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Instructional Leadership Practices that Support Increased Student Achievement in Ghana's Rural Districts

ANTHONY KWAME GYAMERAH
Walden University

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Anthony Kwame Gyamerah

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Walden University
2021

Abstract

Instructional Leadership Practices The Support Increased Student Achievement in

Ghana's Rural Districts

by

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MA, St. John's University, Queens, New York, 2015

BA, University of Ghana, Legon, Accra, 2003,

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Education

Walden University

November 2021

Abstract

Quality education is significant to the development of a country, but not all countries fare satisfactory in this regard. In Ghana, the rural K-12 public schools have persistent lower academic performance than the urban schools, despite the interventions of governments since Ghana's independence. This study provides effective instructional leadership practices that support effective teaching and learning to enhance quality education in Ghana's rural areas to bridge the performance gap between the urban and rural schools. This qualitative exploratory case study explored the instructional leadership practices that support student achievement in Ghana's rural K-12 schools. The research questions investigated the instructional leadership practices administrators implement to support public K-12 schools in Ghana to enhance student achievement and the skills and abilities needed to implement them to improve student achievement. Hallinger and Murphy's instructional management model, which manages instructional programs and promotes a positive school learning climate, was the conceptual framework that guided the study. Semi-structured interviews of 12 principals, supervisors, and teachers from rural and urban school districts and document reviews provided data for the study. The thematic analysis of data confirmed that the role of educators and practical application of instructional leadership practices are vital for quality school and student performance. Rural K-12 public schools will benefit from this study by applying effective instructional leadership practices that support instructional strategies to enhance student achievement. This will help students advance to higher education to acquire knowledge to work in and compete in the global market to impact their community, state, and society positively.

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Dedication

Ad Maiorem Dei Gloriam

This dissertation is dedicated to the Yamfo-Gyamerah family, the Catholic Diocese of Goaso, and all children whose lives may be transformed through the application of this study.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

The relevance of education in the development and building of a nation can hardly be overemphasized. Quality education is significant to the transformation of every country as it facilitates the development of the human capacity to transform the natural resources to advance the quality living standard of the people. Underscoring the primary significance of education to society, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) acknowledged education to be a critical element of national development and global transformation advocating equitable and quality education for all (United Nations in Ghana, 2018; Westheimer, 2020).

The provision of quality education calls for the efficient and effective management of the available human and material resources in the sector. Educational leadership empowers excelling schools to thrive and troubled schools to transform. Education leadership is critical to student learning and teacher improvement (Cheung et al., 2018). Excellent principals and administrators build a school climate that ensures teachers' growth and student improvement and achievement by providing clear direction, developing teachers' abilities and aptitudes, and establishing high achievable expectations for both teachers and students. Therefore, effective school leadership, evaluation, and supervision of teaching and learning, which are essential components of education administration, are fundamental to impacting quality academic achievement (Ampofo et al., 2019).

Since independence in 1957, successive governments in Ghana have ensured quality education for Ghanaians by providing policies, resources, and infrastructure (Mpuangnan, 2020). The 1992 republican constitution of the Republic of Ghana makes it imperative for all children in Ghana to have equal access to quality universal basic education irrespective of their socio-economic and geographical background (The Constitution of the Republic of Ghana, 1992). This constitutional imperative is situated within the context of the Millennium Development Goals 2 and 3 to attain universal primary education and promote gender equality and empowerment of women. These goals were established to fight for the rights of disadvantaged children in the deprived areas of Ghana, regardless of gender and socio-economic status to complete basic primary schooling, which in Ghana has been extended to include K-12 school (Tamakloe, 2018; United Nations in Ghana, 2018).

Governments and education policymakers have endeavored to ensure equal access to quality universal basic education for all children and young adults in Ghana and a sustainable increase in students' enrollment. Despite these efforts by governments and education policymakers in Ghana coupled with improved remuneration of teachers, there is a sharp difference in the quality student performance for the schools in the cities and the rural districts in Ghana (Danquah, 2017; Opoku et al., 2020). The urban schools perform better in every department of the education system than the rural and deprived schools.

Hence, there is a need for greater understanding of effective instructional leadership practices that support teaching instructions and student learning. Effective

instructional leadership practices may ensure a congenial school climate to foster effective teaching to increase quality education in the rural areas in Ghana to bridge the performance gap between the urban and rural schools. The systematic and accurate leadership practices of effective school leaders that support excellent supervision and monitoring of schools, curriculum and assessments, and instructional practices significantly contribute to the quality of educational performance in schools (Butakor & Dziwornu, 2018; Gyamerah, 2019).

Besides, instructional leadership practices, consistent fidelity monitoring and supervising of educational policies and programs with feedbacks, school climate, and the classroom instructions contribute to the effective ways of improving and sustaining quality teaching and learning in schools. Therefore, by focusing on the poor academic achievement in rural and deprived K-12 schools in Ghana, I explored instructional leadership practices that support increased student achievement in Ghana's rural districts and how lack of these practices can hinder and derail quality school and students' achievement in the deprived communities in Ghana and beyond (Gyamerah, 2019). In this study, it was critical to research these subtopics: instructional leadership perspective, history of educational reforms in Ghana, achievement trends of students in Ghana, historical perspective of school leadership in Ghana for the last 20 years, the impact of instructional leadership on student academic achievement, and the dimensions of instructional leadership model.

Knowledge about these concepts connecting to the instructional leadership practices such as monitoring student progress, communicating the school's goals,

protecting instructional time, coordinating the curriculum supervising and evaluating instruction, framing the school's goals, maintaining high visibility, promoting professional development, and providing incentives for teachers and learning offered a broader perspective of quality education to provide some direction to the topic of the study. I explored how these concepts connect to the instructional practices in the rural districts to transform the rural schools in the country and promote quality student academic achievement. This picture set the tone for the research into the instructional leadership practices that support increased student achievement in Ghana's rural districts. However, there is a dearth of literature on instructional leadership practices supporting increased student achievement in public K-12 schools in Ghana's rural districts.

Chapter 2 of the study concerns a literature review detailing current empirical evidence of instructional leadership practices that support student achievement, instructional leadership model with its dimensions and functions, and how these leadership practices of school leaders impact student academic achievement. Other discussions include the history of educational reforms in Ghana, achievement trends of students in Ghana, an overview of instructional leadership, and historical perspective of school leadership in Ghana for the last 20 years.

In Chapter 3 of the study, qualitative research with an exploratory case study design is constructed to explore the instructional leadership practices that administrators provide to public K-12 schools to support student achievement in Ghana's rural districts. The research questions unravel the relevant instructional leadership practices that can support high student achievement in Ghana's rural districts. Chapter 4 looks at the

results, and Chapter 5 deals with the discussion, implications, recommendations, limitations, and conclusions of the study.

Background of the Study

Akram et al. (2018) in a quantitative study sampled two thousand male and female teachers from Lahore, Okara districts in Pakistan to analyze teachers' perceptions of instructional practices of their headteachers and school climate at the secondary school level. The study's findings revealed a positive correlation between instructional leadership practices and school climate but no significant differences between teachers' perceptions of instructional leadership practices and school climate based on teacher school location. The article shed light on relevant instructional leadership practices that can influence academic achievement in rural Ghana.

In quantitative descriptive research, Butakor and Dziwornu (2018) adopted a random and convenience sampling method to select 60 teachers from K-12 schools to study teachers' perceived causes of students' poor performance in math in some K-12 schools in the Ningo Prampram District in Accra, Ghana. The authors revealed a lack of supervision and evaluation of teachers by headteachers and circuit supervisors, larger classes, and inadequate teaching and learning materials in school as factors responsible for students' low academic performance in mathematics in the district. The article provided insights into other factors that call for effective instructional leadership to impact rural students' quality performance.

In a qualitative study, Campbell et al. (2019), employing in-depth interviews, sampled six school principals to explore principals' perceptions of effective instructional

leadership and its effectiveness of the school leaders and teaching and learning in schools. The findings indicated that principals perceived themselves more as instructional facilitators than instructional leaders had a weak perception of what instructional leadership is about and relied mostly on prior experience. The article contributed to informing the choice of a conceptual framework for this study to analyze effective instructional leadership practices that might improve students' outcomes in rural school settings.

In a qualitative study, du Plessis and Mestry (2019) selected eight teachers and four principals with 4 years or more teaching experience from different primary and secondary schools in the White River district through purposeful sampling. The authors explored why teachers did not wish to teach at schools in South Africa's rural areas and establish what could be done to improve this situation. Findings revealed that most rural schools lacked essential infrastructure coupled with administrative problems with their attendant consequences on effective teaching and learning and, ultimately, on quality performance. The article was relevant, as these challenges may have implications for implementing quality instructional leadership on effective teaching and learning for quality students' academic achievements in rural schools.

Fakunle and Ale (2018), focusing on the school climate as a determinant of students' academic performance in public secondary schools in a quantitative descriptive survey, selected 1,455 teachers from 20 secondary schools through stratified random sampling technique to investigate the relationship between school climate and students' performance in public secondary schools in Ekiti State, Nigeria. The authors found a

significant difference between students' academic achievements in schools having an open climate and performing better than the academic performance of students in schools with a controlled climate. The article provided a useful perspective on how instructional leaders influence school climate to impact academic achievements.

Focused on the perceptions of teachers about principals' instructional leadership roles and practices, Ghavifekr et al. (2019) examined the correlation between the teachers' gender and their perception of the instructional leadership roles and practices by interviewing 105 teachers from five primary schools in Alor Gajah in Malaysia. The authors revealed that teachers have a moderate level understanding of how principals' roles as defining the mission of school's managing instructional programs, ensuring a positive school culture, and promoting a positive school climate relate to instructional leadership. The article helped this study to explore how rural school teachers and principals perceive the functions of instructional leaders and how to coordinate these functions to improve students' performance.

Nekongo-Nielsen and Ngololo (2020), using qualitative inquiry with multiple case studies, interviewed 10 principals, two each from five schools in the remotest districts to explore principals' experiences in the implementation of the English Language Proficiency Program in Namibia. The findings of the study were that principals had a significant influence on teacher learning and ensured the successful implementation of a ministerial program while their leadership skills influenced how teachers received instruction and created a conducive learning environment. This article's findings were

relevant to my topic as they provided insight into how significant the influence of principals' leadership is on teaching and learning in rural schools.

Problem Statement

The problem this study was designed to address was the persistent low academic performance of the K-12 public schools in rural districts compared to urban school districts in Ghana. This issue has been a concern for many stakeholders of education as there continues to be a persistent low performance among the K-12 rural schools (Abreh, 2017; Butakor & Dziwornu, 2018). World Bank (2019) reported that in Ghana, students in rural areas perform lower on the National Education Assessment (NEA) and Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) than those in urban areas, as the percent of students scoring non-zero scores in EGRA in English was 19.6% in rural areas compared to 39.5% in urban areas.

According to Adamba (2018) and Anlimachie (2019), the persistent lower performance of students from the rural schools in the state's Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) and the West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) suggest a challenge in rural schools. The challenges, according to literature (du Plessis, 2017; Hickey et al., 2019; Oyeromi et al., 2018; Wiczorek & Manard, 2018), are evaluating instruction, implementing change, improving teachers' instruction, executing research-based practices, and meeting of students' needs. But findings from the literature Derrington and Campbell (2018), Osuji and Etuketu (2019), and Wiczorek et al. (2018) revealed that effective instructional leadership practices can support an increase in quality education for higher performance of students.

However, there is a dearth of literature about instructional leadership practices that support increased student achievement in the rural districts in Ghana (Butakor & Dziwornu, 2018; Danquah, 2017; Sofo & Abonyi, 2018). This study might contribute to the literature of instructional leadership practices to be implemented in the public K-12 school that support student achievement in rural schools in Ghana.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the instructional leadership practices that administrators can apply in Ghana's rural K-12 public school districts that can support student achievement. The study ascertained what needed to change or be implemented more consistently to increase student achievement in rural K-12 schools in Ghana. To achieve this purpose, I sought the perspectives of circuit supervisors, administrators (principals), and teachers in both the rural districts and urban districts in the K-12 school in Ghana of the specific activities administrators (principals) can undertake to provide instructional leadership to improve teaching and learning. Effective instructional leadership practices and programs could potentially influence teachers' quality performance to increase student achievement (Butakor & Dziwornu, 2018; du Plessis, 2017). The relevance of this study resulted from the particular context within Ghana's aim of achieving equity and access to quality basic education (K-12; Tamakloe, 2018), enshrined in article 25 (1) of the Republican Constitution of Ghana (The Constitution of the Republic of Ghana, 1992).

Research Questions

This study explored the instructional leadership practices that can be applied in rural school districts, particularly in the public K-12 school in Ghana that can support increased student achievement. This objective emanated from addressing the persistent low academic performance of public schools rural Ghana compared to the urban areas. In order to realize the study's objective, the study was guided by the understated research questions, which also informed the choice of its approach. The research questions for this qualitative study were:

1. What instructional leadership practices do administrators implement to support public K-12 schools in Ghana to enhance student achievement?
2. What skills and abilities will administrators, supervisors, and teachers need to implement instructional practices that improve student achievement in the rural public K-12 schools in Ghana?

Conceptual Framework

Effective instructional leaders are a critical fundamental characteristic of an effective school because the quality of the programs of the school system depends largely on the quality of the skills of school principals (Sio & Ismail, 2019). The conceptual framework that grounded this study is Hallinger and Murphy's (1985) instructional management model. This instructional management model has defining the mission of the school, managing the instructional program, and promoting a positive school learning climate as its basic dimensions. The Hallinger and Murphy conceptual framework was appropriate for this study, as it provided a context for the research and offered the basis

for exploring the perspectives of teachers, principals, and supervisors of instructional leadership practices that enable school leaders to become effective instructional leaders. This conceptual framework as well provided the basis for analyzing effective instructional leadership practices, which are characterized by a school leader's efforts of developing a vision, mission, school culture, and climate that have a strong focus on instructional improvement to ensure quality academic achievements (Sindhvad et al., 2020).

Nature of the Study

This study was qualitative research with an exploratory case study design. Yin (2014) observed that an exploratory case study explores the presumed causal links that are too complex for a survey or experiment. An exploratory case study was conducted in which circuit supervisors, administrators, and teachers were asked about the instructional leadership practices currently being used to support academic achievement of K-12 schools in Ghana. This case study focused on the rural schools in Ghana that are bounded by the shared demographics of rural schools.

The study was located within the interpretive paradigm, which indicates that there are multiple truths since reality is subjective and constructed from the life experiences, background, and social interactions of a person (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). The interpretive epistemology paradigm and the qualitative approach enabled the study to produce data that were reflective of the varied experiences of the participants in their natural settings (Al Riyami, 2015; Creswell, 2007) as school administrators (principals) circuit supervisors, and teachers. Qualitative research, according to Bowen (2009) and

Blase and Blase (2000) explores behavior, attitude, and experience using multiple forms of data, like observation, interviews, and documents, rather than relying on a single data source. A qualitative approach was consistent with this study because the study was intended to explore the perspectives of teachers, principals, and circuit supervisors of instructional leadership practices that improve student achievement in rural school districts.

This qualitative exploratory case study was based on one-on-one, semi-structured interviews to allow for follow up questions, in-depth investigation, and free participant responses of the research participants. Another source of data was document review. The study reviewed the school improvement plans (SIP). SIPs, Escobar (2019) and Hunde and Desalegn (2019) revealed, are documents that detail educators' goals for improving educational practice and student outcomes, and initiatives for achieving those goals. Reviewing this document guided the study's analysis with the details of the strategies and resources that teachers received to support their teaching instructional practices to ascertain whether that support increased student achievement at the school.

The data helped determine what instructional leadership practices principals can offer to support student achievement in rural districts. The rural schools in Ghana continue to have low student achievement while the urban schools have higher student achievement, and with this study, I hoped to identify those instructional leadership practices used in the higher achieving urban schools and rural schools that can be applied to the rural schools in Ghana. The participants comprised one teacher, one principal, and one circuit supervisor in two public rural basic school districts in Ghana. Others were one

teacher, one principal, and one circuit supervisor in one public urban basic school and one teacher, one principal, and one circuit supervisor of a high school both rural and urban school districts. The study's participants were chosen through purposeful sampling (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

The participants were certified teachers with 2 years or more of continuous service in a rural or urban district as a teacher, principal, and circuit supervisor. The interview questions drew from participants' understanding of instructional leadership practices in their school districts. I transcribed and analyzed the data collected by coding to identify and assign codes to the main concepts which were further categorized and analyzed to identify themes and key issues (Saldaña, 2016).

Definitions

BECE: The Basic Education Certificate Examination is the main examination for junior high school, Grade 9 students in Ghana, which is the transition examination to senior high school (Grades 10-12) or technical and vocation institutes, which is conducted by The West African Examination Council under the supervision of The Ministry of Education, through the Ghana Education Service (GES; Education Sector Analysis, 2018).

EGMA: The Early Grade Math Assessment is a nationally conducted test by the NEA Unit of the GES to provide data about the current state of mathematics performance among a population of interest in Ghana (USAID, 2018).

EGRA: The Early Grade Reading Assessment is a nationally conducted test by the NEA Unit of the GES to provide data about the current state of reading performance among a population of interest (USAID, 2018).

ESA: This is a Ghana Education Sector Analysis which provides an objective assessment of the state of education in the country (Education Sector Analysis, 2018).

Instructional leadership: Instructional leadership concerns the instructional processes through which teachers, learners, and curriculum interact (Abdullah et al., 2019), an approach used by school principals to focus on teachers' behavior in certain activities, which indirectly impacts students' academic achievement, related to the implementation of promoting and improving teaching instructions and student learning innovation program (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000).

Instructional practices: Instructional practices of teachers are the specific effective instructional procedures necessary to achieve desired student outcomes for developmental programs and success, guiding teachers and students' interaction in the classroom (Ozdemir, 2019).

Quality education: Quality education is about the efficiency, effectiveness, and improvement of the school. It involves a school system that is academically and developmentally relevant that educates the students to grow in knowledge or skills to become active change agents and productive members of society since education goes beyond the mere content delivery system (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; Shi & Blau, 2020).

Rural schools: Rural schools, also referred to as high need schools, are deprived village schools located in a place isolated and separated from services and amenities inside or outside the metropolitan area and have less than 5000 people. They are characterized by geographic isolation, small population size, deprived resources and infrastructure, less qualified teachers and principals, and poor performance (Anlimachie, 2019).

School climate: School climate refers to the atmosphere of a learning environment and the quality of school life based on patterns of people's experiences of school life reflecting the norms, goals, values, teaching and learning practices, organizational structures, and interpersonal relationships among stakeholders. School climate combines beliefs, values, and attitudes of the relevant stakeholders such as administrators, teachers, students, non-teaching staff, and the community to create an atmosphere conducive for excellent education (Cohen et al., 2009).

Student achievement: Student achievement, a valued educational outcome, refers to the improvement of academic outcomes for all students to ensure student success in school and life by measuring the quantum of academic learning content that student learns in a determined period, bearing in mind the grade-level goals and standards or the international standards of instruction that teachers need to teach or accomplish (Hattie & Anderman, 2019).

WASSCE: The West African Secondary School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) is an examination taken by Grade 12 students as a transition requirement to higher education, which is conducted by The West African Examination Council under

the supervision of The Ministry of Education, through the GES (Education Sector Analysis, 2018).

NEA: The National Education Assessment is a curriculum-based measure of pupil competency in mathematics and English in Grade 4 and 6 (i.e., P4 and P6), carried out by the NEA Unit of the GES (USAID, 2018).

The 1992 Republican Constitution of Ghana: This is the supreme laws that govern the people of the Republic Ghana that defines the country's fundamental political principles and establish the structures, procedures, powers, and duties of the government, and delineate the fundamental rights and responsibilities of citizens (The Constitution of the Republic of Ghana, 1992).

Assumptions

The number one assumption for this study was the view that all teachers, principals, and circuit supervisors who participated in the study and interviewed had the knowledge and understanding of instructional leadership practices described in the study. But for the explanation of the concept of instructional leadership teachers, principals, and circuit supervisors might have responded differently to the instructional leadership practices that support instructions. Another assumption concerned the genuineness of the responses of the participants. The teachers, principals, and circuit supervisors were assumed to provide honest, reflective, and candid responses to the interview questions. Also, there was the assumption that as teachers, principals, and circuit supervisors, they had an appreciable knowledge of internet technology, particularly about how to use

teleconferencing, since the interviews were conducted virtually due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of this study comprised teachers, principals, and circuit supervisors of public K-12 schools (in Ghana Primary-KG-6, Junior High Schools-7-9 and Senior High Schools-10-12) in rural and urban districts and suburban higher performing districts in Ghana. The scope did not include the teachers, principals, and circuit supervisor of private schools. The focus of the study was on public K-12 schools in Ghana because public schools dominate in the rural communities in Ghana, and they are the most neglected in terms of basic relevant resources and infrastructure for quality performance. The interpretive nature of qualitative research and the limited number of the study's participants, coupled with the non-representative of the population, made the findings non-generalizable compared to the context used in quantitative research (Nassaji, 2020). Therefore, the study provided exhaustive details for users wanting to make transfer a possibility to do so.

Limitations

One of the study's limitations was missing objectivity, as there was a potential for participant and observer bias likely to compromise the validity of the collected data. This limitation entailed the general perception of teachers, principals, and circuit supervisors as their particular understanding of instructional leadership practices influenced their response to the interview questions. Also, a possible limitation was the human instrument resulting in biases that might impact the results of the study.

Another challenge was getting access to participants due to the current outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic that restricted and prevented meetings and close contacts of persons. In addition, there was a possible limitation of generalizing data analysis to teachers, principals, and circuit supervisors in all school districts in Ghana. A strategy to forestall biases and ensured dependability was ensuring that the study's process of analysis was in line with the accepted standards for a particular design as well as carefully documenting details of every research activity and the conclusions of the research or documenting every alteration that occurs as the research unfolds and evolves. This strategy could subsequently be reviewed to examine their accuracy and to what degree the conclusions were grounded in the data by an outside researcher.

There was also transparency in conducting the research, procedural decisions, and data collection and management details. The use of member checks was another way I evaluated this qualitative research method's trustworthiness. I again provided an account of descriptive data, detailing the context, setting, sample, interview procedure, topics, and excerpts from the interview guide and the document review to ensure transferability (Burkholder et al., 2016; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Due to COVID-19, virtual methods were considered to access participants for the study.

Significance of the Study

Significance to Practice

The study contributed to the literature to serve as guidelines for effective instructional leadership strategies in rural districts. Solution to instructional leadership challenges that confront rural districts in Ghana might result in quality education and

increased students' achievement. Because the rural schools in Ghana continue to have low student achievement while the urban schools have higher student achievement, I designed this study to identify those instructional leadership practices used in the higher achieving urban schools and rural schools that can be applied to rural schools in Ghana.

Significance to Theory

This study revealed the effective instructional leadership practices that support students' academic achievement. The findings and the recommendations of the study may serve to help educational planners and policymakers, particularly the rural education directorate, in their planning and training programs of instructional leadership practices that can support leadership strategies for improving rural K-12 schools. The study made an original contribution to the literature by helping to reveal the leadership practices that enable rural school leaders to become effective instructional leaders to influence quality students' achievements.

Significance to Social Change

According to Walden University (2016), social change involves the empowerment of society through the acquisition of knowledge, social awareness, and opportunities for personal growth. Therefore, active systematic instructional leadership practices to support instructional strategies, together with good infrastructure, adequate community support, and the right systems in place, may promote practical academic work to bring about quality education in these rural districts, an ingredient of positive social change. The study may bring about positive social change because when quality instructional leadership practices that support instructional practices are implemented, it may likely

influence quality student achievements to potentially impact people's lives in rural communities. When there are community transformation and an improvement in the human and social conditions, there may be human capital empowerment to transform the living standards of the rural communities positively.

Summary and Transition

Chapter 1 of the study focused on addressing the persistent low academic performance of the K-12 public schools in rural districts compared to urban school districts in Ghana. Given that quality education is significant to the transformation of every country as it facilitates the development of the human capacity to transform the natural resources to advance the quality living standard of the people, effective school leadership to facilitate the evaluation and supervision of teaching and learning are fundamental to impacting quality academic achievement (Ampofo et al., 2019). This qualitative exploratory case study explored the instructional leadership practices that administrators provide to support student achievement that can be applied in the rural districts in Ghana. A conceptual discussion of the dimensions of instructional leadership set the foundation and background for the study's literature review. The operational terms defined in the study illuminated some concepts that are significant to the study and the literature review.

The study highlighted the effective instructional leadership practices that support increased students' academic achievement. These practices may assist educational planners and policymakers, particularly the rural education directorate, in their planning and training programs of instructional leadership practices for improving rural K-12

schools. The study may occasion positive social change, since the implementation of quality instructional leadership practices may influence quality education in rural communities. When there is an improvement in human and social conditions, human capital will be empowered to transform the living standards of the rural communities positively.

Chapter 2 of the study is a literature review detailing current empirical evidence of instructional leadership practices that support student achievement, instructional leadership model with its three dimensions (Defining the School's Mission, Managing the instructional Program, and Promoting a Positive School-Learning Climate) and the 10 tasks (i.e., framing the school's goals, communicating the school's goals, coordinating the curriculum, supervising and evaluating instruction, monitoring student progress, protecting instructional time, providing incentives for teachers, providing incentives for learning, promoting professional development, and maintaining high visibility) constituting this instructional leadership model. It also describes how these leadership practices impact student academic achievement, the history of educational reforms in Ghana, achievement trends of students in Ghana, an overview of instructional leadership, and historical perspective of school leadership in Ghana for the last 20 years.

The third chapter focuses on the study's methodology, instrumentation, and data analysis. Chapter 3 of the study concerns the detailing of the method. Qualitative research with an exploratory case study design was constructed to explore the instructional leadership practices that administrators provide to support teacher instructional strategies of public K-12 schools to support student achievement in Ghana's rural districts. The

research questions ascertained the instructional leadership practices that support increased student achievement in rural districts in Ghana. Data collection process and analysis, instruments for data collection, and analysis provided and why these instruments are described in this chapter. Chapter 4 deals with the results, while Chapter 5 deals with the discussion, conclusions, and recommendations.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

This qualitative research with an exploratory case study design was constructed to explore the instructional leadership practices that administrators provide to support student achievement in Ghana's rural districts. The Hallinger and Murphy (1985) instructional management model was used to explore and analyze the instructional leadership practices that administrators provide to support instructional strategies of public K-12 schools to support student achievement in the rural.

