cases to explore the perceived roles school principals play to improve school performance. We gave the district area manager the following definition to assist in getting the right schools: six schools that have improved their performance as a result of the efforts and influence of the principal. We followed Bernard's (2002) lead, and the idea was to get people to open up and let them express themselves in their own terms at their own pace. We selected a semi-structured interview approach, including an interview protocol composed of a list of questions designed to get the interviewees to talk openly and candidly about the role played by principals in improving school performance. Our focus was on the perceptions of principals and teachers and what they consider to be the role of principalship in enhancing school improvement. While elements of instructional leadership were necessary in this study, our main focus was on how transformational leadership models were adopted in schools to enhance the achievement of school goals. We were apparently interested in the use of transformational leadership in improving school performance. We considered principals and teachers as information-rich cases for our study.

Population and sample selection

The study population consisted of all schools in one district which has a total of 364 schools. From this population of schools, six schools were purposefully identified for the purpose of our study. The six schools were identified by the district management on the basis that there was evidence of improvement in end-of-year examinations. The schools were coded as School A to F so as to protect the schools' identity. Participants were coded as PI to P6 for principals, whilst teachers were referred to as T1S1 and T2S1, which means the first teacher in the first school and second teacher in the same school, and so on. All schools that were shortlisted for the interviews agreed to participate in the study. Interviews were conducted on site at schools in August 2017. Sampling of schools and participants were linked to the aims of the study. Qualitative sampling, which was adopted for the study, is simply the purposive selection of a sample of participants who can best help in understanding the theme that is being explored (Creswell, 2015). In purposive sampling, researchers often handpick the cases to be included in the sample on the basis of their judgment of their typicality or possession of the particular characteristics being sought. Purposive sampling involves a trade-off: it provides greater depth to the study than probability sampling. A purposive sample should be chosen for a specific purpose, and in this case, principals and teachers were chosen as they are information-rich cases drawn from the schools. A purposive sample is also used in order to access knowledgeable people who have in-depth knowledge about particular issues. The schools sampled for the study were located in different geographical parts of the district and were identified as follows:

1. School A: A secondary school located in a township, with 1 452 learners, 44 teachers, the principal had 20 years' experience and held a B.Ed Honours degree in Education Management.
2. School B: A secondary school located in a township with 1 475 learners, 40 teachers, the principal served 14 years as principal and held a Master's degree in Public Administration.
3. School C: A primary school located in a township, with 1 037 learners, 30 teachers, and principal had five years' experience as principal and held a Master's degree in Education Management.

4. School D: A secondary school located in the township, with 526 learners, 19 teachers, and the principal had more than 10 experience and held a Bachelor of Arts Honours degree in Literature.
5. School E: A Combined farm school with 618 learners, 20 teachers, and the principal had seven years' experience and held a B.Ed Honours degree in Education Management.
6. School F: A primary school with 1 023 learners, 30 teachers, and the principal had 10 years' experience and held a B.Ed Honours degree in Education Management.

It is acknowledged that in this type of study, generalisation of findings to a national picture is difficult to make. Furthermore, purposive sampling of six schools where improved performance was evident meant that these schools were by definition not representative of the population as many that were performing well were excluded. However, generalisation to a national picture can be done with caution.

Data collection

The strong desire to collect reliable data that reflected the perspectives of the research participants resulted in the choice of unstructured interviews with principals and teachers. Creswell (2013) shows that interviews present the researcher the means to get hold of the experiences, knowledge, thought and feelings of participants.