Literature Search Strategy

The research for this literature review began with an overview of instructional leadership, specifically instructional leadership models, related to student achievement. The literature presented in this review was from databases such as the following from the EBSCO databases: Academic Search Premier, MasterFILE Premier, ERIC, PsycINFO, and PsycARTICLES. I commenced by researching past studies various databases and researching through the Walden library, looking at leadership frameworks that influence instructional leadership practices that enhance student achievement in rural schools. I also searched for references of articles and publications on the search themes.

The search terms of the study, among other things, included *instructional leadership*, *student academic achievement*, *rural schools*, *teachers' instructional practices*, and *principal instructional leadership*. Defining the mission of schools was another topic I researched for the study. I also searched for literature on managing the instructional program and promoting a positive school learning climate. I researched

different contributing themes such as the history of educational reforms in Ghana and achievement trends of students in Ghana using Bing and Google search engines. These general searches were narrowed to link to the specific search concerning instructional leadership practices that administrators can apply to support student academic achievement.

I again searched the literature on the impact of instructional leadership on student academic achievement and the instructional leadership practices that support student achievement. The instructional management models of Hallinger and Murphy (1985) consist of framing the school's goals, communicating the school's goals, coordinating the curriculum, supervising and evaluating instruction, monitoring student progress, and protecting instructional time. The rest include providing incentives for teachers, providing incentives for learning, promoting professional development, and maintaining high visibility. These instructional leadership practices form the conceptual framework that underpins this study. The literature review for this study focused thematically on instructional leadership practices, teachers' instructional practices, and student achievement as the basis for the study's research questions.

Conceptual Framework

Many instructional leadership conceptual models have emerged in the literature (Blasé & Blasé, 2000; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Taole, 2013) concerning instructional leadership that conceptualizes instructional leadership in relation to instructional supervision (observable behaviors) and teaching and learning. Other models also highlight and emphasize the concept's effectiveness when it is conceptualized to

encompass the scope of other leaders' roles and the principal's recognition of how social organizations operate. The Hallinger and Murphy model, which conceptualizes instructional leadership to comprise leadership functions and processes, underpinned this study, setting the stage for the possible consideration of ways through which instructional leadership varies in different contexts and how principals can practice effective instructional leadership to enhance effective schools and student achievements.

Hallinger and Murphy's (1985) instructional management model was appropriate for this study as it provided a context for the research and offers the basis for exploring the perspectives of teachers, principals, and circuit supervisors of instructional leadership practices that enable school leaders to become effective instructional leaders. This conceptual framework as well provided the basis for analyzing effective instructional leadership, which is characterized by a school leader's efforts of developing a vision, mission, school culture, and climate that have a strong focus on instructional improvement to ensure quality academic achievements (Sindhvad et al., 2020).

Literature Review

History of Educational Reforms in Ghana

In 1957, Ghana became the first sub-Saharan nation to gain independence from British colonial rule. Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, Ghana's first president had a conviction that it would take a population so educated to face and overcome the tremendous problems which challenge any country attempting to raise the standard of living in a tropical zone (McWilliam & Kwamena-Poh, 1975). Motivated by this conviction, successive

governments have detailed several educational policies and reforms to aim at providing Ghanaians a quality educational system for the human and economic transformation.

Dr. Kwame Nkrumah undertook the first educational reform in Ghana. The Accelerated Development Plan (ADP) of 1951, received its legal backing with the coming into force of the 1961 Education Act, which aimed to expand the educational system rapidly. Dr. Nkrumah also recognized the importance of teacher training colleges/schools to have well-trained teachers instruct in schools (Adu-Gyamfi et al., 2016; Aziabah, 2018).

The ADP, commented by McWilliam and Kwamena-Poh (1975), assisted in the expansion of secondary education as the central government forcefully built 15 new secondary schools in built-up localities. In Accra, Tarkwa, Kumasi, Sekondi-Takoradi, among others, also established technical institutions to boost the technical/vocational sector for effective productivity. The content of the ADP of the 1951 reform was to ensure the African identity by embarking on a system that trains teachers from the African perspective. Subjects introduced in this reform related to African cultural identity, values, and practices (Adu-Gyamfi et al., 2016; Aziabah, 2018).

The Education Act of 196, Adu-Gyamfi et al. (2016) and Aziabah (2018) explained, introduced the principle of free compulsory primary and middle school education with a structure comprised of 6 years of primary education, 4 years of middle school education, 5 years of secondary school, and 2 years of advanced-level education (6-4-5-2), making 17 years of pre-university education. This Education Act, McWilliam and Kwamena-Poh (1975) explained, outlined the principles and conditions of teaching

service and established a teachers' council responsible for ensuring high standards in the teaching profession. The reform also outlined the requirements for training and certification for teachers in Ghana. Feasibly, this was an attempt to train teachers with the curriculum based much on the indigenous culture and reduced influence of the western cultural realities in Ghanaians' minds with this initiative (Adu-Gyamfi et al., 2016; Aziabah, 2018).

In 1974, the National Liberation Council initiated a reform, which introduced the junior secondary school (JSS) and senior secondary school concept by the Dzobo Committee. In 1987, new education reforms began in Ghana, which saw a significant transformation in Ghana's educational system (Adu-Gyamfi et al., 2016). The Education Act of 1987 aimed at turning the 1974 (Dozbo Committee) measures into reality: a national literacy campaign launched, and pre-tertiary education changed from 17 to 12 years (Adu-Gyamfi et al., 2016; Darko & Abrokwa, 2020).

The 1987 educational reform that ushered in the JSS concept, aimed at improving the quality of education laid some emphasis on headteachers' preparation and development. The reform succeeded in imposing a new education structure (6 years primary, 3 years JSS, and 3 years senior secondary school [6-3-3]) and increased enrollment and the number of infrastructures (GES, 2001; Lonyian & Kuranchie, 2018; Takyi et al., 2019).

Lonyian and Kuranchie (2018) established that the 1995 educational review in Ghana, which introduced the Free Compulsory and Universal Basic Education (FCUBE) program, stressed the improvement of school management efficiency and required

headteachers to receive training in school management. Yet, Akyeampong (2010), in a review of 50 years of challenge and progress of education in Ghana, opined that the promise of universal access to basic education and vocational programs were left unfulfilled. Besides, education in the 1990s, which aimed at universal access to primary education, did little to link expansion and access to teacher development, welfare, and systematic expansion of post-primary education. But, in the recent past, Dampson (2019) observed that there had been a considerable effort towards the training of K-12 school headteachers in Ghana through the leadership programs in university education, organized workshops, and in-service training.

The 1992 Republican Constitution of Ghana gave a new impetus to Ghanaian education by mandating the state the duty to provide a free and compulsory universal basic education for all children in Ghana (The Constitution of Ghana, 1992). Under this republic, the Local Government Act of 1993 initiated the decentralization in education administration. The decentralization was to transfer power to district assemblies (Aziabah, 2018; GoG, 2001). Currently, the education structure consists of 2 years of kindergarten, 6 years of primary, 3 years of Junior high school, and 3 years of senior high school (2-6-3-3), following the 2007 educational review by President J. A. Kuffour and another review 2009 by President J. E. A Mills, leading to post-secondary and tertiary education.

There is also a technical/vocational education leading to polytechnics, and apprenticeship leading to the world of work, and 3-4 years of tertiary education (Quansah et al., 2019). Under the presidency of Nana Addo-Dankwah Akuffo-Addo, Ghana has

extended the (FCUBE) to all K-12 schools in Ghana with the Free Senior High School policy of 2017 (Abdul-Rahaman et al., 2018). In spite of the various attempts at educational reforms, student achievement disparities continue to persist among the rural and urban public K-12 schools in Ghana.

Achievement Trends of Students in Ghana

The Institute of Statistics (UIS) factsheet of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) revealed that 90% of children between 6 and 14 years old in sub-Saharan Africa failed to satisfy the minimum proficiency levels in reading and 85% in mathematics, a figure much higher than the world averages of 58% and 56% for reading and mathematics (UNESCO, 2017; ESA, 2018). With this backdrop and in fulfillment of the 1992 constitutional mandate, the government of Ghana (GoG) recognized its responsibility to ensure that every Ghanaian child has a right to quality education to the level possible within the resources of the nation (The Constitution of Ghana, 1992). However, the rural-urban socio-economic disparities in Ghana impact the outcomes of the educational provision of basic education (Takyi et al., 2019).

The Ministry of Education (MOE) through the GES governs and guides all K-12 Schools in Ghana with the same policy regulations and programs oversee a centralized curriculum, syllabus and textbooks, but the academic performance of K-12 schools have generally always been low, with the cities performing better than the rural districts (Takyi et al., 2019). The academic performance of K-12 students in Ghana, particularly those in the rural deprived communities, has been a serious concern for many stakeholders in education as students in the urban schools mostly perform better than their counterparts

in rural deprived schools. With this backdrop and in fulfillment of the 1992 constitutional mandate, the GoG recognized its responsibility to ensure that every Ghanaian child has a right to quality education to the level possible within the resources of the nation (The Constitution of Ghana, 1992).

According to Abreh et al. (2018), students' performance trends in science and mathematics at the basic and secondary school levels within a decade-from 2007 to 2016 in Ghana showed variations in the rural and urban districts. Data available from the West African Examinations Council indicate that in approximately 20% of schools nationwide, results did not provide a definitive pattern. Abreh et al. (2018) underscored that students' performance in WASSCE between 2007 and 2016 for both mathematics and science is generally had a high percentage of students who failed, though some students performed better in some of the years like 2016 in comparison to the preceding years of 2013, 2014, and 2015.

From 2007 to 2012, students' performance in Ghana from WEAC data improved progressively but plummeted from 2012 to 2015 and went up again in 2016. Ghana registered about a 30% failure rate in integrated science for each of the years. However, Takyi et al. (2019) stressed that the rural-urban disparities in Ghana impact the performance of basic and secondary education. These disparities in education are evident in the results of the national BECE which is a transition requirement to senior high school and the WASSCE, a transition requirement to higher education (Anlimachie, 2019; ESA, 2018).

Learning outcomes have been areas of concern for the past ten years, with wide variations in BECE and SSSCE/WASSCE results across districts. In particular, Adamba (2018) and Anlimachie (2019) conceded that the persistent lower performance of students from the rural schools in the country's BECE and WASSCE testify that the schools in urban areas perform better than those in rural areas. EGRA results showed that in both 2013 and 2015, only 2% of pupils in Primary 2 schools could read at grade level, with 50% of those tested unable to recognize a single word (ESA, 2018). The 2015 EGMA found that while 46–72% of pupils scored well on procedural knowledge sub-tasks, conceptual knowledge sub-tasks were much more challenging, with nearly 75% of pupils unable to answer a single question correctly in some cases. These assessments show that urban areas significantly outperform rural districts in both reading and mathematics (ESA, 2018; MOE, 2018).

The transition rate between junior high school and senior high school reached 68% in 2016/17, anticipated further increment with the introduction of the New Patriotic Party's policy of free senior high school in 2017 per the assessment of the ESA (2018). In recent years, Ghana has made significant strides in expanding education access. Between 1999 and 2015, net primary enrollment increased from 61 to 91%, and net secondary enrollment increased from 32 to 55% as Ghana introduced Free and Compulsory Universal Basic Education. While these gains in education access are significant, they are not necessarily mirrored by gains in education quality (USAID, 2018). A performance gap was observed between urban and rural Ghana, which could be

explained by the disparities in the distribution of educational facilities and resources, both human and material.

Instructional Leadership in Perspective (Overview)

The concept of instructional leadership has extensively been studied in the recent past decades. A myriad of models and concepts and theories exist to explain instructional leadership, and among these models is the instructional management model of Hallinger and Murphy (1985). Hallinger and Murphy explained instructional leadership as the principal's behavior to promote and improve the teaching and learning process in schools related to teachers, students, parents, school plans, and management. Instructional leadership as a concept is a leadership role for principals and teachers who continually refine their teaching, provide advice and expertise to colleagues through monitoring and continuing education, and participate in peer review both of individual teachers and the instructional program (DiPaola & Wagner, 2018; Wieszorek & Manard, 2018).

The purpose of leadership, Elmore (2000) observed, is the improvement of instructional practice and performance irrespective of role. Aas and Paulsen (2019) emphasized that providing resources, continuity of visibility, teacher professional development, supporting teaching instruction, maximizing instructional time, and for Cansoy and Parlar (2018), tracking student progress, offering feedback on teaching and learning, as well as a practitioner of the curriculum are some effective instructional leadership practices that instructional leaders must develop to achieve school development and better outcomes. In support, Özdemir et al. (2020) argued that the

effective way instructional leaders may achieve school development and student achievement is by focusing on the pedagogical development of teachers and students.

More so, supporting teacher professional development, improving school performance, and enhancing student outcomes are part of the core mandate and responsibilities of school principals. Coenen et al. (2019) admitted the surge in the global demand for educational leaders' accountability about the quality performance of schools had exacerbated education stakeholders' interest in school leaders' leadership styles. Besides, instructional leadership distinguishes itself from other leadership styles. It is peculiar to educational organizations that aim to achieve success in the teaching-learning process and raises successful students for society (Coenen et al., 2019).

Further, Gorton and Schneider (1991) opined that instructional leadership provides the desired conditions for learning and teaching, increasing the school staff's satisfaction, and transforming the school into a productive environment. Leadership development increasingly continues to be a priority of policymakers in many educational systems and organizations, Harris et al. (2019) argued as a means of improving educational outcomes, resulting in increased attention paid in several countries. To the type of leadership that supports organizational improvement and transformation, the instructional leadership style of school principals has proven to be among the critical determinants of improving school performance. Yet, as indicated by Hallinger, Adams et al. (2018), in certain countries, the research base on a well-documented, extensive and international empirical literature of instructional leadership has yet developed fully.

In contributing to the effectiveness of instructional leadership for school development, DeWitt (2020) asserted that in the recent past, the extent to which instructional leaders (principals) employ assessment data for instructional planning had increased globally. This, together with the instructional leaders' involvement in assisting teachers in utilizing effective instructional practices and commitment to developing the school climate as a professional learning environment (Boyce & Bowers, 2018). Hallinger (2018) contributes to instructional leadership's impact on school development, postulating that instructional leadership promotes teachers' effectiveness, and increases student performance. Similarly, Lotan et al. (2019) affirmed that instructional leadership occasionally changes instructional practice and fosters student engagement in learning.

Also, changes in pedagogy are possible when teachers have the opportunity of trying out new strategies, receive feedback, address challenges in the implementation of programs, and iteratively improve throughout multiple workshops when advisors and coaches are accessible. Furthermore, Lotan and Burns (2019) argued that effective instructional leadership practices give teachers a renewed sense of collegiality and purpose and a shared mission that emphasizes their professional identity, keeps them at the post, and provides a sense of responsibility that holds out beyond their classrooms. A sense of feeling that supports active school development and increased student achievement. With the importance and growing understanding of instructional leadership, it is necessary to understand the historical evolution of school leadership in Ghana.

Historical Perspective of School Leadership in Ghana for the Last 20years.

Education is the foundation for building a country's human and economic capital for future prosperity and progress, which for Nooruddin and Bhamani (2019) calls for effective teaching instruction supported and stimulated by the role of school leadership to engage and equip teachers to facilitate student learning and achievement. Nooruddin and Bhamani (2019) join Daniëls et al. (2019) to explain that school leadership is a process of influence that gears toward achieving specific goals objectives based on a shared vision of all stakeholders. The 1987 educational reform, which initiated the JSS concept that aimed at improving the quality of education, laid some emphasis on headteachers' preparation and development (Lonyian & Kuranchie, 2018).

Lonyian and Kuranchie (2018) established that the 1987 educational reforms in Ghana stressed the improvement of school management efficiency and required headteachers to receive training in school management. The GES (2001) recommended that schools set up school management committees (SMCs), governing bodies, and parent-teacher associations (PTAs) to collaborate with school heads to implement school policies (GES, 2001). The leadership role of the headteachers (principals) is significant to effective schools and student achievement.

Martin (2019) and Ganon-Shilon and Chen (2019) underscored a relationship between the implementation of educational reform, effective schools, and headteachers' leadership ability. The Commonwealth Secretariat (1993) stressed the nature and quality of the school head's leadership and management as essential to school effectiveness and quality academic achievement. Lonyian and Kuranchie (2018) emphasized the significance of school leadership in quality education in the assertion that quality

education depends essentially on the quality of school leadership than on the abundance of available resources.

However, the schools' capacity to improve teaching instruction and student learning is much influenced by the quality of the principals' leadership because headteachers' leadership is critical to the success of schools. Sarpong and Kusi (2019) postulated that despite the implementation of several educational reforms in the past that focused on improving the teaching and learning processes, Ghana faces leadership challenges, particularly the training and development of headteacher leadership at the pre-tertiary levels, mainly rural K-12 schools.

In Ghana, the central government through the MOE has been responsible for the overall management of education which comprises central administrative and technical departments. These departments involve planning, budget, monitoring and evaluation, and statistics, research, information management, and public relations of Ghana's schools and educational institutions (Abugre, 2018; Akyeampong, 2010). The GES has the mandate to ensure and coordinate the implementation of all policy pertaining to basic education and senior high school education (K-12). The GES also has the mandate to develop all formal pre-tertiary educational curriculum and certification, with its central divisions: Regional education offices, municipal education offices, and district education offices (Ministry of Education, 2018).

The Ministry of Education representing the central government is responsible for providing and managing education in Ghana with the various statutory bodies under this ministry. Education policies are formulated at the national level by the central

government through the MOE, the political figureheads and technocrats, and to the GES to implement in the schools through regional and district representatives of the Ghana education service (Ministry of Education, 2018). The GES implements education policies at the pre-tertiary (K-12) level for and on behalf of the MOE (Ministry of Education, 2018). According to the MOE (2018), the regional directorates of education, headed by a regional director of education (RDO), are responsible for implementing education policy in each of the regions in Ghana. The RDO make available, funds, educational resources, and materials from central government to all the districts in his region (Akyeampong, 2010).

The district education office (DEO), headed by the district director of education (DDE), is responsible for implementing education policy and education-related matters and programs of GES at the district level. The DDE supervises and monitors schools within the district, providing educational resources and infrastructure, managing the finances, and the capitation grant through the headteachers (Akyeampong, 2010; GoG, 2001). Aziabah (2018) articulated that the implementation of educational policies formulated at the national level is carried out at the school level by the headteachers (principals) who are the schools' administrators and are responsible for running schools and implementing policies set by the education the authority under the overall direction and guidance of DDE. Aziabah explicated further that the activities of the DEOs are, in principle, supported by the district assemblies (DAs), which are statutory bodies created by law for the primary purpose of decentralizing government business at the local or district level, developing school infrastructure, and mobilizing local communities to

support the provision and delivery of pre-tertiary education the local levels. Thus, the DAs have a statutory duty for providing communities under their jurisdiction with education following national policy guidelines laid down by the central government (Aziabah, 2018; Quashigah, 2001).

Headteachers (principals) undertake the management and accountability roles at the school level (Lonyian & Kuranchie, 2018). However, Sarpong and Kusi (2019) agree with Akyeampong (2010) that lack of resources and insufficient training for principals and professional development hinder the successful fulfillment of this job responsibility. The limited authority and training of headteachers mean that they are often not seen as figures of authority at the school (Sarpong & Kusi, 2019). Circuit supervisors at the local level have the role of checking teachers' lesson plans, teacher and pupil attendance records, schools' performance, and instructional materials, but has not been effective (Lonyian & Kuranchie, 2018). The MOE put these structures in place to ensure quality education at the pre-tertiary level, focusing on improving the quality of teaching and learning for improved student achievement, an objective which requires, among other factors, quality school leadership (Kwaah & Palojoki, 2018).

Over the years, Ghana, in her educational reforms, Dampson (2019) asserted, seems to be silent or done little on creating sustainable professional leadership development opportunities for school leaders to be professionally and effectively develop as school leaders. With regards to the selection of headteachers to K-12 schools in Ghana, particularly, the Basic schools both Dampson and Sofu and Abonyi (2018) agreed that it is either been appointed or rise to such positions based on rank and years of service who

are appointed many times without any form of preparatory training. The criteria as stipulated by the 1987 educational reforms were; basic school headteachers with the qualification of a principal superintendents or, at least senior superintendents who had passed through interviews and a week in-service training in school leadership (Dampson, 2019).

Lonyian and Kuranchie (2018) and Sofu and Abonyi (2018) affirmed the two approaches GES use in appointing headteachers to K-12 schools in Ghana as first, the appointment through direct posting. Thus, appointing newly-trained teachers to lead schools, especially in the rural and difficult to staff areas. Second, the appointment through selection and interviews mostly applied to urban schools where prospective candidates for interviews are selected through recommendations by circuit supervisors and other senior officers.

The authors emphasized that once the school leaders, especially those in the rural primary schools in Ghana, are appointed are seldom supported as leaders. At the same time, most of them gain experience through their effort. Sofu and Abonyi (2018) in commenting about the leadership issues in the K-12 education system in Ghana stressed that educational leadership in the Ghanaian context is not even captured as a course or subject in the curriculum of the teacher training institutions in Ghana, where teachers who eventually become basic school leaders are trained.

However, Dampson (2019) postulated that the two public universities, the University of Cape Coast and the University of Education, Winneba, primarily established to train teachers for the education sector in Ghana focused on high school

administrators and not basic school leaders. Thus, there has been a lack of focus on developing school leadership proficiencies, which is integral to the success or failure of educational reforms in Ghana. In conclusion, Lonyian and Kuranchie (2018) emphasized the significance of school leadership in quality education. They asserted that quality education depends on the quality of school management, more than on the abundance of available resources. But the capacity of schools to improve teaching instruction and student learning is much influenced by the quality of the headteachers' leadership because the leadership provided by headteachers is critical to the success of schools.

Managerial School Leadership to Instructional Leadership

School leadership is highly critical to the education system and the success of every educational institution. The cruciality of school leadership runs through all facets of school life. Şenol and Lesinger (2018), citing Hallinger (2009) *Leadership for the 21st-century schools*, attests that before the 1990's the principal as a school leader exercised the roles of educator, coach and mentor, and administrator. That leadership mainly focused on framing the school's goals, maintaining high expectations for teaching and learning, promoting teacher's professional development, instructional supervision, curriculum coordination, monitoring students' progress, and developing school programs as instructional experts (Şenol & Lesinger, 2018). Hallinger, Gümüş et al. (2020) indicated that school principals' responsibilities as leaders were instructional, political, and managerial. These responsibilities were separate and associated with the kind of sole leader with authority to oversee the school administration, with a top-down authority of

principals to rescue and transform failing schools from their vulnerable state to successful institutions (Hallinger et al., 2020).

The managerial school leadership is where principals prioritize administrative and political roles as separate, and in the perspective of Hallinger (2005) and Shaked and Benoliel (2019), has evolved to the concept of instructional leadership where the principal, as an effective instructional leader, provides effective leadership that encourages the qualities in teachers and students. The managerial school leadership concept, Wenno (2017) asserted, manages education in school effectively and efficiently to achieve quality education expected by all stakeholders. The principal in the managerial school leadership is the organization manager who strategizes to achieve educational goals and performs managerial functions such as planning, organizing, and controlling school activities. May et al. (2020) agreed with Wenno that the managerial functions of the principal ranges from planning, developing, utilizing, and empowering all departments and elements of school, which includes teachers, students, administration, and infrastructure to improve teacher quality and student achievement.

The emergence and emphasis on the decentralization of school's management and accountability of educational control taking center stage throughout the world have led to more responsibility for a broader spectrum of facets of school management at the school level and less centralized control of school management. This emergence, OECD (2009) noted, has to lead to reforms of the principal's responsibilities from an emphasis on administration in terms of the compliance of schools with bureaucratic procedures to a broader role that combines administration with instructional leadership with much focus

on the principal's management of teachers and their teaching. Also, Hallinger (2005) and Shaked and Benoliel (2019) agree that the concept of school leadership has evolved into instructional leadership roles where principals prioritize increased teacher instructional practices and student learning. Again, the authors indicate that the managerial school leadership has evolved to the instructional leadership roles where principals motivate teachers and students to step out beyond classroom boundaries to ensure the school's transformation from a workplace to a learning place (Hallinger, 2005; Hallinger et al., 2020).

The managerial school leadership system designated principals as school leaders and organization managers. The schools' leadership system is currently distributed across different situations and people, which has been widely influential in involving and across myriads of stakeholders. Alsaleh (2019) observed that the effectiveness of instructional leadership hinges on the extent to which the influence of instructional leadership promotes teacher instruction and learning. This included leader's learning, and occasionally, parents' learning to support enhanced collaboration and engagement, quality teaching and learning, and the overall welfare of students. This leadership style requires more people on board than being sole authority responsibility (Lang, 2019).

Although instructional leadership distributes leadership roles by delegating responsibilities to other teachers and staff, it does not render the principal redundant and indifferent to the school's activities and issues. Instead, it promotes principals' interaction with teachers and staff in developing relevant human and material resources, routines, and structures to promote teaching instructions, student learning, and academic

achievement. Goddard, Goddard et al. (2019) admitted that school principals' effectiveness in influencing teaching instructional practices is more prevalent through effective school culture and leadership modeling than traditional direct supervision and teachers' classroom evaluation practices. Instructional leadership involves the responsibility of promoting an intense teaching instruction, students learning, professional inquiry, collegial and trusting relationships, and evidence successful school resulting from the collective efforts of relevant stakeholders (Haiyan & Allan, 2021). Thus, for Murphy and Hallinger (1986), the principal's administrative and leadership influences the conditions of teachers working life, which directly impacts the effectiveness of teachers' output and student achievement outcomes.

Impact of Instructional Leadership on Student Academic Achievement

Ismail et al. (2018), referencing Leithwood and Jantzi (2000) postulated that instructional leadership is a kind of leadership approach by which school leaders focus attention on certain strategies and activities of teachers that potentially have indirect influence on students' academic achievement. Since the instructional leadership approach relates to the implementation of activities and practices that promote and improve teaching instruction and student learning, school leaders employ this leadership style in their education administration. In support, Hallinger and Hosseingholizadeh (2019) and Hallinger, Adams et al. (2018) explained that instructional leadership is a school leadership model that emphasizes teachers' classroom practices towards improving school performance and outcomes.

Researchers (Daniëls et al., 2019; Harris et al., 2019) admitted to the relationship between instructional leadership and student achievement, though indirectly. Similarly, Benabentos et al. (2020) joined Hallinger and Hosseingholizadeh (2019) in articulating the connections between instructional leadership and student achievement resulting from the fidelity implementation of student-centered teaching strategies. Because instructional leaders prioritize and emphasize monitoring student growth and development of quality teaching and learning. In a similar vein, Noman et al. (2018) explained that successful instructional leaders usually nurture a positive school climate and work ethic, communicate their vision and goals. The authors also explained that successful instructional leaders consistently invest in knowing how to lead and manage people. They deliberately display and facilitate resilient interpersonal skills that support quality education and student achievement (Noman et al., 2018).

In contributing to instructional leadership and student achievement discourse, Sio and Ismail (2019) held that effective instructional leadership would promote student learning and performance when instructional leaders strengthen institutional belief systems. Also, they create a suitable school climate that supports teacher instructional activities and foster a collegial environment for teachers to collaborate to enhance quality outcomes. Another idea by Chen and Guo (2020) suggested that instructional leaders impact teachers' instructional strategies and teachers' emotional intelligence that ultimately influence student learning and achievement.

In furtherance, Tulowitzki (2019) established that supervision and monitoring, which are functions of instructional leaders, substantially influence teaching and learning

when implemented in tandem with professional development, affect student achievement. The principal as instructional leader Ismail et al. (2018) observed facilitates the success of teachers' instructional strategies by creating a school environment that supports and enhances teachers' instructional practices and student learning. The authors also noted that instructional leaders indirectly impact student achievement when they support teachers' quality and effectiveness by enhancing positive and effective teaching and learning climate. Also, instructional leaders indirectly impact student achievement by supporting teaching instructions to align with researched-based curriculum and assessment protocols and supporting teachers with needed resources (Ismail et al., 2018).

Another perspective from Liu and Hallinger (2018) indicated that principals as instructional leaders impact students' academic achievement. But Liu and Hallinger observed that this is through increased teaching instructions, teachers' behavior, and beliefs. It also involved knowledge, practice, and competency, affirming a positive relationship between principal leadership and teacher instructional practices that support students' academic achievement. Thus, principals' instructional leadership influences their schools' success by managing the school administration and ensuring students' discipline and attendance. It is also through monitoring teaching and learning materials, teachers, curriculum and assessments, and professional development. These responsibilities increase teachers' efficacy beliefs and competency, which improves teachers' teaching instructional practices to increase student achievement (Ismail et al., 2018).

In sum, Ismail et al. (2018), Shaked and Benoliel (2019), du Plessis (2019), and Liu and Hallinger (2018) echoed the significant impact of instructional leadership practices that influence teachers' instructional strategies and teachers' knowledge. They tasked instructional leaders with promoting teachers' classroom instruction to improve teachers' instruction and students' learning. These scholars have revealed a correlation between principals' ability to articulate a clear vision for instructional practices that provide teachers with professional development for improved instructional practices and student achievement

Instructional Leadership Model

The instructional management model of Hallinger and Murphy (1985) is among the plethora of conceptual models of instructional leadership in the educational literature by scholars for studying instructional leadership. Hallinger and Murphy's conceptual model proposes managing the instructional program, promoting a positive school learning climate, and defining the school's mission as its three basic dimensions for the principal's instructional leadership role (Bellibas & Liu, 2018). These dimensions have some identifiable tasks for the principal's instructional leadership practices.

This model provides a reasonable basis for considering instructional leadership as different contexts allow principals and school leaders the flexibility of effective instructional leadership via varied leadership styles. The Hallinger and Murphy (1985) instructional management model will underpin this study because, by this model, instructional leadership tasks represent the reality of the principal's instructional leadership practices. Besides, Nguyễn et al. (2018) admitted that the instructional

management model has often been the framework for most educational leadership investigations. Therefore, the model is the most appropriate to provide the contexts for the research and basis for the analysis of exploring the perspectives of teachers, principals, and superintendents of instructional leadership practices that support increased student achievement in the rural settings.

The Hallinger and Murphy (1985) instructional management model provided a context for this research. It offered the basis for exploring the perspectives of teachers, principals, and circuit supervisors of instructional leadership practices that support school leaders to become effective instructional leaders in developing a vision, mission, school culture, and climate that have a strong focus on instructional improvement to ensure quality academic achievement. Instructional leadership, Sebastian et al. (2019) considered being crucial to school effectiveness when leaders emphasize organizational management for instructional improvement more than the day-to-day teaching and learning. Instructional leadership has been one of the most influential leadership models applied to educational leadership over the past 25-30 years and has been considered crucial to school effectiveness and student achievement (Campbell et al., 2019).

As the authors delved deeper into the significance of instructional leadership in school effectiveness, Leithwood, Sun et al. (2019) argued that instructional leadership, together with transformational leadership, arguably, had been the significant models of school leadership known to have influenced student learning outcomes for school leadership and school effectiveness. Nader et al. (2019) gave credence to the cruciality of instructional leadership that influences school effectiveness together with

transformational leadership. This is true only with the detail that instructional leadership creates achievable goals and objectives through systematic planning and implementing resourcing and monitoring to achieve the set goals and objectives. These functions arguably lead to school improvement and student learning outcomes. Notwithstanding, a fundamental part of instructional leadership, irrespective of whether the instructional leader is another school leader other than the principal, according to Guo and Lu, (2018) and Nader et al. (2019), is to continually support to improve teacher instructional practices.

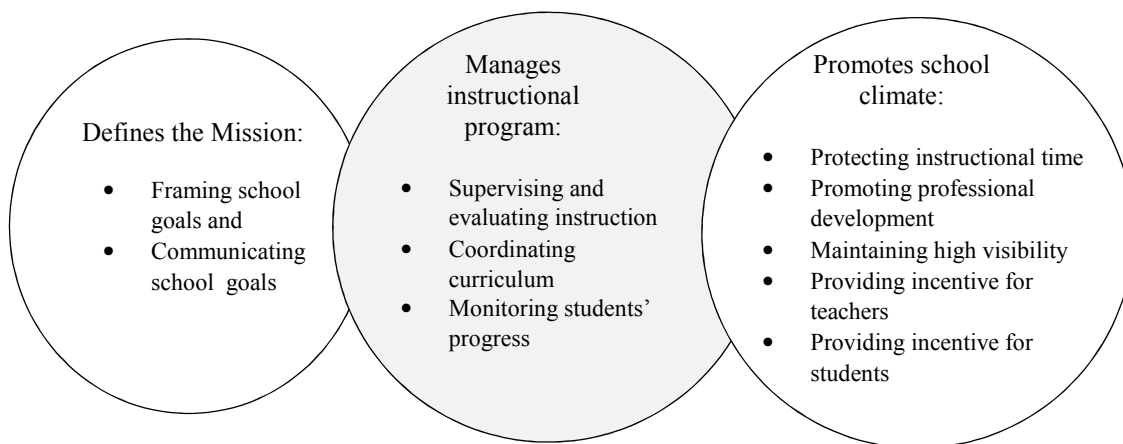
The Hallinger and Murphy (1985) instructional management model proposes the three dimensions of instructional leadership roles, namely, promoting a positive school learning climate, defining the school's mission, and managing the instructional program, has ten instructional leadership tasks constituting this comprehensive model as

1. framing the school's goals,
2. communicating the school's goals,
3. coordinating the curriculum,
4. supervising and evaluating instruction,
5. monitoring student progress,
6. protecting instructional time,
7. providing incentives for teachers,
8. providing incentives for learning,
9. promoting professional development and
10. maintaining high visibility.

Hallinger and Murphy's comprehensive instructional management model is represented in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1

Hallinger and Murphy's Comprehensive Instructional Management Model



The First Dimension (Defining the School's Mission)

Hallinger and Murphy (1985) identified these instructional leadership tasks, framing the school's goals, and communicating the school's goals as emphasizing the principal's or school leader's primary role in establishing and facilitating a healthy and workable relationship among the staff towards achieving the school vision of enhancing student academic growth. Hallinger and Murphy argued that this dimension is fundamentally about the responsibilities of school leaders appropriately establishing and communicating practical school vision.

This vision must generally be understood and supported by all the relevant stakeholders the principal's direction for ensuring effective teaching and learning processes that coordinate appropriately with the established school vision. This

understanding is against the background that studies (Hallinger et al., 2018; Ismail et al., 2018; Liu & Hallinger, 2018) have revealed a correlation between principals' ability to articulate a clear vision of the school for instructional practices that provide teachers with professional development for improved instructional practices and student achievement. In effect, in developing the schools' vision, principals must not seek to rely exclusively on establishing the school goals but on the inputs from the relevant education stakeholders, particularly, the teaching and non-teaching staff (Seong, 2019).

The Second Dimension (Managing the Instructional Program)

The second dimension, which consists of three instructional leadership tasks, supervising and evaluating instruction, coordinating the curriculum, and monitoring student progress, according to Hallinger and Murphy (1985) are essential leadership responsibilities of principals that emanate from this model. Yunus et al. (2019) contended that principals' effective observation, supervision, monitoring, management as well as the coordination of classroom teaching, curriculum, and student growth for improved performance and quality student achievements are the functions inherent in this modal as leadership responsibilities of principals that ensure student achievement. Research testifies that principals' instructional accountabilities are key in coordinating and supervising instruction and curriculum and monitoring students' learning to ascertain the quality of teaching and learning (Cannata et al., 2019).

The Third Dimension (Promoting a Positive School-Learning Climate)

Hallinger and Murphy (1985) reviewed that the third dimension of instructional leadership, i.e., promoting a positive school learning climate, is a principal's efforts of

establishing a good rapport with the social and civil society organizations to create a congenial school climate for learning and instructional programs to thrive. Hallinger and Murphy delineated five tasks as constituting the instructional leadership dimension of promoting a positive school learning climate. These were maintaining high visibility, protecting instructional time, providing incentives for teachers and learners, and promoting professional development. Aside from these five leadership functions that support a positive school learning climate, establishing functional interactions with students and staff is essential for promoting professional development and developing teacher leadership. Broader in purpose and scope than the first two dimensions, the third dimension is critical to the instructional leaders for creating and maintaining a school climate capable of supporting instructional and learning activities that brings about teachers' professional development (Seong, 2019).

Instructional Leadership Practices that Support Student Achievement

Framing the School's Goals

The role of instructional leaders (Principal) in framing school goals, that is, establishing a clear mission, are significant in establishing school effectiveness as by this role principals determine the areas of emphasis in school where staff must focus attention, energy, and resources to ensure student achievement (Hallinger, 2018). Schools become instructionally effective when for Hallinger (2018), instructional leader conceptualizes school goals with inputs from the staff on how to develop these goals and practical ways of translating them into instructional objectives. Khan et al. (2020) explained that a well-framed school's goals, aimed at improving student achievement,

clearly communicated to stakeholders are the recipe for instructionally effective schools. The effectiveness and success of such goals are practically based on the emphasis, commitment, and resources school leaders, teachers, and other stakeholders commit to achieving these goals. There could be a minimal challenge to confront the facilitation and compelling articulation of the schools' missions to stakeholders when principals break them into some few comprehensible school-wide interrelated goals with achievable scope.

In framing the school's goals, Hallinger and Murphy (1985) and Saeed et al. (2018) posited that expressing performance goals in measurable terms is critical. Further, principals should seek to incorporate the responsibilities of staff in achieving the set goals and include data on past and current students. Principals must not leave out the contributions of staff and parents during the development of these goals. Their experiences may serve as a necessary foundation for determining school goals. When instructional leaders include staff in defining school goals and objectives to implement and evaluate, the staff may be more committed to collaborating with the school leaders in achieving the school goals (Saeed et al., 2018). This collaboration between instructional leaders, educators, and parents may inspire confidence in each school because it has a clear, focused, and achievable vision and mission teacher robust stakeholders' commitment to power it to success (Aas & Paulsen, 2019).

Communicating the School's Goals

When instructional leaders sail through with defining school goals, the next task is explicitly communicating and clarifying the school goals. Among the characteristics of

effective schools is when school leaders share goals, objectives, and high expectations with the relevant stakeholders of the school with the school channeling resources towards the realization of the set goals and objectives. Huong (2020) determined that the instructional leader is visible around the school, constantly communicating with everyone about standards and achievements, promoting school-wide professional development, and learning at all levels in the institution. Effective communication of school goals contributes to shaping school climate and culture and defining and sustaining the school mission.

Noman et al. (2018) confirmed that successful instructional leaders usually nurture a positive school climate and work ethic, communicate their vision and goals. The authors also explained that successful instructional leaders consistently invest in knowing how to lead and manage people and deliberately displaying and facilitating resilient interpersonal skills that support quality education and student achievement (Noman et al., 2018; Sio & Ismail, 2019). Equally important is the task of instructional leaders periodically reviewing school goals with the staff and communicating to the appropriate bodies what is new to be implemented and evaluated to achieve school success.

The formal and informal means of instructional leaders communicating school goals are school goal statements, school handbooks, bulletins, PTA meetings, and staff meetings (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). It is significant that all relevant stakeholders, mainly teaching, non-teaching staff, and students, know about the school goals and objectives. This may influence them to cooperate better and contribute to developing,

implementing, evaluating, and realizing the school leaders' mission and goals for a successful school and quality student achievement. These tasks of framing and communicating the school's goals, Hallinger and Murphy (1985) intimated, concern the role of principals in establishing the school's primary purposes.

Also, they concern focusing on the functions of principals collaborating with school staff to establish and ensure that the school readily has clear, measurable, and attainable, short-term goals with students' academic progress as a priority and area of concern. It is then the responsibility of principals to articulate and communicate well these school goals to make them understandable to achieve stakeholder support, particularly, the school community. Thus, framing and communicating the school's goals must capture the instructional leader's role in defining a school's mission, which should focus on developing the school's academics relevant to the peculiarity of the needs of the school population (Shaked, 2019).

Coordinating the Curriculum

As noted by Şenol and Lesinger (2018), instructional leaders' role as effective leaders influences student achievement and school effectiveness by ensuring efficient coordination between curriculum and other school activities such as testing and assessment instruments, curriculum materials, and instructional goals. Instructional leaders perform the management functions of managing curriculum and instructional programs of schools to harmonize and oversee the implementation and evaluation of learning in schools. The function of managing curriculum and instructional programs entails coordinating curriculum, evaluating instruction, assessing and monitoring student

progress (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Saeed et al., 2018). Instructional leaders coordinate curriculum and instructional programs to better place themselves to evaluate teachers teaching success, appraise teaching performance, and identify teachers' strengths and weaknesses in implementing the curriculum. Also, the school leaders identify teachers' needs in instructional activities, monitor student learning and success, and arrange continuous improvement programs that support improved teacher's capacity to teach (Ma'mun & Suryana, 2019).

Instructional leaders coordinating curriculum and other school activities, particularly assessment, from the perspective of Wallin et al. (2019), bolster teaching instruction as principals provide teachers with excellent realistic curriculum models and assessment practices, that enhance curriculum equity within and across schools. Assessment of this nature in the view of Darling-Hammond et al. (2020), allows teachers to evaluate student learning to boost their capacity to progress and empowered to quality achievement. But Sussman and Wilson (2019) and Bhebhe and Nyathi (2019) agreed that in assessing the effectiveness of school through the use of content and a standardized test, there might be variations in results across schools. This would require instructional leaders to collaborate with teachers to ensure consistent coordination between instructional objectives of the schools' classroom activities and extra-classroom activities. Ultimately, these connections in systems and programs promote student growth and achievement.

Supervising and Evaluating Instruction

Undertaking their supervisory roles as effective instructional leaders, Neumerski et al. (2018) found that principals often engage in observation systems and evaluation of classroom instruction. This role of the instructional leader, Abonyi and Sofo (2019) admitted is aimed at improving teacher's instructional effectiveness to ensure student achievement by collaborating with teachers purposely to align the objectives of classrooms to the vision of the school. Therefore, DiPaola and Wagner (2018) observed that the instructional leaders coordinate with teachers to bring the classroom objectives to connect with the school's goals. These leaders review instructional practices through classroom observation, review of lesson plans, and the proper assessment of student work. Meanwhile, Sio and Ismail (2019) considered that supervision and evaluation are significant components of student academic achievement, and so becomes a vital component of the principal's function as an instructional leader. Tulowitzki (2019), supporting instructional leadership and school improvement, contends that when school leaders implement intentional supervision and evaluation with professional development, they influence student outcomes.

Similarly, Sio and Ismail (2019) believed that as part of principals' instructional management functions, instructional leaders establish a continual supervisory system to motivated teachers to develop themselves into teaching instructional experts, mindful of the connection between teacher supervision and evaluation and student achievement. Therefore, instructional leaders should consider the supervision and evaluation of instruction as a necessary task for school leaders. Based on this understanding,

instructional leaders are prominent to this management function of instructional leadership in their regular responsibilities (Brandon et al., 2018).

Brandon et al. (2018) emphasized that school leaders' adequate supervision and evaluation ensure quality teaching and student learning. School leaders, through these processes, focus on instructional approaches that support students' high academic standards. The authors also saw instructional leaders' effective supervision and evaluation as an aspect of teachers' professional career-long continuum of practice aiding teachers' development and growth and, at the same time, ensure quality teaching. Finally, Duran and Miquel (2019) affirmed that instructional leaders provide constructive feedback to teachers to facilitate instructional practices to better student achievement.

But Hall (2019), in acknowledging the importance of immediate feedback for teachers teaching instructions and students' learning performance, was quick to underscore the discomfort instructional leaders encounter in dealing with poor-performing teachers in the course of supervision and evaluation. In contributing to the challenges of efficient teacher supervision and evaluation, Brandon et al. (2018) noted the challenges of management, complexity, and learning as the most glaring ones. The management challenge of teacher supervision and evaluation is the insufficient official work hours for school leaders to consistently provide instructional leadership and supervision.

Other equally critical functions of school leaders often take precedence over supervision and evaluation to support teacher instruction. There is also the issue of complexity challenge. This challenge borders on the relationship between teacher

supervision, the vague expectations for school administrators, and difficulty in understanding and supporting quality teaching. It also bothers on teacher development and teacher growth that serve as obstacles to effective supervision and evaluation. Again, the dearth of ongoing professional development of instructional leadership supervisory knowledge and skills, considered as a learning challenge, is an obstacle to effective supervision and evaluation (Brandon et al., 2018).

Monitoring Student Progress

Thessin, (2019) revealed that instructional leadership task is a critical active principal's responsibility conducted frequently to evaluate student improvement in observing, stimulating, supervising, and monitoring teacher instruction and learning in the school. The effective principals for Hallinger and Murphy (1985) emphasized periodic review and assessment. This is because periodic review and assessment look for evidence of the teaching of curriculum standards by reviewing the formative assessments, grade books, file checks, team lesson logs, and student work outputs. In addition to periodic review and assessment, effective school principals as instructional leaders check for properly assigning student work and the subsequent effect of corrections of student work.

School leaders who undertake the task of monitoring student progress, many times, require subject departments to standardize students' assessment and marking scheme geared towards enhancing student learning. Instructional leaders also undertake to monitor student learning progress by involving in the staff placement of schools. This function of instructional leaders of involvement in class placement is to ensure teachers'

assignments relative to their areas of expertise and strengths for better instruction, students learning, and achievement (Hallinger & Hosseingholizadeh, 2019; Sio & Ismail, 2019).

Hallinger and Murphy (1985) and DeWitt (2020) corroborated other scholars that the functions of effective instructional leaders like observing, stimulating, supervising, and monitoring teacher instruction require principals' expertise in teaching and learning and their commitment to the school's development and improvement. Meanwhile, MacKinnon et al. (2019) affirmed that effective instructional leaders support instructional activities and programs. Such support occurs when instructional leaders prioritize consistently as part of their responsibilities involved in the instruction and assessment to monitor and ensure the progress and growth of students. Shaked (2019) espoused Hallinger and Murphy's (1985) instructional management functions and indicated that supervising and evaluating instruction, coordinating the curriculum, and monitoring student progress constitute the second dimension of managing the instructional program. However, these tasks challenge instructional leaders' rigorous undertaking to stimulate, supervise, and monitor teacher instructional practices and student learning.

These functions require instructional leaders' commitment to improving schools and proficiency and knack in teaching and learning. The dimension, managing the instructional program, demands instructional leaders to immerse in the instructional programs and practices of schools that improve student outcomes. In so doing, school leaders will establish connections, both formal and informal, with organizations and

institutions outside the school to positively impact and sustain student achievement.

(DiPaola & Wagner, 2018; Salisbury & Irby, 2020).

Protecting Instructional Time

The protection of instructional time as one of the responsibilities of instructional leadership substantially impacts students learning due to instructional leadership's focus on teaching instruction and student learning being the vital factors of promoting student academic achievement (Shaked & Benoliel, 2019). However, frequently interrupting instructional hours by both official and unofficial announcements and students' requests from the office adversely affects educators' classroom management and instructional skills, impacting negatively on students' learning and performance outcomes. School leaders guard against the misuse of teaching and learning time by developing and enforcing school-wide policies and measures that prevent and the unwarranted interruption of teaching and learning time.

The safeguarding of instructional and learning time can increase contact hours to ensure student achievement (Sio & Ismail, 2019). Park et al. (2019) asserted that principals contribute directly and indirectly to influencing student achievement, school success, and effectiveness through positive actions they take to support classroom conditions and schools. Successful instructional leaders extensively impact quality school performance when they align the relevant structures of schools like curriculum, academic standards, instructional time, enabling school climate with the school's mission.

Some policies and enforcement practices that successful instructional leaders pursue in Lee and Madden's (2019) opinion reduce tardiness, truancy, and absenteeism

to increase learning time for students. Also, principals can protect and increase instructional time to preserve student opportunities to learn by protecting classroom instructional hours from misuse and interruptions. Principals protect classroom instructional time through public address announcements by collaborating with teachers to develop classroom management practices that are more sustainable and effective (Lee & Madden, 2019).

Again, through instructional practices that reduce the number of non-instructional school activities that disrupt and impinge on classroom instructional time. Instructional leaders also protect instructional time by influencing the quality of school outcomes through the judicious use and alignment of school structures to the allocated time and the strict adherence (Sio & Ismail, 2019). Principals observe the instructional leadership function of protecting instructional times by spending quality official work time to observe and supervise Classroom instructional activities to ensure the better management of contact hours to promote quality teaching and learning (Lang, 2019).

Providing Incentives for Teachers

The role of instructional leaders in educators' incentives is a critical principals' task of creating a more practical learning climate and culture comprising structures capable of recognizing and rewarding educators for their efforts. Sanchez et al. (2020) explained that principals' leadership practices create an atmosphere that supports educational success by strengthening school structures and climate perceived by teachers as necessary motivation to quality teaching instruction. Okoth (2018) outlined educational leadership duties to include setting educational standards, offering the motivation for student

learning, and providing incentives for teachers to boost teaching performance. The introduction of incentives reasonably raises the optimal performance of teachers to improve learning outcomes. The principal's policy of incentive programs for educators finds significant effects in schools' instructional effectiveness and student achievement (Mbiti et al., 2019).

Incentives for teachers are system designed to motivate but also to maintain desired behavior and performance. Teacher incentive programs provide higher effects on teaching instructions in schools. Therefore, a well-programed rewards system is capable of improving incentives for quality teacher's performance. Principals providing incentives for teachers, motivate teachers to achieve better learning outcomes, and strategically lure experience and quality teachers into bolstering effective teaching and learning (Mbiti et al., 2019).

Lang (2019), contributing to the efficacy of incentives to promote teachers' performance, posits that principals' instructional leadership can impact positive change in the teachers' instructional strategies and practices. Instructional leaders offer incentives to teachers to develop and enhance quality instructional knowledge and expertise in instructional practices. More so, Lang (2019) affirmed, instructional leadership creates a school environment diligently maintained to serve as a reward system motivating teachers to enhance performance. In engaging in instructional leadership functions, a school leader promotes teaching instruction, students' learning, and knowledge. Instructional leaders make teacher's remuneration and compensation alluring to

incentivize teachers to spice their instructional practices for increased performance (Comighud & Arevalo, 2020).

Similarly, educational infrastructure, in-service training, and good rewards mutually have a positive influence on the performance of teachers, which may, in the long run, improve the performance of students. Effective instructional leaders endeavor to reward teachers to recognize their efforts to serve as incentives and motivation for hard work and excellence (Ndijuye & Tandika, 2019). This research provides nuance to the earlier research that instructional leaders emphasized on instructional practice and that providing incentives to teachers contributes significantly to promoting trust, commitment, hard work, improved instructional practices, and quality student academic achievement (Bellibas, & Liu, 2018).

Providing Incentives for Learning

Principals, as instructional leaders, ensure the mission of the school as the best place to learn. As part of instructional leaders' functions as providing incentives for learning, principals create a school-wide climate where students will appreciate the value of academic achievement. In such an environment, students frequently receive rewards and recognition for academic achievement in class and school-wide (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Sio & Ismail, 2019).

Principals carry out activities related to student development and progress to improve student performance. Principals also undertake activities to build a positive school climate and motivate students to build determination, monitor, and evaluate teachers and students regularly to improve academic performance. Schools must create a

conducive learning climate for students and a comfortable and guaranteed teaching climate (Campbell et al., 2019). The nature of schools' systems of rewards is an essential element of the positive school learning climate. In environments that are relationship-rich and attuned to students' learning and developmental needs can buffer students' stress, foster engagement, and support learning powering students to greater heights (Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018).

Motivation, Cantor et al. (2019) contended among other factors serves as an essential ingredient of all processes of student learning that is influenced and shaped by the learning climate. Hence, the significance of schools providing a positive learning environment that guarantees a measure of security and support that maximizes students' ability to learn social and emotional skills and academic content more positive school climate is related to improved academic achievement. Osher et al. (2020) corroborated Cantor et al. (2019) on the significance of learning environment as a means of incentive to student learning. The authors illustrated that an active classroom learning community develops respectful relationships between teachers and students and among the students themselves serve as a source of incentive for learning competencies and student achievement.

As part of the functions of instructionally effective instructional leaders, Murphy and Hallinger (1986) pointed out that principals incentivize students with rewards for quality learning outcomes that are school-wide focused. These incentives include award assemblies, certificates of honor and merit for attendance, decency, and behavior. Also, the public recognition of students by mentioning them in school and local newspapers,

student's pictures or portraits display, or other recognizable ways of acknowledging and celebrating the excellence of performing students establish the existence of complementarities across policies to improve learning outcomes. Instructional leaders in addition to the extrinsic motivation, Darling-Hammond, Flook et al. (2020) attested to the intrinsic motivation as well, since students often give prominence to the value of learning when school leaders continually emphasize the intrinsic motivations for learning which is the potential benefits beyond the immediate environment to shore up student performance.