The qualitative researcher can use a variety of techniques for gathering information. There is no single prescription for which data collection instruments to use; rather the issue is fitness for a purpose, and in this case, interview guides were used to collect data from principals and teachers. Less structured approaches to collect qualitative data enable specific, unique and idiographic accounts to be given in which the research is highly sensitive to the specific situation, the specific participants, and the relationships between the researcher and the participants. All interviews were semi-structured to provide a basis for comparison across research sites, whilst also allowing sufficient flexibility for context-based variables. Contact interview sessions ensured direct contact with participants and improved the researchers' understanding of how transformational leadership in schools influence learner achievement. The interviews were useful for gathering facts from participants, accessing beliefs about facts, identifying feelings and motives, commenting on standards of actions, exploring present or previous behaviour, and eliciting reasons and explanations. Semi-structured interviewing was used as the primary data collection method because it best captures experiences of participants in their own words and settings (Charmaz, 2006; Creswell, 2007; Silverman, 2014). In this study, the semi-structured interviews were designed to allow interviewees to give their views and experiences of school performance and its relationship with leadership. We decided to limit the number of interview questions to five to allow participants to remain focused on the key research questions. The study involved the researchers spending more than an hour with each participant to increase credibility through prolonged engagement. We took descriptive field notes using a voice recorder, detailing information on events and activities, and also took reflective field notes that highlighted our personal thoughts related to emerging insights about transformational leadership and the promotion of a culture of teaching and learning. We collected numerous types of data so as to locate the cases within their contextual nuances (Creswell, 2013).

Establishing trustworthiness and credibility

In seeking trustworthiness, the researcher should be concerned with activities that increase the probability that credible findings will be produced (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To ensure trustworthiness of the study, we used Creswell's (2013) norms of trustworthiness, namely prolonged engagement which is the investment of sufficient time to achieve a certain purpose, learning more from participants and testing for misinformation introduced by distortions of the self or the participants, and building trust. Halfway through the process of conducting the interviews, we also ensured trustworthiness where we introduced some member checks by requesting an external coach from the University of KwaZulu-Natal who is an expert in education leadership to review our manuscripts for accuracy and clarification on the sequence of events. Triangulation as a means of establishing trustworthiness and credibility was also implemented – multiple data sources of principals and teachers were used. We also interviewed another participant from the education district offices in order to ensure credibility of the data from the schools. This was done after the analysis of our data from the schools. The data from this participant was consistent with the responses we got from the schools, particularly on the use of transformational leadership models in improving teaching and learning in schools. We also presented our findings using thick descriptions with the element of voice by providing verbatim quotes from participants. These multiple efforts ensured trustworthiness and credibility of our study.

Ethical consideration

Much qualitative research necessitates obtaining the consent and cooperation of participants who assist in investigations and of significant others in the institutions or organisations providing the data. Whereas some cultures may not be strict about informed consent, others have strict protocols for informed consent. This being the case, consent to conduct our study was first obtained from the Ethics Committee of the North-West University, Potchefstroom Campus. We then went on to obtain permission to conduct the study from the North-West Superintendent General for the Department of Education and the Director of Education for Dr Kenneth Kaunda District. This was followed by seeking consent from the six principals and teachers who participated in the study. All the principals and teachers agreed to participate in the study after we had explained the goal of the study to them. The ethical guidelines, as indicated by McMillan (2012), were explained to the participants before and during our interviews. These guidelines included confidentiality and anonymity. Our study participants were made aware that they were at liberty to withdraw from the study at any time without consequences of any kind. We encouraged our participants to be free and express their opinions, since the study was not to investigate or seek for information that would tarnish the image of the schools or the teachers. Given these ethical considerations, participation in this study was voluntary, with all participants enthusiastic to share their views.

Data Analysis:-

Qualitative data analysis involves organising, accounting for and explaining the data, making sense of data in terms of the participants' definitions of the situation, noting patterns, themes, and categories' regularities. It is heavy on interpretation, and one should note that there are frequently multiple interpretations to be made of qualitative data. Qualitative analysis of our data was conducted using a comparative method consistent with grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006). Coding the data and constantly comparing and categorising emerging themes helped to make sense of the voluminous data we gathered from participants (Malakolunthu, McBeath, Swaffield, 2014). Once our interviews were completed and transcribed, the coding of our data commenced. The analysis involved intensive reading of each transcript and the identification of key issues that connected the participants' accounts of their experiences in schools. These efforts ensured and supported the ongoing data analysis as we worked to analyse the data by themes into spreadsheet files, and also carefully looked for data that would discount any emerging themes. As such, we explored the interplay between an individual's environment and an individual's thoughts relating to transformational leadership in schools.