Promoting Professional Development

One of the principals' instructional leadership functions is the promotion of professional development for instructional effectiveness that correlates to successful schools. Sofu and Abonyi (2018), investigating the self-reported professional development activities of school leaders, affirmed that successful instructional leaders support teachers' professional development and growth using a variety of formal, informal, and external approaches development. Sustainable leadership effectiveness in schools through an intense professional development can enhance, form, and trigger commitment and excellence from teachers for increased quality of teaching instruction. Sibomana (2020) explained that instructional leaders facilitate improved school quality by building teacher competence in determining school mission and student learning. But for instructional leaders to enhance the quality of school to achieve national education standards, Sibomana (2020) insisted, requires the efforts of leaders to implement the instructional leadership practices. These practices must focus on determining the mission

of the school, managing instructional programs, enhancing faculty expertise, and promoting the schools' learning climate (Sibomana, 2020).

Instructional leaders support professional development processes through professional teacher empowerment relative to guiding teachers' content and reflective practices (Aldridge et al., 2020). The teacher creates a consistent learning environment by working with students to institute an agreed workable plan for classroom activities, procedures and rules, time management, and learning that governs the classroom. Providing constructive feedback and opportunities for revision are instructional practices that encourage learners to grow (Dekawati et al., 2020). From the perspective of Darling-Hammond and Cook-Harvey (2018), investments in teachers teaching proficiencies and programs that prepare teachers adequately are necessary for providing schools with a more competent workforce that can transform school climate and culture to support effective learning. These authors again illustrated that educators who teach in classrooms or who lead teaching instructions of schools, strong professional development is relevant to sustain and focus on deepening their content knowledge and instructional practices that lead to quality achievement (Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018).

Hervie and Winful (2018) emphasized that teacher professional development is a coherent component of a school's improvement efforts that align with curriculum, assessments, and standards. It facilitates teachers' implementation of the knowledge and practices they learn in their classrooms. The authors further proposed that teacher professional development designed to enhance the professional knowledge and skills improve a teacher's experience on the subject matter. Teachers' teaching methodology

and attitudes of educators, Hervie and Winful noted, tend to enhance students' learning and quality achievement.

Gümüş and Bellibaş (2020) admitted that instructional leaders facilitate in-service training to improve the knowledge, skills, and teachers' self-efficacy. Gümüş and Bellibaş revealed that instructional leaders empower teachers to plan and execute lessons through different practical instructional approaches effectively. Instructional leaders undertake through their teaching instructions and monitoring students' learning outcomes, in addition to other school and community responsibilities.

Similarly, Kulophas and Hallinger (2020) asserted that principals' professional training programs for teachers positively impact teachers' knowledge, competencies, effectiveness, and productivity through increased teacher qualities that affect quality instruction, school climate, and ultimately the performance of students. As part of their management functions of promoting teachers' professional development, instructional leaders create healthy conditions for teachers to build their capacities. Again, instructional leaders ensure teachers' professional competencies, abilities, growth, and development to undertake their instructional responsibilities efficiently. As part of their duties, instructional leaders collaborate with education officers and other experts to organize in-service and other programs to update and enhance the knowledge and skills of teachers in methodology and subject matter contents (Lonyian & Kuranchie, 2018).

Maintaining High Visibility

The instructional leader's management task of maintaining high visibility in schools and classrooms promotes and increases the interaction among principals,

teachers, and students (Sibomana, 2020). This function requires instructional leaders to dedicate most of their official work time to curriculum matters more than administrative tasks. Hence the principal being a practicing teacher adds more impetus to the instructional leader's credibility in maintaining high visibility in schools and classrooms.

Similarly, Khan et al. (2020) illustrated that the functional and collaborative form of leadership whereby the instructional leader works in tandem with teachers and students to shape the school as a workplace with shared goals emphasizes the tasks of instructional leaders of maintaining high visibility in schools and classrooms. Thus, instructional leaders who lead the instructional activities and programs must adhere and committed to the vision and goals of success in teaching and learning. These visions and goals of success in teaching and learning encompass focusing on learning objectives, designing programs, modeling learning behaviors, and instruction activities (Khan et al., 2020).

However, for Darling-Hammond, Flook et al. (2020), even though instructional leaders may not directly influence the instructional process and practices, they influence instruction by providing a conducive school climate and provide opportunities for professional development. They also motivate teachers and students through incentives for improvement in school and classroom processes which contribute to students' academic achievement. In furtherance of this view, Huong (2020) and Khan et al. (2020) held that effective instructional leaders maintain high visibility through activities such as setting school direction and developing students and staff. These activities include redesigning the organization, developing a high level of trust in schools, and intervening in teaching improvement and student learning.

The protecting of instructional time, providing incentives for teachers, and promoting professional development together with motivations for learning and maintaining high visibility, which constitutes management functions of instructional leaders, form what Hallinger and Murphy (1985) referred to as the third dimension of instructional management model. This dimension of the instructional management model for Hallinger and Murphy is much broader in scope and purpose relative to the first two dimensions. The instructional leaders' tasks under this dimension observe and improve teaching instruction through classroom observation and professional development activities.

The final dimension is about assessing the instructional program. It involves the instructional leader's contribution to the planning, designing, administering, and analysis of assessments that evaluate the curriculum's effectiveness. Synonymous with successful schools is the systematic development of school instructionally for the schools' continuous enhancement with rewards aligned with purposes and practices. These functions Hallinger and Murphy (1985) further demand instructional leaders create an enabling environment and provide the support that ensures sustained improvement of teaching and learning.

Summary and Conclusions

Instructional leadership started during the movement of effective schools when outcomes of learning were given more importance than the administrative and managerial tasks of leaders. In sum, Hallinger (2005) articulated that instructional leaders effect changes by making certain that teachers teach and students learn, guaranteeing that

principals equip schools and classrooms with relevant facilities that enhance teaching practices and learning processes. Also, instructional leaders secure teachers' instructional and students learning time and safeguard and efficiently utilized by all teachers and administrators. In addition, instructional leaders plan school goals and objectives and guarantee that all stakeholders, teachers and students understand and comply with these goals and objectives and school administrators with the responsibility to plan curriculum programs, supervise and evaluate classroom instructions. These instructional leadership practices make certain that instructional hours and learning time are well-respected for teachers to teach efficiently by organizing teacher professional development programs and monitoring students' behaviors (Ismail et al., 2018).

The above review has revealed that for the past decades, there has been much emphasis on and utilization of instructional leadership in educational researches, administrative processes and practices, and politics has gained momentum, purposely due to the global call for an emphasis on accountability (Özdemir et al., 2020). Instructional leadership among the various leadership styles has been distinguished and emphasized in the educational organization circles due mainly to its focus on achieving success in the teaching-learning process is paramount. Hallinger (2012) explained that instructional leadership is well sought for in educational organizations due to its emphasis on increasing the school staff's satisfaction and transforming the school into a productive environment. The other reasons are the emphasis on resources, direction, and support principals give to teachers and students for the continuous improvement of teaching and learning.

Hou et al. (2019) observed that instructional leaders implementing effective policies and programs, and achieving the objectives of external accountability, render the instructional leadership approach become significant in education. Hence, the global recognition of school principals' leadership as a distinct element in understanding school effectiveness and success. But focusing on instructional leadership instead of the overall leadership of principals, Hou et al. asserted that establishing a robust instructional environment and increasing teachers' motivations in the form of incentives instructional leadership impacts students' academic achievement.

Instructional leadership consists of setting vibrant objectives, implementing curriculum, observing and facilitating the teaching process, providing resources, and appreciating teachers consistently to promote student learning and growth. The quality instruction of teachers is the top priority for the instructional head. Instructional leadership is devoted to the fundamental job of teaching, learning, and knowledge. It involves discussion with staff members regularly for facilitating their tasks and duties, which ultimately results in more effective learning of students (Nader et al., 2019). Therefore, it becomes expedient to explore the instructional leadership practices that support increased student achievement in Ghana's rural districts using a qualitative exploratory case study.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

This qualitative study explored the instructional leadership practices that support student achievement that can be applied in the rural K-12 public school districts in Ghana. This study established what school officials might need to change or focus on and implement more consistently to raise student outcomes in rural K-12 schools in Ghana. Concerning the achievement of this objective, the study surveyed the perspectives of circuit supervisors, administrators, and teachers of the specific activities administrators (principals) undertake by way of providing instructional leadership to improve teaching and learning.

Effective instructional leadership practices and programs may influence teachers' quality performance to increase student achievement (Butakor & Dziwornu, 2018; du Plessis, 2017). This study was inspired by a particular article (25 #1) of the Constitution of the Republic of Ghana to achieving equity and access to quality basic education (K-12) for all school-going children in Ghana (Tamakloe, 2018). In this chapter, I consider the research methods session, focused on an overview of research design and rationale, the role of the researcher, methodology, participant selection logic, instrumentation, procedures for recruitment for participation, and data collection, data analysis plan, issues of trustworthiness, ethical procedures, and the summary of the chapter.

Research Design and Rationale

The quest to improve school performance and student achievement through a deliberate and consistent focus on enhancing the instructional practices and learning

process and transforming the rural public school into a motivational learning environment and better performing schools served to drive this study (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). The administrator's instructional leadership role is more critical for ensuring effective teaching instruction and successful student learning. School principals who commit to and focus on a vision for their schools nurture their teachers' leadership capabilities to enhance their teaching practices (Wilkinson et al., 2019). Therefore, it was significant to explore the instructional leadership practices that support increased student achievements in rural communities. To carry through this objective, the following research questions were used to guide this study:

1. What instructional leadership practices do administrators implement to support public K-12 schools in Ghana to enhance student achievement?
2. What skills and abilities will administrators, supervisors, and teachers need to implement instructional practices that improve student achievement in the rural public K-12 schools in Ghana?

This study employed a qualitative exploratory case study approach to arrive at a description of the nature of the instructional leadership practices that administrators provide that support student achievement that can be applied in the rural K-12 public school districts in Ghana. Qualitative research methods were considered most suitable for this study because they would promote a deep understanding from the perspective of research participants of the instructional leadership practices that support increased student achievement in public K-12 schools with an emphasis on exploration and description (Creswell, 2013). Qualitative methods also emphasize people's lived

experiences and are deemed well-suited for making meanings that people place on the events, processes, and structures of their lives and their perceptions, presuppositions, and assumptions. Qualitative study was essential and suited for this topic since it is used to consider questions about people's experiences, inquire into the meanings people make of their experiences, and study people in the context of their social interpersonal environment (Gyamerah, 2019; Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

This study employed an exploratory case study (Yin, 1994) to explore the perspectives of teachers, principals, and circuit supervisors of the instructional leadership practices that support increased student achievement that can be applied in public K-12 schools in rural Ghana. Yin (2014) indicated that an exploratory case study is appropriate when there is no pre-determined outcome and when questions like "how" and "what" are involved. Again, exploratory case studies are relevant in a study when the researcher wishes, as understood by Yin, to gain an extensive and in-depth description of a social phenomenon.

Besides, with a case study, I could combine several qualitative techniques to meet the specific needs of the research situation. The other qualitative traditions, such as phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and narrative, were considered for the study, but the qualitative case study was deemed suitable. A case study is perhaps the most flexible methodology that allowed bending several traditions into a valid research design (Yin, 2014).

Semi-structured one-on-one interviews were used to collect first-hand knowledge of the situation from teachers, principals, and circuit supervisors in the rural and urban

school districts in Ghana, together with existing documents for the completion of the study (Creswell, 2013). Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, teleconferencing interviews were used to gather data for the study. The study occurred in rural and urban school settings by interviewing teachers, principals, and circuit supervisors and taking notes from schools' documents.

It was useful to ensure that there were essential conventions consistent and accurate with the intent, the validation, and the development of quality education. With these consistent and precise protocols, it would be less challenging to explain the students' lack of response or excellent performance (Andrade, 2019). In communicating to the education policymakers- Ministry of Education, GES, municipal and district education directorates, civil society organizations, and opinion leaders, the objectives of this study must be clear and unambiguous, leaving the audience understanding the logic of exploring the instructional leadership practices that administrators provide that support student achievement that can be applied in the rural K-12 public school districts in Ghana. The research questions were at the heart of this research, which anchored the problem and purpose statements, and guided the study's data collection and analysis (Burkholder et al., 2016; Gyamerah, 2019).

Role of the Researcher

Throughout the research process, the qualitative researcher assumes the role of the primary instrument of data collection through which data are mediated rather than through inventories and questionnaires. Thus, in Ravitch and Carl's (2016) view, the researcher's subjectivity, identity, positionality, and meaning-making shape the research

in terms of its methods and, therefore, shape the data and findings. I became part of the study because, in a qualitative study, the researcher engages with the participants through various data collection methods and analysis. Hence, my preconceived biases could easily impact my data collection or data analysis. In order to reduce this concern of preconceived biases, the bracketing method and note-keeping were used during data collection and data analysis to examine and reflect on my engagement with the data to ensure that personal biases never interfered with the research (Tufford & Newman, 2010).

As the researcher, I set well-defined research questions, reviewed the available information in the literature, identified case(s), and set the data collection protocols. Data coding and analysis strategies were selected to analyze and report the results of the study's findings. With this process of an exploratory case study, data codes were used to develop categories and from the various categories emerged the study's themes. The themes that emerged from the categories were the study's findings that answered the study's research questions (Saldana, 2013; Yin, 2014). The case study research method was used to investigate and document instructional leadership practices that support increased students' achievement in rural districts in Ghana.

In fulfilling this role of the researcher, there was a description of relevant aspects of self, including any biases and assumptions, expectations, and experiences to qualify my ability to conduct the research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Greenbank, 2003). The role of an observer or outsider was assumed in analyzing the responses of participants, thereby approaching this study as an outsider of the schools and districts selected for the

study. I did not have any direct role in the schools and the districts earmarked for the study, and I did not have any direct influence or relationship with the intended participants. I did not supervise them or worked with any of the participants in any capacity.

I served in these districts between 2007 and 2013 as a religious minister and did not know the participants professionally but served as a chairman of the National Commission of Civic Education in 2013 in one of the proposed rural districts in Ghana. Currently, none of the participants are employed in the same district where I worked. I attempted to access the study's participants' thoughts and feelings as a researcher without any personal relationship with the participants by identifying a problem, undertaking data collection, and analyzing information to find solutions to the problem to promote social transformation (Azungah, 2018). The rigor of the various aspects of the study and the study's integrity was ensured by guaranteeing the credibility, confirmability, dependability, and transferability (trustworthiness) of the research relied on my performance as a researcher.

My perspectives about the study, knowledge about positive social change, desires for positive social change, and human distractions could compromise and pervert what I heard from a participant, which predisposed me to confirmation bias in every interaction with participant data (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Therefore, my disposition to interpret too quickly was monitored, checked, and reduced. I practiced mindfulness meditation to become conscious whenever my thoughts were about previous knowledge instead of

being open and receptive to the conversation and the interviewee's information as a means of monitoring and reducing bias (see Gyamerah, 2020).

Methodology

Qualitative methods help researchers to gain a deeper understanding of people's perceptions of a particular phenomenon (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Yin (2014) described qualitative research as gathering data from a variety of resources, evaluating the data, analyzing evaluations to produce findings, and presenting the findings. This study was qualitative with an exploratory case study design. Yin observed that an exploratory case study explores the presumed causal links too complex for a survey or experiment.

An exploratory case study was conducted in which circuit supervisors, administrators, and teachers were asked the instructional leadership practices administrators implement to support enhanced student achievement and how administrators ascertain what may need to change or be implemented to increase student achievement in public K-12 schools in Ghana. Again, circuit supervisors, administrators, and teachers were asked about the challenges circuit supervisors, administrators, and teachers face in improving student achievement in public schools in Ghana and how the instructional leadership issues learned could be applied in the rural K-12 public schools in Ghana.

The study was located within the interpretivist paradigm, which indicates that there are multiple truths since reality is subjective and constructed from a person's life experiences, background, and social interactions (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). The interpretivist epistemology paradigm and the qualitative approach enabled the study to

produce data reflective of the participants' varied experiences in their natural settings (Al Riyami, 2015; Creswell, 2007) as school administrators (principals), circuit supervisors, and teachers. Qualitative research, in the view of Bowen (2009) and Blasé & Blasé (2000), explores behavior, attitude, and experience using multiple forms of data, like observation, interviews, and documents, rather than relying on a single data source. A qualitative approach is consistent with this study because the study sought to explore the perspectives of teachers, principals, and circuit supervisors of instructional leadership practices that improve student achievement in rural school districts.

This qualitative exploratory case study was based on one-on-one, semi-structured interviews to allow for follow up questions, in-depth investigation, and free participant responses of the research participants. SIP was another data source the study used. SIP, Escobar (2019), and Hunde and Desalegn (2019) revealed, are documents that detail educators' goals for improving educational practice and student outcomes and initiatives for achieving those goals. Reviewing this document helped guide the study's analysis with the details of the strategies and resources that support instruction to ascertain whether that support increased student achievement.

The data helped determine what instructional leadership practices principals can offer to support student achievement in rural districts. A purposive sampling technique was employed to select participants for this qualitative exploratory case study. Purposive sampling is a sampling selection technique where respondents are selected because they are information-rich and illuminative as they both offer useful manifestations of the points of interest and are relevant to the research questions (Patton, 2015).

Participant Selection Logic

Participants were selected from both urban and rural districts and schools and from primary and high school levels who comprised teachers, principals, and circuit supervisors in two public rural and urban primary and high schools in Ghana chosen through purposeful sampling (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The rural schools in Ghana continue to experience low student achievement. In contrast, the urban schools have higher student achievement. With this study, I hoped to identify those instructional leadership practices used in the higher achieving urban schools that can be applied to the rural schools in Ghana.

The participants must have 2 years or more of continuous service as a teacher, principal, and circuit supervisor in a rural or urban district. The interview questions drew from participants' understanding of instructional leadership practices in their school districts. I transcribed and analyzed the data collected through coding to identify and assign codes to the main concepts. The study further categorized and analyzed themes and key issues (Saldaña, 2016).

This study used a purposive sampling technique to select participants for this qualitative exploratory case study. Purposive sampling is a sampling selection technique where respondents are selected because they are information-rich and illuminative as they both offer useful manifestations of the points of interest and are relevant to the research questions (Yin, 2017). All three sampled groups must be teachers and administrators in schools and thus possess the required years of experience to teach and serve in the rural and urban districts for not less than 2 years.

These selected participants provided the necessary information relevant to the instructional leadership practices that support increased student achievement that can be applied in a rural public K-12 school in Ghana. In all, 12 participants were interviewed from three districts and three schools for data collection for the study, as presented by Tables 1, 2, and 3 below.

Table 1

Numbers of Participants and Categories of Schools Involved in This Study

Participants	Categories				Total
	Rural primary	Rural high	Urban primary	Urban high	
Supervisors	2	0	2	0	4
Principals	1	1	1	1	4
Teachers	1	1	1	1	4
Total	4	2	2	2	12

Note: These age distributions highlight the age groups of the study's rural and urban participants and their percentages.

Table 2

Number of Districts and Schools Involved in This Study

	Districts		Schools		Total
	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	
	2	1	2	1	6
Total	3		3		6

Note: The table indicates the number of rural and urban districts and schools in Ghana involved in the study

Instrumentation

This study explored the instructional leadership practices that administrators provide to support student achievement in rural districts in Ghana. This study sought to ascertain what may need to change or be implemented more consistently to increase student achievement in rural K-12 schools in Ghana. The instrumentation chosen for this qualitative research project was an interview. I employed open-ended questions to interview teachers, principals, and circuit supervisors in Ghana's rural and urban school districts and documents evaluation for data. Qualitative interviewing was used because it involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world as well as a splendid description of participants' behaviors, knowledge, experiences, and interactions shared through interview questions with me as the researcher. Thus, studying phenomena as a qualitative researcher in their natural environment, making meaning of them, or interpret these phenomena based on the meanings people bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013).

The qualitative interviewing as a data collection tool comprised the preset interview protocols (probes and sub questions) that I asked a person who met the criteria but was not participating in the study to agree to allow me to interview them using the interview protocol to ensure that the questions were clear and that their responses addressed the research questions. These instructions, were followed for the interview to ensure consistency and thus increased the reliability of findings. Open-ended questions and probes were utilized to assemble responses from the study's participants.

Owing to the geographical distance and difficulty in reaching participants, coupled with the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak and the cost involved, I considered conducting teleconferencing interviews. After recording the interview using an audio recording device, there was a verbatim transcription of the participant's responses, which were cross-checked with the interview notes taken during the interviews. Subsequently, the transcription was read back to the participants to authenticate and establish the transcript's precise details and accuracy. Lastly, the participants responses were analyzed, beginning with the interview transcript, and then the documents review to look for recurring and common ideas. These responses and transcripts were hand-coded to develop concepts and themes (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Saldaña, 2016).

Interviews

A qualitative interview, an interaction between an interviewer and the respondent in which the interviewer establishes a general direction plan for the conversation and pursues specific topics raised by the respondent (Babbie, 2017), was used to elicit information for the study. Interviews provided an opportunity to gather views and insight on the topic at hand. Exploring the instructional leadership practices that support increased student achievement in rural K-12 schools, the interview questions for the teachers, principals, and circuit supervisors were similar in content to gather purposeful and targeted data. These interview questions were based on the research questions of this study. Considering the process's voluntary nature, I forwarded documentation supporting privacy, ethical conduct, and participation letter to the prospective participants and

sought views from peers to review and provide feedback on the various data instruments used throughout this study.

There were semi-structured interviews conducted in one-on-one sessions. One-on-one semi-structured interviews afforded the researcher the flexibility and opportunity to interpret non-verbal clues of interviewees by observing interviewees' body language and facial expressions. The interviews were conducted during and after school hours for easy accessibility to some participants and at the same time at each participant's convenience. Interview sessions with each of the participants lasted for about 45 minutes to an hour, and the conversations were recorded with an audio-recorder. The location identified for the interviews provided participants with convenience and comfort due to its proximity to participants' duty posts. At the same time, the selected location gave them an assurance of security and privacy, which strengthened participants' confidence to share freely their knowledge without any uneasiness (Herzog, 2005). An audio-recorder and notetaking were used to capture the interviews followed by the transcription of the recorded proceedings from the interviews. I followed all the appropriate qualitative study protocols to ensure data reliability, secured participants' privacy, and enhanced ethical conduct. The researcher and the participants reviewed the data this study gathered from the interview sessions to ensure consistency and reliability. The information collected from the participants were stored in a secure area to ensure privacy and followed ethical practices.

Documents

The review of existing, relevant, and contextual documents, according to Patton (2015), are an essential aspect of the data collection and the process of analysis. Naturally occurring documents that are a significant source of context and history help researchers understand the complexities of what we study better by providing a form of data triangulation to first-person accounts. In this case, the data from these documents supplemented the forms of data that the study participants provided through data collection processes.

This study used official document such as School Improvement Plan (SIP) that was useful for contextualizing and relating to instructional leadership practices that support increased student achievement and the context more broadly. SIPs are documents that detail educator's goals for improving educational practice and student outcomes, and initiatives for achieving those goals. SIPs are specific plans that each school or school district strategically creates as a planning process to improve organizational processes, operations, and student outcomes and refines periodically to guide its work in enhancing achievements for all students (Escobar, 2019; Meyers, & VanGronigen, 2019). Through planning, educators use data to determine how and where to direct and focus resources to achieve specific goals (Ghana Education Service, 2008).

SIPs outline the school's goals, how directors and supervisors can support educators through professional development, what data to monitor, and how to engage and collaborate with parents and community to raise student achievement (Escobar, 2019; Ghana Education Service, 2008; Kwaah & Ampiah, 2018). What was learned in the SIPs

were used in my data analysis and interpretation. As the local manager of schools, I had access SIP, because SIPs were available document for supervisors, principals, and teachers to improve teaching and learning to drive school improvement. Reviewing this document guided the study's analysis with the details of the strategies and resources that teachers receive to support their instructional practices to ascertain whether those teaching practices support increased student achievement at the school. The review and triangulation of these documents concerning primary empirical data were essential to understanding the context in which this research happened and gave credence to data collected (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

This method was relevant and suitable for this study as it offered an opportunity for considering heterogeneous viewpoints of participants (teachers, principals, and circuit supervisors). I adopted these multiple perspectives to advance some instructional leadership practices that support rural schools' instructional practices, what needs to change, and what to implement from the insiders' perspective and experience to support increased student achievement. This approach was appropriate because my interest and focus was to explore the instructional leadership practices that support increased student achievement of public K-12 schools in rural Ghana. Most research in this area had, until this point, been carried out from the outside rather than the insider perspective. There were some modifications to suit my purpose of studying social change based on the mission of Walden University.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Participants' selection to provide qualitative data was in consultation with the district education directors and circuit supervisors. The selection was based on serving in these rural and urban districts as supervisors, principals, and teachers with not less than two years of professional experience. After receiving district and IRB approval to conduct the study, I contacted the district education director and Circuit supervisors, who helped me select one school from each of the three rural and urban districts.

Haven identified the schools and participant pool, the teachers, principals, and supervisors (participants) were invited to participate in the study by sending a letter or email. These letters and emails contained the consent form, which explained the study's purpose and procedures. The invitation letters or emails also contained the study's voluntary nature, risks, and benefits of participating in the study. The consent form elaborated the payment of participants as well as the participants' privacy, which assured them that the researcher would neither reveal the identity of participants nor used their personal information for any purpose besides this research project. Those who agreed to participate returned the consent form and formal agreement either by signature or an email stating, "I agree." I then contacted those who had agreed to participate in the study to schedule a date and time for the interviews.

Included in this research process was an examination of qualitative data to gather a robust view of instructional leadership practices that support student achievement. The study with qualitative data will explore individuals' perspectives and, more importantly, gather data from interviews and document evaluations. The data collected was reviewed

and examined for patterns, themes, and trends to facilitate and inform conclusions from the participants and other data sources. I authenticated data with some additional review methods and processes to ensure the study's consistency and clarity. This study employed one-on-one semi-structured interviews and document reviews to explore the instructional leadership practices that support increased student achievement in rural K-12 schools. In collecting qualitative data, there were interview data relative to the perspectives of teachers, principals, and circuit supervisors from rural and urban school districts in Ghana and a review of document data.

As a backup plan to get participants for the study in case the recruiters failed to turn up or met the required criteria participants needed for the study, I would, as part of participant selection, sample additional six participants (two teachers, two principals, and two circuit supervisors) from both the rural and urban school districts. These participants would have to meet all the relevant criteria for selection. From this group, I would resort to in the event of participant withdrawal or unavailability due to any circumstance. After reviewing the transcripts and results of the study, and there was no further need for clarification, I thanked the participants for their participation and then exited the study.

One essential component of all research is follow-up procedures, which can be conducted many times during the actual research and can also be afterward. Follow-up interviews in research generally increase the research effort's overall effectiveness, further the goal in a particular study, and review new developments (Morgan, 2015). In case there would be the need for follow-up interviews for additional information, there would be an initial contact (in person, by phone, or by e-mail) to ascertain participant's

availability, willingness, and preparedness to be interviewed, the suitable times, and the participant's capability and experience to be included in the study. They were teachers, principals, and circuit supervisors with two or more working experience.

I arranged the interview date, time, and topic beforehand and sent a letter or e-mail of introduction containing the research's consent form and preamble. I was clear with the interview duration and made available my contact information if any interviewee wished to withdraw or change the time scheduled for the interviews. The interview took place in a location convenient and conducive for the participant (Bolderston, 2012). After debriefing with participants, I thanked them for their participation and exited the study.

Data Analysis Plan

As a way of member checking, after I had transcribed each interview, participants were asked to review the transcripts to ensure that they were the true representation of what the interviewees said. Subsequently, I made any necessary revisions based on their feedback. The second member checking happened after I had completed the data analysis, where participants were asked to review the results of the analysis of the study.

In the view of Yin (1994), the case study method is an empirical study that investigates a social phenomenon within its natural context. Interview techniques are typical of the case study method in addressing the 'how' and 'why' research question types. Although the strategies to collect data using interview techniques are well defined, there is an issue associated with any research, which is interpreting the resulting data (Yin, 2014).

To undertake this exploratory case study data's successful analysis, I explained the study using the data from the semi-structured interviews. The document review helped to add context to the interview data for a reliable conclusion. The interviews were conducted using the English language, the official working language of Ghana.

Based on research questions, the study's data was analyzed from the interviews with participants and recorded with a tape recorder, and subsequently transcribed in a word document. There was the initial analysis of the data by using codes and coding techniques to recognize and identify concepts, themes, events, and examples to bring out the interrelationships among these classifications of data guided by the research objectives, the research questions, and the propositions (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). I analyzed data from different interviewees and document reviews, examined data to organize into categories, and from these categories emerged the themes, concepts, or similar features. First, I listened to each recorded interview, read and re-read the transcripts to fully appreciate and understand the interviews, and then identified the categories and units of meanings.

Discrepant data is contradictory information derived from participants, which often may lead the researchers to a finding that will likely be viewed as logical. Researchers should interpret discrepant data as being in a reciprocal relationship rather than an oppositional one (Noble & Smith, 2015). They can reveal potential flaws in the construction of measuring instruments to researchers, for instance, the unintended ambiguity in the depth of participants' responses (DiLoreto & Gaines, 2016; Noble & Smith, 2015).

To treat this study's discrepant data, I evaluated the discrepant information by checking with participants by returning the transcripts to the participants for review and additional information for the needed clarification. I also collected additional data and interviewed additional participants from suburban districts, which were mostly higher-performing districts, to make more comparisons (Creswell, 2007). Again, I treated discrepant data by sorting out, examining, and accounting for the analysis to prevent researcher bias from interfering with or alter the data and any insights offered by participants (Anderson, 2010).

Issues of Trustworthiness

After coding the information gathered from the document and the responses and follow-up to the participants' responses, the common themes that run through all the sources were articulated and analyzed, and the results built around these themes. The study's trustworthiness of its findings in terms of confirmability, credibility, dependability, and transferability was then explained.

Trustworthiness in qualitative research is among the ways the researcher can succeed in persuading himself and readers about his research findings' worthiness and so deserve attention (Nowell et al., 2017). Some characteristics of excellent qualitative research are robustness, well-informed, thorough documentation, naturalistic, and interpretive. They persuade themselves and the audiences that the research findings are worthy of attention (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Together with other qualitative research characteristics such as systematic, a careful process of identifying the problem, collecting and analyzing data, explaining and

evaluating data, and data interpretation establish the trustworthiness of qualitative research. That is, in conducting qualitative research, ensuring its rigor and quality is paramount. In qualitative research, the quality standards established by researchers to judge the rigor of qualitative research are expressed in terms of the study's findings' trustworthiness or expressed through how an inquirer can persuade themselves and the audiences that the results of the research are worthy of attention (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

In qualitative research, the quality standards established by researchers to judge the rigor of qualitative research are expressed in terms of the study's findings' trustworthiness or expressed through how an inquirer can persuade themselves and the audiences that the findings of the research are worthy of attention (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Trustworthiness maintains that a qualitative study should contain the same vigorous procedures as any other study. The purpose of the research, how to conduct the research, procedural decisions, and data collection and management details should be transparent and explicit (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2014).

A reviewer should follow the progression of events and decisions and, with ease, understand their logic because there is an adequate description, explanation, and justification of the methodology and methods. Observer effects, multiple researchers, and the use of member checks are various ways of assessing a qualitative research method (Burkholder et al., 2016). Concerning trustworthiness, after I completed the transcription of the interview responses, and allowed the participant to review his responses for member checking by reading back to interviewees the transcript while clarifying their

responses. With the participants confirming their answers with nothing to change, I hand-coded the data and generated the study's themes (See Gyamerah, 2020).

Credibility

In qualitative research, the concept of credibility concerns the extent to which the research findings and conclusions can be considered credible and viewed as convincing. Similarly, qualitative credibility research concerns the truthfulness and authenticity of the findings and the extent to which they reflect the reality of the phenomenon to be investigated. Thus, to establish the credibility of this study, I needed to be certain in understanding the research participants, the research context, and all the relevant processes, including the interpretations, were as accurate and exhaustive as possible (Nassaji, 2020).

As a strategy to ensure data credibility, member checking, or participant validation, sharing the data and interpretations with the research participants to verify whether there was agreement among them or otherwise. Another appropriate strategy is triangulation, which involves using multiple data collection methods, sources, explanations, or perspectives. Triangulation helps qualitative researchers achieve a more accurate and comprehensive understanding of the problem under investigation, thereby increasing the study's findings' validity and credibility (Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Nassaji, 2020).

Another appropriate strategy used to make certain that there was confidence in the study's integrity was triangulation. I used multiple data sources to develop a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under consideration. Triangulation

helped established whether the research findings represented the possible information gathered from the participant and the document sources were the correct interpretation of the sources' original views. Through triangulation, I collected data utilizing multiple data collection methods (Korstjens & Moser, 2018)-telephone interviews, field notes, and document evaluations. I read back the interview transcript to the participants as a way of member checking, persistent in observation when developing the codes, categories, and themes, which helped me examine the data's characteristics. I regularly read and reread the data, analyzed it, and revised it to reflect the sources' intended depth of insight accordingly (See Gyamerah, 2020; Nowell et al., 2017).

Transferability

Transferability in qualitative research means the extent to which qualitative researchers' interpretation or conclusions of the study can be transferable to other similar contexts. Ensuring the transferability of qualitative researchers' interpretation or conclusions requires the researcher's exhaustive description of the research's activities and assumptions (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Transferability in qualitative research is comparable with generalizability in quantitative research.

Due to the interpretive nature of qualitative research and the often-limited number of study participants coupled with the non-representative of the population, the findings cannot be generalizable relative to the context used in quantitative research (Nassaji, 2020). Transferability, therefore, should not be meant for the qualitative researcher to establish generalizable claims. Instead, qualitative researchers should provide exhaustive details for users wanting to make transfer a possibility to do so (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

This qualitative research inquiry can be generalizable and expanded upon to identify the successes and challenges in various communities, other geographical locations and how to implement the instructional leadership practices that support increased student achievements in rural public K-12 schools to occasion a positive social change in these rural communities to benefit society (Nowell et al., 2017). I provided an account of descriptive data, thus the context in which I undertook the research, the setting, sample, interview procedure, topics, excerpts from the interview guide, and the documents used (See Gyamerah, 2020).

Dependability

Dependability, which includes the consistency of findings, specifies that the researcher should report the research study in the context of qualitative research. Other researchers possibly can result in similar interpretations should they review the data (Nassaji, 2020). Dependability involves participants' evaluation of the findings, analysis, and study recommendations to support the data as exactly received from participants of the study (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

A useful strategy to establish the study's dependability was checking whether the study's analysis process followed accepted standards for a particular design. Another strategy to enhance dependability was by carefully documenting every research activity's details and the conclusions of the research or documenting every alteration that occurred as the research unfolded and evolved. This careful documentation of every activity and change that occurred in research could subsequently be reviewed to examine their

accuracy and to what degree the conclusions were grounded in the data by an outside researcher (Nassaji, 2020).

Confirmability

Confirmability discusses the aspect of neutrality in qualitative research and concerns the extent to which other people confirm the researcher's interpretations and conclusions. Confirmability in qualitative research bears a resemblance to replicability, which has to do with what extent to reproduce a study (Nassaji, 2020). With the qualitative research emphasis on the researcher's operational role and engagement in the research, the researcher of qualitative research is required to secure the data's inter-subjectivity. Therefore, data interpretation must be grounded in the data rather than on the researcher's select preferences and viewpoints, emphasizing the interpretation process encapsulated in the analysis of the study (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

This research study ensured confirmability through the meticulous documentation of the various procedures for checking and rechecking the data throughout the study. This research's confirmability was ensured by establishing and describing the data and the findings to such a degree that others can confirm their accuracy (Nassaji, 2020). After the study, conducting a data audit became an essential strategy for examining the data collection procedures and making judgments regarding the potential biases to ensure neutrality.

Triangulation was another strategy to establish confirmability, and in this context, to minimize the researcher's bias (Shenton, 2004). Another strategy to enhance dependability was by carefully documenting every research activity's details and

conclusions or documenting every alteration that occurs as the research unfolds and evolves. This careful documentation of every activity and change in research can subsequently be reviewed to examine their accuracy and the degree to which the conclusions will be grounded in the data by an outside researcher (Nassaji, 2020).

Ethical Procedures

The study's participants included teachers, principals, and circuit supervisors, who voluntarily offered to participate throughout the process and should they encountered challenges or contested any aspect of the process to inconvenience or impact negatively on them, they were at the liberty, and it was within their right to withdraw their participation. Before I revealed to participants the study processes, there was first an orientation to equip participants with the relevance of the various stages and aspects of their participation. In order to achieve the purpose of this qualitative study (to explore the instructional leadership practices that administrators provide to support student achievement in the rural districts in Ghana), there was similar interview question administered to all the participants in fashion to collect purposeful data that stemmed from the research questions of the study.

Before collecting data from participants for the study, I applied for permission to carry out research work from Walden Institutional Review Board (IRB). After receiving IRB approval to conduct the study, I contacted the gatekeepers of the education directorates of the four rural school districts in Ghana and sought the participants for their consent before beginning to engage them in the study. A letter or email containing the consent form, which tells the study's purpose and procedures, specifying the study's

voluntary nature, risks, and benefits of participating in the study, was sent to the participants.

The consent form explained the payment of participants and the participants' privacy, assuring them that the researcher would neither reveal the identity of participants nor use their personal information for any purpose besides this research project. Thus, the participants were assured of confidentiality, that through the use of pseudonyms, or specific identifying facts would be changed or not disclosed. Thus, I did not include identifying information like participants' names, unique attributes in the final report.

Proper data storage and management security were paramount in protecting participants' confidentiality. I stored securely in locked file cabinets in a secured building data on transportable media such as flash memory devices, audio recorder, portable external drives, and paper documents of participants to ensure data confidentiality. I activated and configured 15 minutes lock-out functions for my computers' screen savers and created passwords difficult to determine for the computers used for the data analysis and storage for data protection confidentiality. This stored data would be kept for a minimum of 3 years. Only I, the researcher, have access to the data and would be securely destroyed by shredding all paper files with personal identifying information of participants and files on memory drives, laptops, and file serves permanently deleted (Patel, 2016).

I carefully considered all possible ways that data security could be compromised for strategic planning right from the study's outset (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Interview sessions with each participant lasted for about 45 minutes to an hour, and the

conversations were recorded with an audio recorder. I augmented the audio recording with notes taking to make up for the malfunction of the audio recorder.

Data was collected and analyzed thematically. This process of collecting and analyzing data thematically involved the transcription of the audio-recorded interviews by immersing in the transcripts to identify relevant themes. I coded the data into themes and then discussed the data to form frameworks based on the identified themes. Each participant was designated with a unique serial number to assign and attribute specific comments and ideas to the particular interviewees. For the category of teachers, their serial number will be TR-1 to TR-4, the category of principals will be PP-1 to PP-4, and that of circuit supervisors will be CS-1 to CS-4. But to avoid confusion, participants were assigned numbers P1 to P12.

Summary

The study employed a qualitative exploratory case study to explore the instructional leadership practices that administrators provide that support student achievement that can be applied in the rural K-12 public school districts in Ghana. This exploratory case study addressed the research questions: What instructional leadership practices do administrators implement to support public K-12 schools in Ghana to enhance student achievement? What skills and abilities will administrators, supervisors, and teachers need to implement instructional practices that improve student achievement in the rural public K-12 schools in Ghana?

Qualitative methods provided a detailed description of the research participants' behaviors, knowledge, experiences, and interactions who shared their experiences

through interview questions with me, the researcher. The thematic and cross-case analysis enabled me to know more about the relevance or applicability of the findings to other similar settings and be important to this study. The cross-case analysis allowed me to dive deeper into the findings to determine if the cases were typical or diverse (Larsen & Searle, 2017). The purpose of chapter four was to present the findings from the research study based on the guiding research questions.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

Quality education is significant to the transformation of every country as it facilitates the development of the human capacity to transform the natural resources to advance the quality of the standard of living of the people. The provision of quality education calls for the efficient and effective management of the available human and material resources in the sector. Excellent principals and administrators build a school climate that ensures teachers' growth, school improvement, and student achievements by their clear direction, developing teachers' abilities and aptitudes, and establishing high achievable expectations for teachers and students (Cheung et al., 2018). Hence, effective school leadership, evaluation, and supervision of teaching and learning, which are essential components of educational administration, are fundamental to impacting quality academic achievement and the education system's goals (Ampofo et al., 2019).

Chapter 4 of this study presents and discusses the results gathered from the study's participants on instructional leadership practices that can be applied in the rural K-12 public school districts in Ghana. This qualitative exploratory case study was designed to identify the effective instructional leadership practices that the urban school administrators provide that support student achievement that can be applied in the rural low-performing K-12 public school districts in Ghana to increase student achievement. The two research questions, the Hallinger and Murphy's (1985) instructional management model (the conceptual framework), which proposes the dimensions and

specific functions instructional leaders provide for the effective school, and quality achievements, guided the study. The study's research questions are:

RQ1: What instructional leadership practices do administrators implement to support public K-12 schools to enhance student achievement in the rural districts in Ghana?

RQ2: What skills and abilities will administrators, supervisors, and teachers need to implement instructional practices that improve student achievement in the rural public K-12 schools in Ghana?

Probes were used as follow-up questions to support each of the study's research questions (see interview protocols in Appendix).

In this section, I consider and discuss the pilot study to the main project and the research setting. The analysis focuses mainly on organizational conditions that might have influenced the participants' responses to the interview and the participants' demographics, which also involved looking at the participants' profiles. Using the purposive sampling technique, 12 participants, including teachers, administrators (principals), and circuit supervisors, were selected from rural and urban school districts in Ghana for the study.

Interviews were used to draw from the participants' perspectives of instructional leadership practices in their school districts because they possessed the required years of teaching experience and had served in the rural and urban districts for not less than 2 years. The participants provided the information relevant to the instructional leadership practices from urban and rural schools that would support increased student achievement

that can be applied in a rural public K-12 school in Ghana. The data collection section includes the methodology used in gathering data for the study. The next section deals with data analysis, where the data collection process was discussed. It was critical to develop and adhere to clearly defined criteria that could account for the study's quality.

The evidence of trustworthiness, which involved ensuring the study's credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, was examined. Trustworthiness, according to Lincoln and Guba (1985), is a fundamental requirement in qualitative paradigms. To establish the study's trustworthiness, I explain the study's topic, methods, sampling technique, settings, participants demographics, experiences, and perspectives, thus allowing readers to apply the information proffered to suit their individual situations. The study's results are examined, considering the themes developed, the tables, and graphics that might be relevant and applicable to illustrate the results. The study's data were analyzed and revealed the following thematic areas:

1. Effective leadership and instructional leadership practices.
2. Planning and implementing school improvement programs.
3. Application of instructional leadership practices.
4. Challenges to effective instructional leadership practices.
5. The role of educators in student achievements.
6. Evaluating instructional leadership practices.

Finally, there is a summary of the study's findings relative to the study's research questions and a transition to Chapter 5 of the study, which comprised of the interpretation of the findings, recommendations, limitations, implications, and conclusion of the study.

Pilot Study

After receiving IRB approval to collect data from the field, a pilot study was conducted before the actual data collection. I conducted a pilot study to ensure the validity and reliability of research questions and also to help me hone my interview skills. As observed by Ravitch and Carl (2016), a pilot study is used to test a study's data collection instruments in order to develop and refine them. The pilot study was conducted with friends in education who met the qualification as the study's sampling criteria. This study was audio-recorded with the permission of the participants. The interviews data were transcribed and analyzed to refine the main study's instruments. I analyzed the pilot interview data to examine the data relative to my research question to ascertain if the data generated could answer the final study's research questions.

The data for the pilot study was not included in the final research, neither did it call for any changes in the research questions and the study's instruments. Instead, it helped to test understanding and check how easy or difficult the study's format was to follow, and how the flow of information was logical. It also helped to check how the study's participants would interpret the items in the research instruments.

Research Setting

The study's participants included teachers, administrators (principals), and circuit supervisors who voluntarily offered to participate throughout the process. The participants were selected from both urban and rural public school districts, both primary and high schools. The interview hours were scheduled based on participants' availability. The individual interviews were conducted via teleconferencing. The participants chose

their preferred setting for the interviews, most of the locations being their staff rooms or classrooms. Due to unreliable internet connectivity, two participants had to reschedule their interview days and times to travel to the city for uninterrupted phone interaction.

All the participants were satisfied with the interview processes, and none had any qualms with the audio recordings and the other protocols. Each interview was transcribed after each session. Notes were taken during the interviews to compare with and clarify the participant's comments and statements in order to better reflect participants' responses. None of the participants shared any concerns about arrangements, occurrences, institutional challenges, personal issues, monetary constraints, or natural happenings obstructing the process and the responses.

Demographics

This section discusses the demographic characteristics of participants. The study's participants' demographics were given particular attention in considering the phenomenon of interest of the study. This was because thorough description of participants' demographic characteristics may allow readers to determine to whom the study's findings generalize and allow for comparisons across replications of studies. The demographics of selected participants were representative of the teachers, principals, and circuit supervisors in the public rural and urban primary and high schools in Ghana. There were 12 participants drawn from three districts and three schools. Four of the participants were teachers, four administrators (principals), and four circuit supervisors. Six were from the urban school districts, and the other six were from the rural school

districts. The participants had 2 years or more of continuous service in a rural or urban district as teachers, principals, and circuit supervisors.

This study used a purposive sampling technique to select participants for this qualitative exploratory case study. All three sampled groups were teachers and administrators in schools and thus possessed the required years of experience to teach and serve in the rural and urban districts for not less than 2 years. These participants provided information relevant to the instructional leadership practices from urban and rural schools that would support increased student achievement that can be applied in a rural public K-12 school in Ghana.

These demographic characteristics of participants highlighted the highest qualification, job positions, working experience in current positions, and working experience in their respective districts. Table 4 and Table 5 below represent the participants' demographics characteristics for this study according to where they work, either in a rural or urban district.

Table 3*Demographics for Rural Districts Participants*

Participant number (P)	Highest qualification	Job position	Working experience in current position	Working experience in current district
P1	Teacher Certificate "A"	Teacher	16 years	12 years
P2	Diploma in Education	Administrator	12 years	5 years
P3	Diploma in Education	Teacher	9 years	9 years
P4	Bachelor's in Education	Circuit supervisor	7 years	2 years
P8	Diploma in Education	Circuit supervisor	9 years	15 years
P12	Diploma in Education	Administrator	11 years	18 years

Note. These demographic characteristics of respondents highlighted the highest qualification, job positions, working experience in current positions, and working experience in their respective districts of participants from rural districts.

P. represents participants of the study

Table 4*Demographics for Urban Districts Participants*

Participant number (P)	Highest qualification	Job position	Working experience In current position	Working Experience in current district
P5	Master of Philosophy (M. Phil.)	Administrator	10 years	10 years
P6	Master of Science (MSc)	Teacher	17 years	12 years
P7	Diploma in Education	Administrator	19 years	11 years
P9	Bachelor's in Education	Teacher	10 years	10 years
P10	Master of Science (MSc)	Circuit supervisor	6 years	14 years
P11	Master of Philosophy (M. Phil.)	Circuit supervisor	3 years	9 years

Note. These demographic characteristics of respondents highlighted the highest qualification, job positions, working experience in current positions, and working experience in their respective districts of participants from urban districts.

P. represents participants in the study.

As shown in Table 5, the demographic characteristics of participants from the rural districts, one of the participants (P1) is a Teacher Certificate “A” holder, four of the respondents (P2, P3, P4) are Diploma in Education holders, and one (P12) is a bachelor’s degree holder. Also, as shown on Table 4, the demographic characteristics of participants from the urban districts, four (P5, P6, P10, P11) have master’s degrees as their highest

educational qualification for the urban district participants. Only P7 and P9 had a Diploma in Education and bachelor's degree respectively as their highest educational qualification. The participants' demographic information suggests that most participants have in-depth experience and reasonable knowledge about the subject area and the dynamics of rural and urban school districts, which may have positively influenced their responses to the study's questions.

Table 5

Respondents' Age Groups

Age range	Urban	Rural	Total number	Total percentage (%)
21-30 years	1	3	4	17
31-40 years	1	1	2	33
41-50 years	3	2	5	42
51 years and above		1	1	8
Total			12	100

Note: These age distributions highlight the age groups of the study's rural and urban participants and their percentages.

Table 5 highlights the age groupings of the study's participants. From Table 5, five participants representing 42% were within the age range of 41 and 50. Two of the participants representing 17%, were within the age range of 31 and 40, while four, representing 33% of participants, were between 21 and 30 years old, and one, representing 8%, was above 51 years old. These age demographic characteristics of the study's participants indicated that most of the participants with the advantage of older age and experiences in teaching, administration, and supervision were from the urban school

districts. On the other hand, most of the younger participants (21- 30 years old), probably with little or no experience in teaching and administration, were from rural school districts.

In Ghana, like many African countries, educators prefer to teach in urban areas. Hence, most schools in rural areas become empty with principals and teachers or have longer delays in filling posts. Even if posts are filled, rural schools may have novice principals, newly trained teachers, and less experienced or fewer qualified educators. Rural schools have less experienced teachers, with the more experienced ones working their way to urban and desired schools (Anlimachie & Avoada, 2020; Evans & Yuan, 2018). The demographic information of the participants of this study may be relevant in providing a degree of inference that might be useful in the discussion and the study's findings.

Data Collection

Data were gathered for this study through one-on-one semi-structured interviews and review of Schools' Improvement Plan (SIPs) to validate interview data. The semi-structured interviews for the data collection used the interview protocols gleaned from the study's research question, conceptual framework, and literature. Twelve participants who were teachers, administrators (principals), and circuit supervisors from rural and urban school districts in Ghana responded to the study's interview questions.

The interviews were conducted through telephone conferencing at locations chosen by the interviewees for their convenience and comfortability to facilitate quality data collection. The participants were furnished with conference call numbers and access

codes to dial in to join in the conference for the interviews. Before the interviews, I thanked the participants for their time and participation, reviewed the interview protocols, particularly the consent form, and stressed the participant's right to withdraw whenever they desired.

Each of the interviews were recorded with a Sonny Audio recorder with a memory chip for safe storage. Each participant was thanked after each interview session and was informed that I might be contacting them for further information or clarification, when necessary, after the transcription and the results. I conducted the interviews within 21 days, which allowed ample time to accommodate the 12 participants and achieve data saturation. Each participant was designated a unique serial number (P1, P2, P3...P12) that attributed comments and ideas which were specific to each interviewee. Interviews provided the opportunity to gather views and insights on the instructional leadership practices that support increased student achievement in rural K-12 schools. The same questions were administered to the teachers, principals, and circuit supervisors to gather purposeful and targeted data.

The interviews were conducted during and after school hours for participants' easy accessibility and convenience. The English language was used for all the interviews without any difficulty because all the study's participants spoke and understood the English language, which is the official language of the participants. Interview sessions with each participant lasted between 45 minutes and 1 hour, and the conversations were recorded with an audio recorder and notes taken. The locations selected by the participants for the interviews, provided the participants with convenience, and comfort

and, at the same time, served to protect their privacy and strengthened their confidence (Herzog, 2005).

Data Analysis

I completed the data analysis of this study after all the interviews were completed. The interviews were transcribed by following all the appropriate qualitative study protocols to ensure data reliability and secure participants' privacy and ethical conduct. During the analysis, data gathered through the interview was reviewed by reading and rereading the interviews' transcripts to become familiar with the collected and coded interview data. I commenced the study's thematic data analysis process by coding each transcript separately and, using a flexible open coding approach, arranged the data gathered comprehensively and logically (Braun & Clarke, 2014).

Braun and Clarke (2014) explained open code generation to mean data organization in an orderly and meaningful way. This process of data generation assisted me in classifying the interview data collected from the study's participants into smaller units, easy to comprehend to facilitate meaningful analysis. I began analyzing the individual participant's responses, keeping track of the general pattern of participants' perception, paying significant attention to emphasis, repetitions, break-in thought patterns and the data direction. Meaningful codes were assigned to data, considering and flushing out all repeated information for better quality coded data. Subsequently, codes were categorized into categories that shared similar characteristics and common relationships, giving rise to suggested themes (Braun & Clarke, 2014; Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Braun and Clarke (2019) observed that developing code and themes in qualitative analysis can be possible through either inductive approach, thus, resulting from the data content of collated data or through a deductive approach (based on the existing literature, views, perceptions, concepts, and theories). The themes developed sprang from the generated codes and patterns of codes that ensued from the data information of participants from the interviews. The thematic analysis of the study's data would result from, in the view of Ravitch and Carl (2016), how the code from the data relates and connects to the generated themes and the theory serving as the study's framework.