Results:-

The main focus of the study was to establish the transformational leadership roles of principals to enhance learning achievement. The opinions of participants and conclusions drawn from each of the questions are presented and analysed in depth below.

How principals use transformational leadership to enhance the culture of teaching and learning.

Our first question sought to establish how principals use their transformational leadership roles to enhance the culture of teaching and learning. Apparently, the concept of a culture of teaching and learning is widely used in the context of South African schools, especially in the South African Standards of principals of 2016 which emphasises that principals as instructional leaders should promote a culture of achievement for all learners by communicating and implementing a common vision and mission that is shared by all stakeholders. The culture of teaching and learning refers to the attitudes of all role players towards teaching and learning and the promotion of quality teaching and learning processes in schools. We define a culture of teaching and learning as a learning imperative and obligation to prioritise, attend to, and to always act on matters relating specifically to enhancing the chances of all learners to fully engage themselves in learning activities, where learning is a priority for all. Comments made by all the six principals showed that principals play a significant role by creating a culture of teaching and learning in their schools. The principal of School B noted that he has a direct responsibility for creating a conducive climate for effective teaching and learning. This was confirmed by one of the teachers (T2S2), who explained that:

Our school is able to sustain improvement because we are motivated. Our teachers work hard, there is a positive school climate and we all have a positive attitude towards our work. Our principal seeks to ensure that there is collaborative work to overcome challenges and reach our goals. There is organisational learning and improvement supported by our principal and the school Senior Management Team (SMT).

Principals' transformational leadership towards enhancing effective teaching and learning

Findings from the study participants suggest that principals as transformational leaders enhance effective teaching and learning through:

1. promoting professional development among teachers;
2. regularly communicating with teachers, parents and learners;
3. frequently supervising teachers and coaching where it was necessary;
4. creating conditions where teachers felt involved in the general running of the school;
5. monitoring learner progress;
6. emphasising high standards for members;
7. regularly conducting accountability sessions with teachers;
8. arranging class visits followed by regular feedback.

The findings from the study indicate that principals play a crucial role in enhancing effective teaching and learning in their schools. These findings are in line with Harris (2004) who argue that school principals exercise an indirect but powerful influence on the effectiveness of the school and in enhancing the achievement of learners. From our interviews, it was clear that principals make a significant contribution to school achievement by building internal capacities for teacher development. A teacher from one of the schools (T2S2) had this to say about the significant role played by principals:

Our principal works hard to transform teachers and as such tries to rise the self- interest of our teachers by motivating us to perform better than initially expected.

Teachers interviewed indicated that their principals play a crucial role in:

1. developing a vision for the school;
2. considering individuals and their specific needs;
3. ensuring that all teachers are rewarded and motivated to achieve their goals; and
4. ensuring that all teachers in the school assume both management and pedagogical responsibilities and roles.

Participants in this study acknowledged the importance of distributed leadership as it enhanced learner achievement. This is in line with Aryee et al. (2012) who argued that transformational leaders motivate their employees by articulating a vision and mission in terms of values these leaders represent. All participants, especially teachers, indicated that principals communicate the vision and mission of the organisation or organisational unit.

Decision-making processes in the schools

Participants interviewed in this study emphasised that decision-making in their schools was participative, where teachers had some input on major decisions made in the school. One of the teachers noted that:

School improvement and development means involving teachers in decision-making. The school idea does not belong to the principal, but to all the school members. If we do not agree with an idea, it is impossible to convert idea into school action. Different members have different backgrounds and experiences, and this helps to develop a school wide positive attitude towards teaching and learning. We assume both management and pedagogical responsibilities (T1S2).