The codes generated that aligned to each other to discover specific categories that emerged from the interview data to form relevant themes were reviewed (Saldana, 2016). I turned to axial coding at this stage, which Ravitch and Carl (2016) explained as grouping open codes to form categories to confirm the primary and open-coded data information to develop relationships among codes. This coding approach enabled me to move from chunks of codes to coding categories to situate the sets of concepts related to each other to make the study's arguments and develop my findings. Temporary themes were formed based on the connections among the codes and the designated temporary themes for each group (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

The study's themes emerged from the resulting patterns from the axial coding. There was the searching for patterns among the codes and data from all 12 participants from these codes. The resultant patterns became emerging or temporary themes, which were subsequently arranged into broader themes relative to the study's conceptual

framework and the research questions, which informed the study's thematic data analysis approach (Saldana, 2016).

There were several codes related to instructional leadership practices, and instructional leaders' professional competencies, development, and school improvement that I developed into themes. A copy of the study's outcomes was sent to the participants through their emails for clarifications as a means of member checking for assurance of quality. Whatever clarifications were proffered by participants were reflected in the description to enrich the study's outcomes. This member checking approach helped minimize possible personal biases and contributed to the study's validity (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

The member checking approach was significant to establishing trustworthiness and integrity during the data collection process and data collected. Through the data collection and the following of the necessary protocol therein, I enriched my experiences and understanding of the instructional leadership practices that support increased student achievements in the rural public K-12 school in Ghana. Furthermore, member checking helped me clarify every possible misinterpretation and misrepresentation of the participant's information by transcribing interviews and analysis. Thus, through the process of member checking, participants' information review with committee members, and reflecting on data, I managed to reduce personal bias to ensure data integrity and contribute to the study's trustworthiness (Creswell, 2007). Table 7 below presents the overview of the codes and axial codes organized into emergent themes.

Table 6*Overview of Codes and Axial Codes Organized into Emergent Themes*

Codes	Categories	Themes
<p>RQ1. What instructional leadership practices do administrators implement to support public K-12 schools in Ghana to enhance student achievement?</p>		
<p>Code 1. Coordinating and promoting effective practices in the teaching and learning processes; Evaluating and assessing teaching instructions and student learning.</p>	<p>Instructional practices</p>	<p>Theme 1. Effective instructional leadership practices</p>
<p>Code 2. Collaborating with stakeholders to create a conducive school climate for effective school and learning.</p>	<p>Engagement</p>	<p>Theme 2. Planning and implementing school improvement programs.</p>
<p>Code 3. Inadequate resources, infrastructural deficit, and lack teacher motivation.</p>	<p>Setbacks</p>	<p>Theme 3. Challenges to effective instructional leadership practices.</p>

RQ 2. What skills and abilities will administrators, supervisors, and teachers need to implement instructional leadership practices that improve student achievement in the rural public K-12 schools in Ghana?

Code1. Teaching, supervising and observing classroom instructions.	Responsibilities	Theme1. The role of educators in student achievements.
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Code 2. In-service training programs for educators, updating workshops, and advanced studies.	Professional development	Theme 2. Empowerment
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Code 3. Provision of resources, effective monitoring and supervision.	School Improvement	Theme 3. Application of instructional leadership practices.
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Note. From the interview transcripts of administrators, teachers, and circuit supervisors of the study, the following codes, categories, and themes emerged.

With my experiences and knowledge in the phenomenon of interest and the possible biases resulting thereof, I personally reflected on my practices to prevent and minimize biases (Galdas, 2017). As I reflected on my techniques and considered my own experiences as a headteacher and local manager of schools, it enabled me to bracket my knowledge, experiences, and biases to listen with an open mind to the experiences and responses discussed by the study's participants. Being conscious of personal biases during interviewing allowed me to follow all relevant protocols conscientiously and systematically while interviewing the study's participants to gather valid data.

Discrepant data is contradictory information derived from participants, which may lead the researchers to a finding that will likely be viewed as illogical (Creswell & Miller, 2000). While conducting data analysis, there emerged cases where some participants demonstrated similar experiences manifested in the patterns that emerged during the coding of interview data to develop themes. These similarities were carefully examined as they reflected in all the responses to the study's research questions. Although these similarities were not discrepant data per se, the information was evaluated through checking with participants by returning the transcripts to the participants for review and additional information for the needed clarification.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Credibility

Credibility means ensuring that people can consider the study's findings and conclusions as credible and view them as convincing, truthful, and authentic, reflecting the reality of the phenomenon investigated. In trying to establish the study's credibility, the research participants, the research content, all the processes, and the interpretations of every information were ascertained to be accurate and exhaustive. The study's questions were piloted with friends in education who were qualified to take part in the study to test my interview protocols. In all, five people (teachers, principals, and supervisors) were invited through emails, and they accepted and responded to the invitation through the emails. Member checking or participant validation was conducted, where data and

interpretations were shared with the participants to verify whether the information represented their responses.

I used the SIPs of the schools as another data source to triangulate and validate the study's findings. Data was collected through telephone interviews and recorded with an audio recorder, notes were taken, and documents evaluated. The interpreted data was read back and reread to the participants as a way of member checking and diligence when developing codes, categories, and themes.

Transferability

Transferability in this qualitative study referred to providing an exhaustive detail for users wanting to make transfer a possibility to do so (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). But for Leung (2015), transferability meant the appropriateness of the processes, tools, and data, and whether these processes, tools, and data can be generalized to additional and different settings. Notes were taken, and interviews were recorded with a sonny audio recorder to capture the study's data richness accurately.

I used these processes, tools, and data to delineate participant experiences, events, and activities that supported or opposed the conceptual framework of the phenomenon concerning instructional leadership practices that support increased student achievement in Ghana's rural public K-12 schools. The individuals who held positions as teachers, principals, and supervisors provided narratives on the phenomenon from different settings.

Dependability

This study's dependability refers to the study's reliability, which means that the evaluation of the study's findings, analysis, and recommendations support the data as exactly received from participants of the study. The study's dependability was established by incorporating the relevant processes to strengthen the rigor, interpretation, and analysis of data of the instructional leadership practices. Also, to enhance the study's dependability, every research activity, every alteration, and the conclusions that occurred were documented as the research evolved.

By this documentation of every activity and change, outside researchers could subsequently review the study to examine their accuracy and to what extent the study's conclusions were grounded in the data. Again, the participants were allowed to confirm their responses, asked questions, clarified phrases and statements, and provided additional information, when necessary, to remove any possible misrepresentation of the study's participants.

Confirmability

The study's confirmability was ensured by meticulously documenting the various procedures for checking and rechecking the data throughout the study and described the data and the findings to such a degree that others can confirm their accuracy and replicate it elsewhere. After the study, I conducted a data audit, examining the data collection procedures and the instruments that established and verified data accuracy, made judgments to eliminate the potential biases to ensure neutrality. There was data

triangulation with information from documents to show confirmability, and in this context, minimized the possibility of researcher bias.

Results

The results section of the study deals with the findings resulting from the study's participants' responses to the research questions. From this discourse emanated various themes as appropriated to each of the research questions. This qualitative exploratory case study sought to explore the instructional leadership practices that administrators provide that support student achievement that can be applied in the rural K-12 public school districts in Ghana.

The two research questions and the Hallinger and Murphy (1985) Instructional Management Model, which proposes the dimensions and specific tasks instructional leaders provide for effective school and quality achievements, guided the study.

Research Question 1

What instructional leadership practices do administrators implement to support public K-12 schools to enhance student achievement in the rural districts in Ghana?

This section looks at the themes that fell under research question one, which dealt with administrators' instructional leadership practices to support public K-12 schools in Ghana's rural districts to enhance student achievement. Four themes emerged from this research question:

1. Effective leadership and instructional leadership practices.
2. Planning and implementing school improvement programs.
3. Application of instructional leadership practices.

4. Challenges to effective instructional leadership practices.

Theme 1. Effective Leadership and Instructional Leadership Practices

A first theme that emerged from the study was the effective leadership and instructional leadership practices applied in the various K-12 schools. Hallinger and Hosseingholizadeh (2019) and Hallinger et al. (2018) discussed that instructional leadership is a school leadership model that emphasizes teachers' classroom practices towards improving school performance and outcomes. Therefore, administrators' instructional leadership practices to support public K-12 schools in Ghana are critical to enhancing student achievement.

When discussing a successful instructional leader, P4 simply said, "He must connect people to build essential collaborations." This principal believes that time should be spent developing connections with everyone that walks through the door, including parents and community members. Another principal, P5, said:

I recall how they made me feel. That is extremely significant to me in terms of how administrators make their colleagues feel. If they are appreciated if their viewpoint is valued, and if they listen to and respect the views of those with whom they work.

P7 also added, "Successful instructional leaders realize that if you want to surround yourself with excellent people, you have to be able to create relationships; it needs to be a deep connection that leads others to come around and understand your vision."

A rural school principal concurred with the others and postulated that "Principals collaborate with teachers to support students and school improvement." Again,

principals, the study revealed, coordinate with the education directorate through circuit supervisors to provide a better school climate for quality education.

On this view, an administrator, P12, alluded, “I team up with the local committee leaders to provide clean or better sanitation facilities in school, to monitor and supervise students and staff.” At the same time, P10, who had served at an urban district for 15years, emphasized,

“I facilitate the appropriate relationship between school leadership, parents, and the rest of the community for school support.” Besides, P9 shared similar sentiments, “Principals ensure team building, liaise with teachers, parents, and the community to provide resources to augment government efforts for the smooth running of the school for better performance.”

Effective instructional leadership, as revealed by the participants, thrives on the leader’s knowledge and experience. The circuit supervisors emphasized the significance of expertise in the achievement of successful leaders. For instance, P11 stated, “I believe it is simply intelligence, the capacity to know a lot about our profession, to be well-read and grasp a lot of the various parts of the field because it is so broad.” Another supervisor, P8 made a similar statement, “Principals must be experienced and very well understand what their field entails. Most of our principals understand the concept of successful school leadership and how to become one.”

Participants emphasized the importance of communication skills in effective leadership successful leadership practices. One administrator, P5, put it beautifully, “I always think of my role as a lot of communication. Information management consumes

so much of my time. Information comes to you, and you need to get it out to the staff, so they don't say things like I didn't know, I am not aware." Information management is essential to effective school leadership, as was expressed by the study's participants.

An administrator posited, "You have to be able to share information, you have to be able to communicate on many levels, and so you have to be that people's person and just have the little chit chats." Sharing information through good communication may be essential in the development of a principal's vision. Concerning this thought, P2 indicated, "Our ability to convey the vision that we have to others around us seems to me to be a significant trait and typical of most excellent principals I have worked with." P7's response appeared to sum up the respondents' views on communication as a successful school leaders' trait by stating, "You have to be willing to be a communicator on all the various modes that you may be to get everyone on board with your vision and implementation plans."

The study's participants, mainly the principals and circuit supervisors, expressed that effective instructional leadership is a combination of art and craft. Their general opinion was that although not everyone can lead and some people are born with inherent inclinations to be excellent leaders, leadership can be developed, taught, and polished. For instance, P10 mentioned, "I believe effective administrators have to have a personal quality that draws colleagues to them." P4 noted, "Administrators are not for everyone." One principal, P7, added, "There is an art to it as well; it is the capacity to see, hear, and feel. Some individuals can see how others respond or listen and get a feel for it, and then make those changes on the fly." P12's honest answer was, "It is not everyone who can

perform this job. Whether they believe they can or cannot, when it comes down to it, they see that the work is more difficult than people believe.”

When asked about a thriving school environment and how principals’ leadership influences it, principals provided a lengthy list of subjects that, in their opinion, make a school environment effective. They all viewed the principal as a significant figure in influencing the school environment. Their answers centered on excellent instructional quality focused on students, a pleasant and caring environment, respect for everyone, and an orderly and safe environment. For instance, P8 specified, “Principals coordinate with teachers to collaborate with the community to ensure better school climate for effective school activities.” In addition, P2 mooted, “Principals provide school discipline and facilitate parents’ involvement in school administration for better performance.”

To become an effective instructional leader, participants expressed, requires growth in instructional practices. For the study’s participants, growing as an instructional leader meant admitting to your weakness and limitations as a school leader and the need to work towards perfecting your leadership abilities. In her response, P7, a principal reflected on her conversation with a principal of a successful school in her district as:

One of the most important things I paid attention to since I was, as I will say, weak in my administration was to create the opportunity for development, personal growth in what was best practice in teaching and administration. I had to research them. I was always curious to learn more. I understood what was at the forefront of educational reform and growth so that I might learn something fresh to bring back to my classrooms.

From the interviews, the participants agreed on the instructional leadership practices applied in the various K-12 schools, confirming Hallinger and Hosseingholizadeh (2019) and Hallinger, Adams et al. (2018) assertions that instructional leadership is a school leadership model that emphasizes teachers' classroom practices towards improving school performance and outcomes. Therefore, administrators' instructional leadership practices to support public K-12 schools in Ghana are critical to enhancing student achievement.

The urban participants' perspectives on instructional leadership practices were not different from the rural participants' responses. Principals perform crucial roles and undertake critical activities that help transform schools and students' performance, affirming Ismail et al. (2018) and Hallinger and Murphy (1985) effective instructional leadership practices that transform schools. The urban school participants' responses to the instructional leadership practices administrators implement to support public K-12 schools in Ghana to enhance student achievement affirmed the crucial role instructional leadership practices play in school transformation (Ismail et al., 2018).

An administrator, P5, postulated, "I coordinate activities in the teaching and learning processes to achieve instructional goals. I manage the school's resources to create a good environment for the smooth running of the school to promote teaching and learning." P7, also an urban school administrator, posited, "Administrators mostly visit classrooms to observe instructions, conduct supervision and create an environment for innovative teaching and learning in the school. We also provide teaching and learning

materials for effective instructions.” The information gathered revealed principals’ functions as institutional heads of schools and managers (Hallinger, 2005).

Agreeing with Hallinger, a circuit supervisor indicated that “Principals monitor academic work, staff evaluation of students’ performance, provide incentives to motivate staff, and implement new policies and instructional strategies for improvement.” An urban school supervisor, P10, had this to say:

School heads coordinate the curriculum, establish, and communicate to teachers, parents, and the school management council school’s vision and direction for implementing improvement plans. Also, they provide professional development programs and in-service pieces of training for teachers for improved instructions and student achievement.

The study’s findings confirmed the literature on school improvement resulting from improving the school’s climate and community collaboration that facilitate and result in high school and student achievement (Escobar, 2019). Changes in the school climate that administrators bring that result in an orderly and safer school environment can support the possible turnaround of schools and improved performance (Campbell et al., 2019). As revealed in the participants’ responses, these changes in school climate can demonstrate quick and dramatic changes to the school’s vision, communicating these visions, motivating staff and students to support improvement in whole school performance and student achievements.

Principals of performing schools successfully worked with the community, families, and staff to ensure their support and involvement in the school changes. It

seemed that principals and supervisors in both rural and urban school districts cherished working towards building a relationship with stakeholders to ensure a secured school climate for quality teaching and learning activities to thrive. However, it appeared that supplementing the government's efforts in providing resources to support teaching and learning was conspicuously missing in the responses of rural participants, which could account for a gap in resource provisions in the rural schools.

One of the principals' instructional leadership functions, in the view of Hallinger and Murphy (1985), is promoting professional development for instructional effectiveness that correlates to successful schools. Sofu and Abonyi (2018) affirmed that successful instructional leaders support teachers' empowerment through professional development and growth using various formal, informal, and external approaches to development. Hence, through intense professional development, sustainable leadership effectiveness in schools can enhance, form, and trigger commitment and excellence from teachers for increased quality of teaching instruction.

The study's participants answered questions on how frequently professional development programs are organized and how often they attend such programs. In responding to this idea of empowerment of staff, a principal, P12, shared, "A great leader is not someone who does it all. What you need to do, I believe, is to enable people to perform their tasks more successfully. Give them chances, assist and empower them." Also, P2 explained his fundamental philosophy on empowering others as an effective instructional leader, as:

I support the staff, motivate them, and instill in them that sense of ownership so they can perform at every level in the school. I organize professional development programs to help to update their knowledge. I take part in the programs to comprehend what they might be learning to work with them as a team and depend on them for support.

Also, P4's view on empowering teachers was, "Listen, but encourage them to concentrate on their responsibilities and support them, give them the tools and resources they need, and supervise them to succeed." Similar responses were recorded from the participants from the urban center compared to those from the rural area. They believed that regular training programs enhance teachers' and instructional leaders' effectiveness when all attend these programs. Participants, expressed and confirmed the literature that professional development programs empower educators and help improve principals' and teachers' knowledge, skills, and self-efficacy.

The study affirmed that training programs empower teachers and principals to effectively plan lessons using different practical approaches in their teaching instructions and monitoring students' learning outcomes (Gümüş & Bellibaş, 2020; Kulophas & Hallinger, 2020). For instance, P5 explained, "I facilitate in-service training or other coaching and mentoring programs once every month. I also attended all such programs organized regularly by the district and the region." The administrators and a circuit supervisor noted how professional development training impacts the instructional effectiveness of teachers and successful schools. P7 declared, "We organize twice or thrice every academic year training programs, and they attend because it is a requirement

to attend when organized. We provide them T & T [transportation] and food as some sort of incentive to boost attendance.”

The information garnered from the interviews supported Sibomana’s (2020) view that instructional leaders facilitate improved school quality by building teacher competence in understanding and applying school mission and student learning. The study affirmed that investments in teachers’ teaching proficiencies and programs that prepare teachers adequately are necessary for providing schools with a more competent workforce that can transform school climate and culture to support effective learning (Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018).

On a not so deferring view, a rural school participant, P2, designated:

Our school and the district organized one training program or another at least once each term, and all teachers must attend or risk being disciplined. At the same time, the circuit supervisor liaises well with the school leadership to organize such training programs and ensure that all teachers attend, but many do not attend.

Because they know the heads cannot give them any harsh punishment, but just a reprimand or no disciplinary action at all.

It appeared from this case that staff development has an effective and lasting impact on school performance. Therefore, the processes of implementing such staff development programs are paramount to instructional leaders and supervisors. Change in teachers’ knowledge, skills, and attitudes also permeated through the rural setting participants’ responses. However, the intensity and effectiveness of these staff development programs are a challenge.

An administrator, P12, indicated that “For principals to organize these training programs depends on the availability of resources to support its success.” One other administrator, P2, mentioned, “I organize some training for my school once every year and others each term. I think it must be regular and compulsory for all to boost teacher’s effectiveness.” Some participants, acknowledged and emphasized the importance of professional development and in-service training in empowering educators but seldom organized them in their schools.

A teacher’s response to how often professional development programs are organized alluded to some of the rural school educators’ challenges to improving their school’s performance and student achievements. P1’s response on this theme was, “No updating training programs are organized in our school. Hence, many initiatives are personal or self-problem-solving leadership.” But students’ success was essential and critical in the responses to teacher efficacy through professional development programs. The participants considered effective monitoring and supervision as paramount and a guiding force to improving schools’ and students’ performance in responding to the effective instructional leadership practices for high student achievement. Essential to educator’s effective leadership and effective instructional leadership practices and their application in schools are the skills and abilities of the principals and instructional leaders.

The study revealed skills and abilities rural principals require to apply effective instructional leadership practices to increase student achievement. This expertise surfaced when participants shared their thoughts on how rural principals could apply instructional

strategies to assist supervisors, principals, and teachers in raising student achievement in deprived communities. The respondents' responses affirmed the literature that school leaders contribute significantly towards the success of schools and the quality performance of students (Ismail et al., 2018). Hence, school leaders must be well equipped to acquire and improve the necessary skills, competencies, and capabilities to lead and manage their schools effectively (Godda, 2018; Mestry, 2019). A supervisor posited that “Schools that are successful have typically been guided by school principals who demonstrate high levels of leadership competencies.”

School principals' instructional leadership practices positively impact teachers' efficacy, increasing their classroom instructions and, subsequently, students' academic achievements (Ismail et al., 2018). The complexity of the educational system in this era poses constant challenges for school leaders in providing sustained improvement in student achievement. Given these complexities, school leaders and educators ought to possess some skills and abilities to change and adapt to the changing conditions for continuous institutional improvement for quality results despite possible resistance (Lacks & Watson, 2018).

Participants responded to whether there should be any peculiar characteristics associated with principals interested in innovative teaching and learning in rural schools. A principal stated that “The drive to achieve success in a school and ensure better performance is deeply rooted in skills and competence of principals and teachers to ensure that all students receive an education that helps them to succeed in life.” Furthermore, P7, an urban school administrator, believed that rural school leaders “Ought

to be focused, open-minded and career-oriented.” Buttressing this point, P8, a supervisor, declared that “Dedication and hardworking must be the core characteristics of principals ready to work to transform rural schools; they also must have patience and empathy, ready to collaborate with stakeholders.” Again, P6 proposed that for rural school principals to transform their school’s low-performance stories, “They must be strategic and team builders and not micromanagers.”

Given the urgency of turning around low-performing and failing schools, research on the effectiveness of the turnaround models is still emerging. In his review of educational literature on turning around failing schools, Murphy and Bleiberg (2018) concluded that there is a great amount of conceptual misunderstanding and confusion about organizational turnarounds. Many new ideas and programs circulating have suggested how to turn around failing schools. Rural principals must be strategic, support and promote people-oriented relationships among staff, students, and community, managers of a scarce resource, and have goodwill to succeed.

In addition, rural principals must be motivators who create atmospheres that inspire educators and offer opportunities that promote educator’s self-motivation to enhance quality school climate for quality instruction and learning. Staff motivation is significant to quality instructions and student achievement. Principals’ leadership practices must create an atmosphere that supports educational success by strengthening school structures and climate perceived by educators as necessary motivation to quality instructions (Sanchez et al., 2020). However, many instructional leadership practices fail to create the necessary climate that motivates educators because many principals consider

staff motivation solely their responsibility. Instead, principals have to create an environment where the staff can motivate themselves (Lang, 2019). All the 12 participants expressed their views on this theme, skills and abilities needed for effective implementation of instructional practices.

The information gathered from participants revealed that intrinsic and extrinsic motivations are critical to educators' use of innovative teaching techniques to promote quality student performance. Still, it takes the expertise of school leaders to succeed. P5 shared her perspective and indicated:

As an instructional leader and the leader of the staff as a team, you have a duty to ensure that you facilitate and provide your team's essential needs to create a better climate for them to develop their full potential. You have to be able to create the enabling conditions to make this happen [or] achievable. But, it has been challenging in our school and other colleagues.

The circuit supervisors' responses affirmed literature (Godda, 2018; Mestry, 2019) that Education leadership and management are processes that must require a simultaneous approach to achieving the organizational goals and the development of the education leaders. Therefore, instructional leaders must be well equipped to acquire and improve the necessary skills, competencies, and capabilities to lead and manage their schools effectively (Godda, 2018; Mestry, 2019).

For example, P 10 remarked:

Your responsibilities as a school leader are huge and difficult, not clear and simple. You have to make sure your staff's basic needs for their work are provided

for the safe working conditions for the team, which can protect them from burnout.

Also, P11 mentioned, “School leaders must have the capacities and competencies of making the attractive schools place for teaching and learning. But, most schools, particularly those in rural communities, lack such principals to change things around to make schools attractive.”

Another respondent, P2, remarked, “Principals as school leaders must always try to encourage and promote social interaction and team spirit.” An administrator also declared that “Being able to collaborate with and learn from other more experienced teachers is vital not only to our professional development, but often motivates me to use innovative techniques to enhance my output as an educator.” From the perspectives of supervisors interviewed, educators feel motivated when their efforts receive recognition and appreciation. According to P11, “Teacher incentives and teacher motivation packages from the GES (Government), district education office, the local community, and the administrators to reward hard work and excellence among teachers inspire educators.”

Motivation for educators must generally concern the magnitude of work, the expected outcome, the amount of work performed, and or related to achieving quality performance. Therefore, achievement, recognition, and responsibility must inform authorities’ decisions to motivate teachers, administrators, and supervisors. These perspectives of the study’s participants corroborate the theory of McGregor (2006), who propounded that all management styles stem from managers’ perceptions of the basic nature of their team, thus creating Theory X and Theory Y managers.

Suppose a leader believes that his team members dislike their work and have little motivation; in that case, for McGregor, that leader likely uses an authoritarian management style, which usually involves micromanaging people's work for better productivity. However, if a manager believes that his team members take pride in their work and see their work as a challenge, he is more likely to adopt a participative management style. Leaders who use this approach trust their team to take ownership and responsibility of their work and perform their duties effectively by themselves. The approach that leaders take will have a significant impact on how to motivate their team members.

Therefore, managers or leadership must understand how their perspectives of what motivates their team can inform their management or leadership style. School leadership has a profound impact on a learning organization, namely, its members, which include students and teachers (Leithwood, 2011), with teachers and principals having the greatest influence on student learning, followed by the district administrators (Louis et al., 2010).

In sum, principals encounter major challenges in coping with numerous changes and issues that bother on quality education. Mestry (2019) observed this situation is partly due to the inadequate preparation for their leadership position or lack of the requisite knowledge, skills, and capacity to lead and manage schools effectively and efficiently. Therefore, instructional leaders must be well equipped to acquire and improve the necessary skills, competencies, and capabilities to manage their schools effectively (Godda, 2018; Mestry, 2017).

Theme 2. Planning and Implementing School Improvement Programs

School leadership has a significant impact on the quality of the school and student's learning outcomes. For Tan (2018) and Kartini et al. (2020), student achievement is consistently higher in schools where principals are perceived to have more competence than schools with perceived less competent principals as heads. Successful school leaders are often quite persistent, who endeavor to translate their sense of tenacity into actions that drive and power their colleagues to the highest levels of effectiveness (Azar & Adnan, 2020). School characteristics are essential in determining academic achievements. A variety of school improvement programs have concentrated on a school effects interpretation of the relationship between achievement and background (Holzberger et al., 2020).

Heck and Hallinger (2009) observed that school improvement leadership is a process of influence where school leaders identify a clear direction for the school, motivate staff, and coordinate strategies toward improving teaching and learning. Thus, successful school leaders provide substantial influence on the school community to drive school success. The participants admitted to achievement gaps in student performance and the attempted efforts to change the story in all cases. For example, P6, a teacher in the urban setting, affirmed that “There are some particular groups of students that struggle in their academic performances, so I organize remedial classes for them to assist them in catching up with the good ones.” Corroborating this, another teacher, P9, explained, “Some students find it difficult to grasp the theory aspect of the subject I

teach, and so I engage them to do more practical work since some students learn best when they see and experience.”

The rural schools’ cases were not different from the urban schools, but the approach to redressing the issues somehow differs, which appeared to result in the achievement disparities in both cases. A rural school respondent, P3, stated that:

We have the problem of some students struggling. We have started efforts like giving them after-school classes and intensifying guidance and counseling to assist these struggling students. There is a decline in their achievement data. Most of these students walk long distances to school and live in challenging communities without electricity to study at night. Besides, our school is in deplorable condition. We do not even have enough teachers. We only do our best to help. Although there is a positive pattern in terms of the achievement gap, some groups still struggle. To change the struggling students’ situation, the district, principals, and the community should create a climate that gives equal respect, treatment, and opportunities for all groups of students to perform.

Strong leaders are often authentic, a characteristic that covers a good deal of ground. It includes what researchers describe as openness to others (Secundo et al., 2018). Embedded here are feelings of empathy and concern for others and a sense of conscientiousness, which includes dependability and consideration. The relation between a principal and school effectiveness will be best understood by using models that account for the effects of the school context on the principal’s leadership.

Theme 3. Application of Instructional Leadership Practices

Instructional leadership involves leadership focus on implementing practices that will positively influence student learning. It concerns understanding how to implement improvements effectively, build collective efficacy during that implementation process, and work together with teachers and staff to focus on learning, improve instructional strategies and increase student engagement (DeWitt, 2020). This leadership type is also about collecting evidence to understand principals' impact as leaders and practitioners.

Applying instructional leadership is an essential strategy that contributes to increasing student capacity and performance when proper structures are in place. The participants provided answers to how they apply the instructional leadership practices learned to impact student achievements in their schools in Ghana. Eight of the study's participants (administrators and circuit supervisors) gave responses indicating some traditional means of knowledge dissemination and application in education, particularly as recommended by school improvement plans (SIPs) for instructional leaders and teachers.

In assessing the different leadership approaches used in the study's schools, principals and supervisors defined leadership from their personal experiences and understanding of the term. They had mixed views of the term but were consistent with the actions, and behaviors leaders engage in while executing their leadership and management duties. One notable view was educators perceiving the principal as primarily responsible for the supervision and management of teachers, curriculum development and planning, and students' academic performance. The examples from the data include a

principal's indication that while she takes her leadership role seriously, she understands that leadership is:

Multifaceted in character, as you must be different things to many persons at different moments. [Moreover], everybody looks to the principal, so the principal must come up with solutions for everything. However, the principal believes that technically, that should not be the case because you are working together as a team, but everything ultimately has to lay at the principal's feet. You do not do everything, but you are responsible for all aspects of the organization at the end of the day.

The supervisors from the urban schools shared similar leadership perspectives. Still, they believed that the interdependence of all stakeholders works together to achieve set targets that maximize the schools' overall successes. These leadership perspectives are synonymous with Tafvelin et al. (2019) suggestion that leadership is not particular to those in formal roles but expands to informal leaders within the organization. Collectively, two administrators and a circuit supervisor shared a view that the application of instructional leadership is vast. For instance, P10 mentioned that:

Principals and teachers apply the knowledge from effective instructional leadership training programs when regular in-service training programs are conducted, and they share with their colleagues. But performing teachers and principals must be sent to underperforming schools to bring their expertise to bear in those schools.

The study's data revealed that instructional management is essential to the efficient application of instructional leadership practices for a school's success. The data affirmed literature that instructional supervisors' role is critical to applying instructional leadership activities for quality performance (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Sio & Ismail, 2019). The overall picture painted by the principals and supervisors is worthy to note. P8's shared perspectives are that "leadership is team-orientated and must include all stakeholders' active involvement in executing them in schools, instead of thinking it the sole function of principals."

It is also evident from the study's data that the context in which these principals operate, years of experience, and commitment to their schools have influenced their leadership approach. For instance, P12 mooted, "Supervisors must ensure through regular supervision that the teachers and principals practiced the strategies and skills learned in their instructional activities." At the same time, P7 intimated that "Incentive and motivation packages must be part of strategies to get teachers and principals to implement the practices and skills learned through workshops, in-service and professional development programs in the classrooms."

On the other hand, two administrators who have had a combined 15 years of experience in the education sector and at their various schools attributed aspects of their current leadership approach to their former experiences working at other institutions. These different experiences provided contrasting views among principals on different leadership approaches in executing their duties to improve and maintain their school

success. These respondents engaged with transformational, distributed, instructional, autocratic, and situational leadership in managing and leading their schools.

Despite the differing approaches used, the study's respondents noted that their school success is driven by the support they receive from their teachers, auxiliary staff, students, parents, and community members who support their schools' programs. It is evident from the study's data that the principals have encouraged and endeavored to create a reputable and positive school environment. The information gathered from the study's respondents gave credence to the significance of implementing quality instructional leadership practices to better low-performing schools. But for instructional leaders to enhance school quality to achieve national education standards, Sibomana (2020) insists that leaders must implement instructional leadership practices.

This effort must focus on the instructional leaders' coordinating and collaborating with staff and other stakeholders to determine the school's mission, manage instructional programs, enhance faculty expertise, and promote the schools' learning climate. This collaboration should ensure regular coordination between the schools' instructional objectives, classroom activities, and extra-classroom activities (Bhebhe & Nyathi, 2019; Sussman & Wilson, 2019). Ultimately, these connections in systems and programs could promote student growth and achievement.

The study's participants revealed that the institutional heads' work was directed more towards managerial issues than responding to instructional activities. At the same time, some also find themselves without the time, expertise, or inclination to engage in hands-on supervision of classroom instruction. An administrator posited, "Instructional

leaders must, in addition to their traditional duty of school administration, spend time to focus on developing teachers and students' knowledge, and implementing of the curriculum and assessment." Even in rural schools, where headteachers are more likely to engage in this aspect, a supervisor commented, "There remains a disconnection between principals and classrooms in most of our schools."

The study affirmed the active involvement of urban district supervisors and all educators in school improvement activities. P11 denoted, "Some of us through our coaching and mentorship, we inculcate the sense of discipline and hard working in students and on the part of principals, dedication, and commitment." One administrator, P7, revealed, "As an instructional leader, I ensure cooperation between the school, teachers, and community resulting in better discipline, quality school, and higher student academic performance." The management of schools and instructions are the prior responsibilities of principals and circuit supervisors who are engaged in coordinating material and human resources for the efficient functioning of every department of education at the local levels. The instructional leaders collaborate with education officers to provide a positive learning environment that guarantees security and support that maximizes students' ability to learn to improve academic achievement (Cantor et al., 2019; Osher et al., 2020).

For instructional leadership practices to influence school growth and enhance quality student achievement, the study's results emphasized, requires strategic monitoring and supervision of schools. Effective instructional leadership practices involve consistent and regular monitoring of instructional activities and whole school supervision. Effective

monitoring and supervision require principals' collaboration with teachers on curriculum and instruction, which comes under Hallinger and Murphy's (1985) instructional management model.

To ensure efficient monitoring and supervision to achieve success, participants believed that commitment to school management is imperative. For instance, P9 stated that "Principals must be committed to managing the schools efficiently." P3 posited that "Circuit supervisors must ensure that principals and teachers keep student data and other records to help in future school assessment and planning." P1 added that "There must be professional development programs on how to assess and evaluate the continuous progress of students the state and national assessment protocols."

Besides, P4 intimated that "Principals must monitor teachers implementing the improvement plans and assessment protocols to achieve instructional successes and quality performance of schools." Still, on the efficient ways to ensure quality monitoring and supervision of instructional activities, P5 suggested that "All school heads need to solicit the views and ideas of their teachers when planning school improvement policies and training because they are the ones to be implementing the proposed plans." In view of these thoughts, Dimopoulos (2020) alluded that the important characteristics of the headteachers' leadership style in effective professional learning programs have been seen as advocacy, support, and the ability to involve and affect others.

In ensuring that student achievement is attained in K-12 public schools in Ghana, one of the leadership roles of principals, teacher leaders, and supervisors is the business of supervision and monitoring. While this falls directly within the purview of circuit

supervisors and principals, a teacher concurred with Hallinger and Murphy (1985) that in instructional management, principals must ensure that teachers attend school regularly, prepare their lessons and deliver lessons appropriately, visit classrooms from time to time to supervise teaching and learning. This assertion was supported by P10, who opined:

Principals monitor and guide teachers' contact hours, provide and manage the needed instructional and learning resources. Principals conduct frequent classroom observations to check the efficient application of instructional activities, curriculum and assessment requirements, and the proper teacher use of time without distractions. They then give us suggestions for improvement.

These participant responses give credence to the functions of principals regarding the curriculum and instruction dimension of Hallinger and Murphy's (1985) instructional management. Although all the rural participants agreed to the principal's task of managing and monitoring teacher instructions and student learning, optimum use of contact hours, conducting classroom observation, ensuring lesson preparation and delivery, expressed challenges to performing this principal core function. P12 admitted to "schools under trees and teacher commute." At the same time, P1 stressed, "Teacher attrition, absenteeism, lousy weather disrupting classes, and the activities of illegal mining," among others, hindering the effective managing and monitoring of teaching and learning for quality performance.

Shaked (2019) and Seong (2019), corroborating Hallinger and Murphy (1985), highlighted instructional leadership practices to include: coordination of the curriculum, supervision, and evaluation of instruction, and monitoring of students' progress. The rest

included protecting instructional time, providing incentives for teachers, maintaining high visibility, providing incentives for students, and promoting professional development. These instructional leadership practices of principals are linked to creating the conditions for optimal teaching and learning. In Shir and Elujekwute's (2021) view, instructional supervision involves all the actions supervisors take to observe, monitor, and mentor educators and provide supportive feedback for improving the classroom instructional process. Principals' management of instruction practices U-Sayee and Adomako (2021) revealed included checking teachers' lesson notes, scheme of work, students' and teachers' punctuality, and regularity in school, classes, and classroom observation, among others.

The data further indicated that although the principals and teacher leaders inspect and vet teacher lesson notes ensure punctuality, little attention is given to instructional supervision. To this sentiment, P6 declared, "Principals and circuit supervisors seldom observe classroom instructions to provide feedback where necessary for effective output." But Ampofo et al., (2019) explained that regular and timely supervision of teaching instructions and provision of professional guidance, constructive feedback, and instructional assistance minimize instructional time wastage, protect instructional time, and encourage commitment to duty, thereby ensuring effective time management in the schools.

The study's respondents, who were supervisors, stressed the principals' monitoring and management functions as part of their core functions as instructional leaders. Supervisors' responses revealed principals' opportunity to observe teachers'

instructional strategies and collaborate with the community to support instructions. For instance, P11 noted, “Principals manage the activities of the schools to facilitate teaching and learning. They coordinate with the school management council to access the capitation grants to provide the required materials for both teachers and students.” Another participant, P10, remarked, “Principals ensure availability of teaching and learning resources, attendances of both teachers and students, and undertake classroom observation.” One principal, P7, supported the supervisors’ responses and added, “Principals liaise with community leaders to support teachers’ welfare and infrastructure for quality teaching and learning.”

Participants at the rural schools’ admitting to teacher commute, teacher attrition, absenteeism, lousy weather disrupting classes, activities of illegal mining, among others hindering the effective managing and monitoring of teaching and learning for quality performance, might explain the low academic achievement of rural schools. School effectiveness entails enhancing school climate, school, and student quality output measures, which is mostly about student academic achievement. Hence, the ability of the principal to effectively supervise instructional activities and manage the school’s instructional time to facilitate quality instructional delivery offers critical learning opportunities for students to academically perform creditably demonstrates the school's effectiveness (Sio & Ismail, 2019; U-Sayee & Adomako, 2021).

The school’s capacity to accomplish its set goals and objectives may indicate the school’s effectiveness. For Ramberg et al. (2019), school effectiveness indices include schools with shared visions and goals, greater collaboration and cooperation between the

principal, teachers, and parents, effective teaching and learning evaluation and monitoring, and positive learning environment. But in this study's context, school effectiveness is the administrators' ability to empower educators through training programs, facilitate an improved teaching and learning environment, monitor and supervise school's programs to attain educational goals and objectives.

Theme 4. Challenges to Effective Instructional Leadership Practices

Liu and Hallinger (2018) admitted that educators impact students' academic achievement through teaching instructions, teacher behavior, beliefs, knowledge, practice, and competency. Organizational and contextual factors predominantly influence instructional leadership practices, thereby becoming challenges in the learning environment for instructional leaders to improve schools' performance (du Plessis, 2019). The study's participants responded to the challenges that circuit supervisors, administrators, and teachers face in improving student achievement in public rural public schools in Ghana.

During the interviews, all the participants admitted to setbacks to effective instructional leadership practices that support increased student achievements. P1, a teacher, responded and noted that:

Students lack motivation, role models, and the necessary support to make it through education successfully. Students walk long distances from home to school and back. These issues encourage truancy, which does not auger well for school leaders' efforts towards quality academic work and performance.

Inadequate resources to help teachers, supervisors, and administrators to

implement and supervise innovative teaching to improve student achievement are but some of the challenges we face.

On the supervisory front, circuit supervisors commented on the attitude of parents and guardians towards the responsibility of taking care of their children's education, emphasizing that lack of parental cooperation and communities attitudinal change towards public education affect schools' growth and success. For instance, P8 commented:

Most parents and guardians are not cooperative, and they think that everything concerning their children's education must be the government's responsibility.

The people's public schools' mistrust that performances are generally bad and that students hardly progressed to higher education is a major challenge.

From the administrator's perspective, the difficulty in the rural community's partnering with the government to provide a quality education through the provision of the necessary and needed infrastructure is a significant challenge to quality school performance. Participants also alluded to some social issues as hurdles for school leaders to handle to ensure effective schools. To these issues, P2 observed, "Our biggest problem is lack of community interest in pupil's academics, lack of study materials, and basic infrastructure for quality teaching and learning." Adding to this point, P 12 said, "Small-scale illegal mining in rural communities takes students' attention from school. This makes it difficult for schools to progress because most of the students are always absent from school."

These responses from the participants corroborate Hallinger and Murphy (1985) and Sio and Ismail (2019) that incentives and motivation for teachers and learning, protecting instructional time, positive school climate, and high visibility are crucial and relevant to student achievements. But the study's results revealed that most schools lack these systems and interventions that become a challenge to effective instructional leadership and school's accomplishments. Concerning this view, P7, an administrator, expressed, "There is a lack of interest, motivation, appreciation, and support from parents and local authorities. We lack infrastructure and logistics for schools, teachers' instruction, and students learning."

These setbacks become a significant deficit in teaching and learning and a challenge to rural instructional leaders in providing an effective teaching and learning environment. Try to incentivize teachers and students to enhance quality school, and student performance becomes difficult. The study's results give credence to the literature that schools must create a conducive learning climate for students and a comfortable and guaranteed teaching climate (Campbell et al., 2019). The nature of schools' systems and facilities reward and offer an essential element of a positive school learning climate. The relationship-rich environments attuned to students' learning and developmental needs can buffer students' stress, foster engagement, and support learning that powers students to greater heights (Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018).

Some of the respondents proffered solutions to curb the challenges leaders face in their practices. For example, P6 suggested, "Principals should create community awareness on the need to support the school improvement activities and involve parents

in planning and implementing education policies in rural communities.” On his part, P8 proposed, “Government and community authorities must tackle the issue of the illegal gold mining activities in the rural communities that distract student’s attention and disrupts school programs.” Also, P4 submitted, “There should be a dialogue among relevant stakeholders to ensure that schools receive and acquire the needed materials for effective teaching and learning.” But for P10, “The government and NGOs must have policies and interventions to empower parents who live below the poverty lines to support their children’s education.” Some other suggestions were changes in the mentality of parents and the local communities through dialogue and town hall meetings to assist the government in any way possible to provide for the education of all children within the school-going age.

Research Question 2

What skills and abilities will administrators, supervisors, and teachers need to implement instructional practices that improve student achievement in the rural public K-12 schools in Ghana?

The second research question concerned the skills and abilities administrators, supervisors, and teachers need to implement instructional practices that improve student achievement in the rural public K-12 schools in Ghana. This research question also focuses on the roles and abilities of circuit supervisors and administrators in ensuring responsive supervision and evaluation to create a conducive school climate to promote quality instructional activities that support increase student achievements. Based on the

responses of the participants to the second research question, the following themes emerged:

1. The role of educators in student achievements.
2. Evaluating instructional leadership practices.

Theme 5. The Role of Educators in Student Achievements

The teaching profession can be exciting and extremely challenging. Educators become role models, caregivers, mentors, and advisers. Teachers can have a tremendous impact on student's lives, either negatively or positively (Garcia-Molsosa et al., 2021). To this, an urban teacher, P9, explained, "Teachers impart knowledge to transform the lives of students to empower them to effect positive social change." Another urban teacher, P6, shared, "Teachers endeavor to support students' learning styles, bearing in mind students' stages of development, learning levels, and absorption capacity." Therefore, teachers need to be highly adaptable and flexible with their lesson plans (Ariffin et al., 2018).

The school leader is accountable to students, teachers, parents, and the community. Teachers in the classroom need someone who is a leader, helpful, inspiring, and informed in educational issues to assist them in meeting the instructional expectations of students, parents, and schools. To fulfill their roles as principals, P10 suggested that "Principals must have diverse leadership styles and qualities to provide direction and assistance teachers and the school as a whole." Therefore, teacher leadership, a concept known as instructional leadership, which provides a clear vision and objectives for instructors and students, coaching, and mentoring for teachers (Abonyi &

Sofa, 2019), is critical. Schools become instructionally effective when for Hallinger (2018), instructional leaders share their clear vision and goals with the staff and how to develop these goals and translate them into instructional objectives.

The instructional leadership model aims to promote student learning, and to achieve this goal; principals must have a clear vision for their school and communicate this vision to their staff (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Saeed et al., 2018). On this theme, P11 inferred, “Educators provide front-line services in schools, working around the clock to support the students.” Another participant, P12 advanced, “Principals as instructional leaders, we provide support for teachers' instructional practice through observations and feedbacks.”

Also, P2 explained, “As an instructional leader, I facilitate workshops, professional development programs, resource management, and conducive school climate for effective teaching and learning.” But the study’s data affirmed that regular and informal professional development training opportunities are necessary and critical for teacher effectiveness. The study revealed that most principals of high-performing schools encourage teachers to attend professional development sessions beyond the ones mandated by the state. P5 mentioned, “Some of us are taking advantage of the online learning programs to update ourselves to better our instructional efficacy.”

Teachers endeavor to support students’ learning styles, bearing in mind students’ stages of development, learning levels, and absorption capacity. Therefore, teachers need to be highly adaptable and flexible with their lesson plans (Ariffin et al., 2018). In considering the role of educators in student achievements, a principal in the rural setting

opined, “My role is that I am the school leader, I manage the school resources, teach, supervise teachers and students, and collaborate with the parents and the district office to take care of the school.” A Circuit supervisor, P4, indicated, “I monitor, supervise, and evaluate schools, educators, and students to ensure that all GES protocols are observed to promote quality education in the circuit.”

Assessment is another vital role that educators perform that emerged from the study’s data supporting increased student achievements. The impact of the assessment at each level depends on the type of information considered, the criteria effectiveness, and the action that follows that evaluation (Michie et al., 2018). Policymakers and educators apply assessment in many ways in education. Special attention is now given to assessment to help in teaching and learning, called assessment for learning (AfL) or formative assessment. In that instance, the focus is on assessment of learning, or summative assessment, which summarizes pupils’ knowledge or what they can do at certain times to report achievement and progress (Ching & Lund, 2018).

Practitioners and experts in education use assessment in many ways. Educators and education policymakers have given a good deal of attention to assessment and its use in helping in teaching and learning, which experts describe as assessment for learning (AfL) or formative assessment. When talking about assessment *for* learning (AfL) or formative assessment, the center of attention turns to an assessment *of* learning, or summative assessment, which teachers or educators utilize to summarize what pupils know or can accomplish at certain times in their study to report achievement and progress (Ching & Lund, 2018). P6 observed, “It is my duty to assess students in the term and at

the end of each term through the end of term examinations to evaluate students' understanding and progress." Also, the study's data affirmed that administrators and supervisors are involved in teaching and assessment processes in the schools. For instance, P10 noted, "Administrators and supervisors are involved in the teaching and assessment when we evaluate school achievement data and conduct district aptitude tests for all schools in the district."

Theme 6. Evaluating Instructional Leadership Practices

The goal of evaluating principals' instructional leadership practices in this context is transformational, as the principals engage teachers and other stakeholders on quality school and instructional strategies to achieve school and student success. The study's results indicated that the school's curriculum, instructional leaders, and supervisors must commit to accountability and transparency for student performance and quality school results. This principal responsibility requires the ability to observe classroom activities of teachers and students regularly, ensure that teachers fully comprehend and successfully implement various required district and national evaluation and assessment measures (Escobar, 2019; Neumerski et al., 2018).

Besides, principals must provide the school staff, parents, and the community the training needed to understand the school curriculum and for the teachers to successfully implement it as stipulated by the school improvement plan document (DiPaola & Wagner, 2018; Escobar, 2019). On this theme, an administrator from the rural school district shared his perspective that "Evaluating instructional leadership practices allows us [administrators] and our teachers to identify the effectiveness or otherwise of our

leadership practices and approach to our responsibilities, and make changes when necessary.”

Similarly, an administrator from the urban district agreed with those in the rural districts but delved deeper into this issue. They indicated that when supervisors evaluate principal’s instructional practices, aside from being the supervisors’ traditional duties, it also serves as a professional development strategy for principals to effectively improve their quality as school administrators to manage their schools for higher achievement. P10 expressed, “When supervisors evaluate our work, it helps us to learn from the knowledge and experiences of experts in the field to better our practices and become effective.”

Still on this theme, P4 added that “Evaluating instructional leadership practices brings out the appropriate professional development and training for teachers to update them on new instructional methods.” Again, another respondent, P12, indicated, “Evaluating instructional leadership practices helps me focus and stay on track regarding education policies and deliver on the curriculum and assessment strategies.” These responses of the study’s respondents affirm one of the conceptual framework’s tasks of instructional leaders, Supervising and evaluation of instructions (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985) and the literature concerning the effectiveness of evaluating instructional leaders’ practices (Abonyi & Sofu, 2019; DiPaola & Wagner, 2018).

Although the literature has demonstrated the effectiveness of transformational leadership in relation to trust, satisfaction, commitment, and performance in educational institutions (Fuller et al., 1996; Kouni et al., 2018), it seldom addressed the possible

processes underlying those relations. Therefore, the study's results indicate some probable reasons for this effectiveness: promoting self-motivation, high performance, educators' well-being, reducing burnout, and enhancing self-actualization. On the other hand, the study's results indicated that leadership that focuses on the organization's evaluation, assessment, and performance serve as motivation in teachers with higher turnovers in performance.

Summary

In Chapter 4 of this study, I considered and dealt with the pilot study to the main project, research setting, demographics, data collection, data analysis, evidence of trustworthiness, and data results, followed by the summary of the study. A qualitative approach with an exploratory case study design and a thematic analysis was used to study instructional leadership practices that support increased student achievement in rural K-12 public schools in Ghana. The thematic analysis of the data provided answers to the study's research questions: RQ1. What instructional leadership practices do administrators implement to support public K-12 schools in Ghana to enhance student achievement? RQ2. What skills and abilities will administrators, supervisors, and teachers need to implement instructional practices that can improve student achievement in rural public K-12 schools in Ghana?

Several themes emerged from the data collected on instructional leadership practices that support student achievement in public K-12 schools in Ghana. These themes were: the role of educators in student achievements, effective leadership and instructional leadership practices, planning and implementing school improvement plans,

effective application of instructional leadership practices, and empowerment. Challenges to effective instructional leadership practices, skills and abilities needed for effective implementation of instructional practices, and evaluating instructional leadership practices were also other themes that emerged from the study.

The findings supported Sebastian et al. (2019) consideration of instructional leadership being crucial to school effectiveness when leaders emphasize organizational management for instructional improvement more than the day-to-day teaching and learning. The findings also supported Ismail et al. (2018), Shaked and Benoliel (2019), and du Plessis (2019), and Liu and Hallinger (2018), affirming the impact of instructional leadership practices that influence teachers' instructional strategies. Also, it proved the impact of instructional leadership practices on teachers' knowledge and the task of instructional leaders promoting teachers' classroom instruction to improve teachers' efficiency and students' learning.

Moreover, the findings revealed that administrators in the rural school districts were knowledgeable of Hallinger and Murphy's (1985) instructional management model and its significance to effective instructions. However, the findings disclosed that most rural school administrators did not implement all the dimensions and the various functions proposed by the model for school's effectiveness and success. The study's results affirmed improved student performance and a schoolwide improvement when school leadership implemented effective instructional leadership practices and other school improvement systems and programs.

For instance, most urban school participants expressed that their school's performance improved due to their principals' ability to articulate a clear vision for the school's improvement and communicate the same and the implementation plan of the vision to the staff and the school management council. Other instructional leadership practices participants expressed that support quality performance were coordinating curriculum, supervising, and evaluating classroom instruction. The urban school participants also mentioned effective practices such as monitoring student progress, providing incentives for teachers, and incentives for learning. They again included protecting instructional time and providing professional development programs as other effective instructional leadership practices their principals implemented to promote high student achievements, as revealed in this chapter.