This was supported by (P3) who remarked that:

Here we are trying to follow a democratic, participative decision-making by involving our members of staff to take part in making decisions. Our teachers have solutions to most problems we face, some of them have been in positions of leadership such that we consider their opinions.

Frequent citations from principals noted that decision-making in schools was participative, as shown in this quotation:

The secret of school improvement and success is involving teachers in making decisions so that decisions are not sabotaged at the implementation stage (T2S3).

Most specifically, the study established that principals on regular occasions consult with their teachers and frequently engage with them in discussing curricula and some issues relating to learner behaviour. It was clear from the results of the interviews that the only way to achieve large-scale development and learner achievement was to invest in collective decision-making with teachers. These findings resonate with the transformational style of leadership, which according to Sayadi (2016), is people-oriented, aims to achieve cooperation, build trust within the team, and foster cooperation to develop common goals and values and a common vision for the future. Participation of teachers in decision-making natures them to implement innovative ideas, which make decisions more likely to be accepted and implemented because they reflect and serve the interest of the community of practice that serve to put them into action.

Discussions:

Principal leadership and learner achievement

The findings from our study suggest that school principals are under considerable pressure to demonstrate their contribution of their work to school improvement, which has resulted in the creation of a wide range of literature which addresses leadership in the context of learner achievement. School principals along with their SMTs have a key role to play in setting direction (Hallinger, 2011) and creating a positive school culture, including the proactive school mindset, and supporting and enhancing staff motivation and commitment needed to foster improvement and promote success for schools. Whilst there is evidence that transformational leadership has been shown to be important for promoting learner achievement, it is also realised that a combination of leadership strategies can be most beneficial in ensuring learner achievement and most leadership effects operate indirectly to promote learner achievement by supporting and enhancing conditions for teaching and learning through direct impacts on teachers and their work. The key dimensions of successful leadership are identified as:

1. enhancing teaching and learning in the schools;
2. redesigning and enriching the curriculum;
3. enhancing teacher quality, including succession planning;
4. placing an emphasis on common values;
5. accountability sessions for teachers;
6. defining the vision, values and direction for the school;
7. improving conditions for teaching and learning to enhance learner achievement;
8. building relationships, including the school community;
9. strategically managing resources and the school environment;
10. developing partnerships beyond the school to encourage parental support for learning and establishing new learning opportunities; and
11. building the school as a professional learning community.

Findings from our interview questions point to the fact that principals are doing their best to make it through any given day, leading the diverse needs of the school community by building trust, commitment, interdependence, and empowering teachers. Principals created a school climate that improves the productivity of teachers, learners and parents, and this fostered school effectiveness.

Conclusion:-

Hallinger (2013a) reviewed over 40 empirical studies and concluded that principals exercised a measurable impact on school effectiveness and student achievement using transformational leadership strategies. Similarly, our study established that school leadership substantially increases student achievement: it indirectly influences students' outcomes and school culture. In the context of South African schools, leadership has direct effects on learning achievement by creating a culture of teaching and learning, and our study concluded that principal leadership using transformational leadership styles influenced learner achievement through the development of strong interpersonal relations and continuous accountability sessions conducted in the schools.

The empirical evidence presented in our study suggests that effective leadership in schools is necessary to create a culture of teaching and learning. We argued that transformational leadership has positive effects on the performance of teachers, which ultimately influences learner achievement. We conclude that school leaders, particularly principals, have a key role to play in setting direction and creating a positive school culture, including the proactive school mindset, and supporting and enhancing staff motivation and commitment needed to foster improvement and promote success for schools by improving conditions for teaching and learning. Transformational

leadership provides a best fit with notions of distributed leadership, which are inescapable in South African schools. Our study presented an overview of the growing body of international literature that examines the nature and purpose of school leadership and its relationships to school improvement. It has provided a particular focus on the links between leadership and school and classroom processes, in particular, examining how transformational leadership can enhance and support better teaching and learning and thus promote better outcomes for students. We argue that effective leadership is an important but not a sufficient condition for successful schools. Transformational leadership is a crucial quality of principals.

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