The findings also revealed that most principals of the rural schools did not implement most of the effective instructional leadership practices that may impact teaching instructions to influence quality school and student performance. The study revealed some challenges that may partly account for rural school principals' inability to implement the effective instructional leadership practices that can enhance quality instructional activities to support high student achievements in the rural K-12 school in Ghana. Chapter 5 of the study included the interpretation of the findings, the limitations of the study, the study's recommendations, the implications, and the conclusion.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

In this qualitative exploratory case study, I sought to explore principals' instructional leadership practices that can support student achievement in Ghana's rural K-12 public schools. Chapter 5 of the study includes a discussion of the interpretation of the findings presented in Chapter 4, recommendations, implications, limitations to the study, and conclusions of the study. Underscoring the primary significance of education to society, the United Nations SDGs acknowledged education to be a critical element of national development and global transformation, advocating equitable and quality education for all children (Westheimer, 2020). In schools, leaders have effective tools to ensure quality education, affecting student results and improving learning.

In this study, there was a focus on instructional leadership practices relative to the poor academic achievement in rural K-12 schools in Ghana gained through interviews. I attempted to understand the persistent low academic performance of the K-12 public schools in rural districts compared to urban school districts in Ghana. This issue has been a concern for many education stakeholders as there continues to be persistent low performance among the K-12 rural schools (Abreh, 2017; Butakor & Dziwornu, 2018). The study will contribute to the literature about instructional leadership practices that can support increased student achievement in the rural districts in Ghana (Butakor & Dziwornu, 2018; Danquah, 2017; Sofu & Abonyi, 2018).

The goal of this study was to explore the instructional leadership practices that administrators can apply in Ghana's rural K-12 public school districts that can support

student achievement. This in turn will contribute to changing the story of the persistent low academic performance. There was a need to understand the effectiveness of instructional leadership in urban and rural settings, to ascertain the effective for Ghana's rural schools. The study's inclusion of perspectives and data from the global context made the study's findings relevant not only in the Ghanaian schools but also in other school districts around the globe.

The case study methodology was applied to answer the guiding research questions: What instructional leadership practices do administrators implement to support public K-12 schools in Ghana to enhance student achievement?; and What skills and abilities will administrators, supervisors, and teachers need to implement? The qualitative character of this case study enabled a thorough grasp of the participants' views and experiences about the research topic (Creswell, 2013). The 12 participants shared depth of knowledge and experiences as data information in their responses. The participants were from various backgrounds, ages, administrative experience, and educational experiences. These participants responded to how principals exercise leadership and implement effective leadership practices relative to student success in rural and urban K-12 schools. The interview data were analyzed to identify themes that synthesized the interpretation of findings. The study's findings revealed six thematic areas that offered deep insight into the instructional leadership in Ghana's K-12 rural and urban schools.

The findings revealed that principals of K-12 rural schools in Ghana were knowledgeable of the dimensions and the various functions of Hallinger and Murphy's (1985) instructional management model and its significance to effective instruction but

did not implement all the dimensions and the various functions as proposed by the model for school's effectiveness and success. Also, the study revealed that most urban schools' performance improved due to their principals' ability to articulate a clear vision for the school's improvement and communicate the implementation plan of that vision to the staff and the school management council. Findings again revealed that most principals of the rural schools did not implement many of the effective instructional leadership practices. These practices could impact teaching instructions and influence quality school and student performance. The study highlighted some challenges that may partly account for rural school principals' inability to implement effective instructional leadership practices. These practices could enhance quality instructional activities to support high student achievement in the rural K-12 school in Ghana. With the challenges to effective instructional leadership practices, the application and the implementation may suffer and not be sustainable.

The aim of this chapter is to provide a comprehensive discussion of the study's themes and categories from the responses and the findings and their relationship to current literature and the conceptual framework. There was also the consideration of the limitations and recommendations that were proffered, and finally, the study's implication to literature, policy, and social change was considered.

Interpretation of the Findings

The findings of this study confirmed to a large extent the literature reviewed in Chapter 2. Scholars emphasized that the quality school leadership is integral to quality education rather than the abundance of available resources (Daniëls et al., 2019; Lonyian

& Kuranchie, 2018; Nooruddin & Bhamani, 2019). This study has affirmed that effective instructional leadership is essential to successful schools and quality performance. Hence, many resources must be earmarked and spent on human capital development and material development within the educational sector. This applies to every school and district to train principals and all instructional leaders to become effective instructional leaders to enhance student achievement.

Confirming Knowledge in the Discipline

The study's findings highlighted important insight regarding school leadership in K-12 rural schools in Ghana, namely that there is too much focus on the overall leadership of principals instead of the instructional leadership. Hou et al. (2019) suggested that instructional leaders establish a robust instructional environment, which motivates teachers to improve their teaching quality to impact students' academic achievement. As demonstrated in Chapter 2, the literature review showed that instructional leadership started during the movement of 'effective schools' when learning outcomes were given more importance than leaders' administrative and managerial tasks (Hallinger, 2012).

The review has revealed that there has been more emphasis on and use of instructional leadership in educational research, administrative processes, and practices for the past decades. Education policies have gained momentum, purposely due to the global call for an emphasis on accountability (Hallinger, 2005; Özdemir et al., 2020). Instructional leadership among the various leadership styles has been distinguished and

emphasized in the educational circles due mainly to its focus on achieving effective instruction and success in the teaching and learning processes.

The study's findings give credence to the literature, including the work of Hallinger and Hosseingholizadeh (2019), Hallinger et al. (2018), and Hallinger (2012) that stated instructional leadership is critical to a successful school and educational transformation due to its emphasis on teachers' classroom practices towards improving school performance and outcomes increasing the school staff's satisfaction and transforming the school into a productive environment. Also, the findings affirmed that instructional leadership emphasizes the efficient application of resources, direction, and support principals give to teachers and students to improve teaching and learning continuously. Given this fact, Hou et al. (2019) added that the instructional leadership approach is significant in education when instructional leaders implement effective policies and programs and achieve the objectives of external accountability. Hence, there is global recognition of school principals' leadership as a distinct element in understanding school effectiveness and success.

Instructional leadership consists of setting vibrant objectives, implementing curriculum, observing and facilitating the teaching process, providing resources, and appreciating teachers consistently to promote student learning and growth. The quality of instruction of teachers is the top priority for the instructional head. Instructional leadership is devoted to the fundamental job of teaching, learning, and knowledge. It regularly involves discussion with staff members to facilitate their tasks and duties, which ultimately results in more effective learning of students (Nader et al., 2019).

The study further revealed that there could be a significant relationship between school leaders, teachers, supervisors, and the local community through effective instructional leadership. It was evident that such a relationship was essential in ensuring an effective school and higher academic achievements. For instance, P 7 remarked:

Successful instructional leaders tend to realize that if you want to surround yourself with excellent people, you have to be able to create relationships; it needs to be a deep connection that leads others to come around and understand your vision.

According to Hallinger (2018), the role of instructional leaders in framing school goals and establishing a clear mission is significant in establishing school effectiveness. With this role, principals determine the areas of emphasis in school where staff must focus attention, energy, and resources to ensure student achievement. As a result, education directors and policymakers must not overlook the significance of instructional leadership in managing educational institutions and the role of instructional leadership in enhancing educational quality.

Principals' instructional leadership is crucial in influencing teachers' conduct to enhance the quality of teaching and learning. The results of this study affirmed that leadership style affords school leaders with the expertise to carry out excellent academic administration that impacts educators' instruction to promote student achievement. It also became evident through the study's findings that school principals' general instructional leadership qualities had a strong connection to quality instruction, which impact student performance. As a result, the level of education that school administrators provide to their

students is linked to the quality of teaching. It can also be deduced that if a principal does not consider the essential qualities of an instructional leader as identified in the literature, the performance of the teachers under their supervision will be affected. This will have a significant impact on the students in the classroom. Therefore, when instructional leaders implement effective instructional practices, they may impact teachers' instruction and student performance.

The study revealed that head teachers' instructional leadership practice of establishing school's goals, planning and implementing SIPs, and effectively communicating them to teachers and other stakeholders is necessary for school growth and quality performance. This fact was significantly associated with students' academic performance in the K-12 schools in the rural and urban districts under investigation. This link was stronger in high-performing urban schools than in low-performing rural schools. These results raised concerns at first, given the numerous reforms in 1974, 1987, 1995, 2007, and 2009 that the Ghanaian governments had implemented to close the performance gap between rural and urban public K-12 schools. But the study's literature review revealed that these reforms did little to create sustainable professional leadership development opportunities for school leaders to develop professionally and effectively as instructional leaders (Dampson, 2019).

In selecting headteachers to K-12 schools in Ghana, particularly the basic schools, both Dampson (2019) and Sofo and Abonyi (2018) agreed that it is either by appointment, rising to such positions based on rank, years of service or longest-serving teacher on the staff, and in some instances, based on the age of the teacher. Many times,

these principals are appointed without any form of preparatory training. School leaders are held responsible for the school's success (Aas & Paulsen, 2019), and they are required to thoroughly comprehend and follow the school improvement processes. These results may corroborate prior studies on the school reform process if examined further (Escobar, 2019; Hunde & Desalegn, 2019). According to Nader et al. (2019), instructional leadership and transformational leadership influence school effectiveness. Instructional leadership creates attainable goals and objectives through systematic planning, implementing resourcing, and monitoring to achieve the set goals and objectives. These functions are thought to contribute to the development of schools and student learning outcomes.

Principals and supervisors' years of experience and dedication to their particular school impacted their instructional output, leadership style, and the outcome of their teachers' instruction, which was an unexpected result of the study, and supports the purpose of the study. On this subject, P12, a rural school administrator, remarked:

In the situation where most of our teachers and supervisors are young graduates with no or little experience, it affects the effective school administration and teaching strategies to impact students' performance. Yes, because effective supervision and monitoring become a challenge since most of these novice supervisors and teachers do not know what pertains to rural communities and how to help teachers, headteachers, and students deal with rural school challenges. This is a big problem for us.

This revelation crystalizes the literature's claim that the principal's length of time or number of years in the current position positively impacts student achievement. Kraft and Papay (2014) noted that teachers continue to improve in their effectiveness as they gain experience in the teaching profession, and that teaching experience is, on average, positively associated with student achievement gains throughout a teacher's career. That is, schools with longer principals' tenure tend to have higher student achievement gains (Grissom & Bartanen, 2019).

Dhuey and Smith (2018) observed that novice principals with no prior experience as principal and newly appointed principals mostly tend to have less positive impact on the school and student achievement. Educational research often employs educators' academic level, certification status, and the amount of coursework in the subject matter as indicators of the educator's level of knowledge (Toropova et al., 2019). Lee and Lee (2020), agreeing with Toropova et al. (2019), observed the relevance and the contributions of educators' qualifications like coursework, level of education, certification, test scores, and experience on student achievement across subjects and grade levels.

The findings again revealed that principals of high-achieving and high-performing schools established yearly achievable objectives more often than principals of low-achieving and low-performing schools. They developed these objectives using needs evaluations and other data. But more significantly, they either involved teachers in developing the objectives, or the principals communicated these objectives in ways that teachers easily understood. According to the statistics, school performance is influenced

by support from teachers, other school staff, students, and external stakeholders to support school programs.

Interpreting the Findings in the Context of the Conceptual Framework

The study's outcomes corroborated the assertion that the principals' supervision of instructional practices, among other things, must include checking of teachers' lesson notes, lesson plan, and punctuality. Other practices included regularity in class, lesson observation and classroom management, conducting examination, and marking schemes (Ampofo et al., 2019; Ebete & Ejims, 2020). Through the data analysis, it was discovered that the principal's visibility in classrooms had a positive impact on teacher motivation and morale. However, in order to successfully perform these visits, principals should be familiar with student achievement data and must be able to correlate school goals with whole school achievement. Principals must communicate and collaborate with teachers, parents, and the community about improving student learning and provide staff development.

This discovery supports the first and second dimensions of the study's conceptual framework- defining the school's mission and managing the instructional program. Principals of low-performing schools encouraged staff development and conducted classroom observations less frequently than principals of high-performing schools. This finding supports the second and third dimensions of the study's conceptual framework- managing the instructional program and promoting a positive school learning climate. This was consistent with the research of Neumerski et al. (2018), who observed that principals must frequently participate in observation systems and classroom instruction

assessment to enhance teaching instructions to support student achievement. According to Abonyi and Sofo (2019), the instructional leader's job is to improve teachers' instructional effectiveness to guarantee student success by purposefully working with teachers to match classroom objectives to the school's vision.

This result may lead to the presumption that if administrators in K-12 schools established and utilized yearly objectives to direct academic emphasis more successfully, they would be able to improve student academic performance more effectively. Principals of K-12 schools in rural areas preserve instructional time less often and are less visible than principals of urban schools. Huong (2020) discovered that the instructional leader is visible across the school, continuously talking with everyone about standards and accomplishments, encouraging school-wide professional development and learning at all school levels.

Effective communication of school objectives helps shape the school environment and culture and define and maintain the school purpose. Insights from the study's participants and SIP indicate that teachers and educators often think that principals and instructional leaders should be visible in the school and the classroom. Frequently visiting the classrooms from the participants may prevent teachers and children from feeling alone and left behind. The principal's presence in the school and classroom gives teachers motivation and the assurance of principals' support.

According to Wallin et al. (2019), educators value administrators who sometimes offer to assist a class, demonstrating their skills and dedication in classroom life. Teachers may not always appreciate a principal who tells them what to do but teaches

what to do and creates the opportunity for teachers to carry through. The implication is that teachers see their superiors as educational leaders and expect these superiors to direct the teaching process. Moreover, the findings revealed that administrators in the rural school districts were knowledgeable of the instructional management model (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). However, these administrators did not apply most of the dimensions and the various functions proposed by the model for the school's effectiveness success.

The study's results affirmed Hallinger and Murphy (1985) instructional management model, which proposes three dimensions of instructional leadership roles, namely, promoting a positive school learning climate, defining the school's mission, and managing the instructional program, with its ten instructional leadership functions:

1. Framing the school's goals,
2. Communicating the school's goals,
3. Coordinating the curriculum,
4. Supervising and evaluating instruction,
5. Monitoring student progress,
6. Protecting instructional time,
7. Providing incentives for teachers,
8. Providing incentives for learning,
9. Promoting professional development, and
10. Maintaining high visibility

These instructional leadership functions support improved teacher instructional practices.

The study's findings support this instructional management model's effectiveness for

school improvement and quality student performance. One of this study's results revealed that instructional leaders in Ghana's K-12 schools emphasized organizational management for instructional improvement rather than day-to-day teaching and learning.

One of the study's significant findings was what might constitute effective instructional leadership in Ghana's rural K-12 public school. The study's participants all agreed that instructional leaders are effective in certain ways. These ways included improving teacher instructional practices and organizing evidence-based professional development programs. They also involved collaborating with relevant stakeholders to build strong relationships across the school and the community.

However, how the instructional leaders apply effective leadership depends on the principal's perception of instructional leadership and their background. It also depends on the principal's experiences, geographical setting, and the availability of resources. The study's interviews centered on the effectiveness of instructional leadership practices. They focused on how rural Ghana's principals can apply these practices to enhance the teaching of rural K-12 public schools and support student achievement.

In discussing the effective instructional leadership practices, I considered the instructional leader's role and effectiveness for school success. The discussion was based on the literature review and the participants' responses to the study's research questions. The participants' perspective of effective instructional leadership seemed to be linked to improving teacher practice and student performance. This connection is by implementing improvement plans, effective professional development programs, and effective

monitoring and supervision. Also, it is by providing relevant teaching and learning materials and infrastructural development.

As revealed by the study's findings, the effectiveness of instructional leadership in K-12 schools affirmed the literature on the instructional management model (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). This model served as the conceptual framework to ground this study. The interviews with the participants revealed that effective instructional leadership requires establishing and maintaining loyal relationships between the instructional leader and the teachers. It also requires the establishment of direction and purpose for professional learning and teacher practices.

The study's results affirmed improved student performance and schoolwide improvement when school leadership implemented effective instructional leadership practices and other school improvement systems and programs. Furthermore, the findings show that the principal is an educational leader and functions in managerial and instructional capacities. The principal is responsible for curriculum development, instructional improvement, and fostering an environment conducive to realizing human potentials. Also, the principal is accountable for influencing staff and learner behavior, supervising instructional activities in the school, and cultivating a professional culture (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Saeed et al., 2018).

According to this research, when instructors are pleased with their jobs, student performance improves. This situation may come through when educators believe their contributions are appreciated and provided with the support systems and resources to carry out their teaching responsibilities. As a result, it is the principal's responsibility to

foster collegial opportunities at the school to inspire teachers to work together to achieve the school's shared goals and objectives.

Limitations of the Study

This study is not without limitations. There is the limitation regarding the study's settings. The schools and districts serving as the case sites did not include those schools between urban and rural communities. Schools and districts between urban and rural communities (peri-urban) have unique dynamics and experiences than urban and rural communities. Therefore, to include schools and districts in between urban and rural communities might have offered different perspectives to instructional leadership practices and whole-school transformation of the principals' management needs and concerns. Participants were selected from schools in only three educational districts out of Ghana's 56 municipal and 154 educational districts.

The research might have yielded different findings if far more administrators, supervisors, and teachers were drawn from many private and public schools across the length and breadth of the country. The non-inclusion of certain categories of K-12 schools in Ghana may not have helped to present a holistic and realistic picture of the issues studied in the country. This omission would be a rich area for future research. Considering that the study mainly focused on the government public schools, expanding the study's sample size and demographics to include the private K-12 schools and wealthy socio-economic settings in the country might have influenced the results. It might alter the results and the participants' understanding of effective instructional leaders and instructional leadership practices that support student achievement.

In addition, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, data was collected through teleconferencing. Therefore, prospective participants who had served as headteachers for rural schools for many years and had rich experience in rural school administration but had no access to the internet or were not technology inclined could not participate in the study. The telephone interviews limited the opportunity to interpret participants' gestures, demeanor, and facial expressions, which are essential to quality qualitative data. Face-to-face interviews may have influenced the data in some way.

The findings cannot represent all K-12 schools in Ghana because of the limited sample size of 12 participants. Although 12 is adequate sample size for a qualitative study, it does not reflect the entire public K-12 school leadership in Ghana. However small the sample size, it may not limit the dependability and transferability of the findings. Thus, using a small sample relative to the entire population in which the research problem was applicable does not served as a significant limitation to this study.

Although some information from the SIPs were relied upon for data validation and understanding of data, a more comprehensive understanding of the research problem would have been attained if additional secondary data was used in the analysis. Finally, the study utilized only one research approach to generate qualitative data on principals, supervisors, teachers' professional management needs, and instructional management concerns. This deficit did not aid in providing broad-based evidence of the research problem as would have mixed approaches. Notwithstanding the limitations, the study has implications for future research, policy, and social change.

Recommendations

This study's findings complement the wider range of information on how leadership in rural K-12 schools may be integrated into a more comprehensive concept of school leadership. This research showed that a paradigm shift is required to identify and embrace instructional leadership as a distinctive feature and a need for leadership in K-12 schools in rural Ghana. Ghana's rural schools, particularly the rural basic schools, are struggling in education leadership. This challenge may be attributable to the country's education reforms without considering the difficulties leaders may confront when implementing such reforms. Also, the principals of K-12 schools, mainly the rural schools, have knowledge about effective instructional leadership practices but do not or seldom apply them in schools, partly due to apparent challenges that impact schools in these communities. The following recommendations are based on the limitations and strengths identified in the study and other equally essential insights from the study.

The present study results may be a starting point for further quantitative research on the impact of instructional leadership practices on academic performance by individual instructors and students in rural Ghana. A better understanding of the variables that influence altering people's views of education leadership may expand the pool of information which can help teachers and heads of K-12 schools improve their leadership abilities. Research to examine the direct connection between students' poor performance and the principals' instructional leadership practices may inform policy direction. Such research may also influence the training of principals as instructional leaders to ensure school success and quality student performance.

Future studies on effective instructional leaders and instructional leadership practices that support student achievement may consider a broader range of scope to involve both public and private schools from different socio-economic settings. The current study mainly focused on the government public schools in Ghana. To extend the future research of instructional leadership practices to involve the country's private schools may guarantee some unique perspectives. These perspectives may likely influence policy on effective instructional leaders' responsibilities and instructional leadership practices that support student achievement.

Also, future research on the subject needs to include schools in peri-urban communities. These are schools in-between the urban and rural communities to enhance a better understanding of the issues. Schools in such settings often have different dynamics from rural and urban schools. Knowledge about professional learning for teachers, instructional approaches, principals' responsibilities for building their own and others' leadership capacities in this setting will be worthwhile for policymaking. Such knowledge may inform the efforts of developing and assisting principals and instructional leaders of all K-12 learning institutions in the country. This may promote the quality of rural schools' principals' leadership abilities, educational leadership, and academic performance of K-12 schools, particularly the rural schools at the district, municipal and, regional levels.

Again, it will be worthwhile for future research to gather secondary data on implementing student-centered teaching strategies to enrich the study's outcomes. An investigation into how successful principal's instructional leadership practices influence

student-centered teaching strategies to support student learning will help rural K-12 principals and school leaders strategize to promote student achievement. To buttress this point, Hallinger and Hosseingholizadeh (2019) explained that instructional leaders prioritize and emphasize monitoring student growth and develop quality teaching and learning.

Implications

The research study has contributed to enriching and enhancing administrator's understanding of instructional leadership practices that support increased student achievement. The study is unique and sets the tone for future research on instructional leadership practices that support student quality performance in the low-performing rural school districts. Considering the dearth of literature on instructional leadership practices that support increased student achievement in Ghana's rural public K-12 schools, the study would be a point of departure for further future research. The study again contributes to the literature on quality school management and effective instructional leadership in rural public schools.

The study has proffered data information that may trigger an informed policy direction at the district, regional, and national levels. The research study has provided data that may improve and maximize in-service training and professional development programs for principals and teachers of rural schools. The study's outcomes might be significant to supervisors, administrators, teachers, and managers to improve rural schools and student achievement if the relevant stakeholders focus on and address the challenges the study uncovered.

The findings substantiate research on successful instructional leadership to result in positive social change in rural school districts and communities. Effective instructional leaders establish a clear direction for the professional development of teachers, which may enhance teachers learning to improve instructions. This impact on teacher practices may directly relate to and address the significant need for student improvement and quality achievement.

Quality student performance may transform students' future to influence positive social change in rural communities through advocacy, sensitization, and social responsibilities of some rural folks. That is, enhancing rural students' performance may help them advance to higher education and careers to positively transform their lives and impact their immediate and larger communities. When students succeed and get well-remunerated jobs and better careers, their economic status may change, affecting people's livelihoods and social lives, the economies of local communities, districts, regions, and the nation at large, bringing about positive social change.

In order to improve teacher instruction and student achievement in the face of limited resources for professional development, principals to rural school districts must be knowledgeable in school management and administration. They must be well-resourced to provide staff with in-service training themselves. Principals to rural schools must be able to tap the expertise that exists amongst their staff to establish peer-coaching programs. Educational authorities and policymakers should support principals in low-performing rural school districts in areas such as guidance on performance, planning, and implementation of school improvement activities to transform failing schools. The rural

school principals must also be supported with expertise in building collaboration with stakeholders to support school transformation. They must also be trained and resourced to translate essential quality support systems, policies, resources, and efforts to affect the school performance and individual student achievement.

The educational leadership at the K-12 schools is necessary for schools' success. Schools with effective leadership and teachers often perform better than schools with leaders who are not effective educational leaders. Therefore, it is vital to train principals as educational leaders to improve the overall outcomes and better levels of student performance. By assisting all school leaders of K-12 public learning institutions in Ghana in leading effectively, the MOE can change the story of persistent low student academic performance, mainly in the rural communities.

Principals must adopt guiding principles to establish and communicate common aims, monitor and provide feedback on the education and learning process, and promote professional growth across schools. Principals working together to achieve shared objectives help the staff to feel as though what they do in the school is valuable and thus improves their potential of successfully and efficiently doing a responsible job. These principals should encourage excellent teachers, recognize their accomplishments in school, and recommend them for the district, regional, and national awards. Principals should recommend hardworking teachers for further professional development courses to make them experts in their fields. Such teachers may, in return, reinvest their knowledge in other teachers in the schools to influence quality teaching to impact schools' improvement and student achievement.

Therefore, through the various education directorates, the GES needs to provide regular and mandatory in-service and professional development programs for rural principals, supervisors, and teachers to equip and enhance their teaching, leadership, and management capacities for quality instructions. Such instructional and leadership development opportunities would update teachers, administrators, and supervisors of rural school districts on current best practices of pedagogy and instructional leadership approach to enrich their professional and administrative functions. This approach may promote a quality school climate to enhance teaching and increased student achievement.

Also, the GES must well resource the rural schools with the essential modern teaching and learning materials, educational infrastructure, and certified teachers to match the urban schools. Providing these resources may help transform the education terrain in the rural communities for the rural schools to become attractive to educators and students, which may support quality teaching and learning. As part of the reforms in the education system in Ghana, the higher education institutions must have programs purposely for school leadership to train prospective teachers in school administration to lead the various K-12 educational institutions in the country. Qualified school administrators and leaders trained in human resource management and monitoring and supervisory roles to support the better management of rural schools are needed.

Low-performing rural public schools must institute incentive programs that reward good student behavior and achievement and teacher accomplishments. The district education directorate should implement a teacher and administrator support system. This system must comprehensively outline instructional intervention programs

designed to identify and help educators exchange expertise and skills with the others of at-risk schools. Thus, there should be a collaborative program in school districts where rural and urban administrators and teachers can learn and transfer knowledge and expertise. Efficient collaboration and exchange programs may encourage the transfer of knowledge and best practices to help transform the in-need public schools, especially the schools in the rural districts.

In addition to the general school administration skills, principals to rural schools must receive particular professional development and rural community-specific training. This opportunity would equip these administrators to understand and appreciate the rural culture and how best to collaborate with the community to transform these schools. The one-size-fits-all system in the education system often does not favor the rural community schools, as was revealed in the study.

The education directorates must train leadership in rural schools in the use of data to promote student achievement. School leadership must expect all teachers to manage, analyze, and interpret data, and supervisors must hold principals and teachers accountable for these responsibilities. The principals should oblige each teacher to keep data to monitor and track the progress of individual students and the whole class. Principals generally must be accountable for a whole-school effort, while individual teachers are accountable for each class.

In appointing teachers to head schools as principals, they must be trained to appreciate data in planning and implementing school improvement strategies. Education directorates must train all principals to be instructional leaders with the skills for research

and organize professional development programs based on school data using evidence-based resources. Serving and newly appointed principals must have the capacity to use school data to improve teacher instructional practices and student outcomes. Regular access to ongoing professional development on curriculum and assessment protocols, instructional techniques, and school improvement programs may improve instructional activities that may impact student performance.

Conclusion

The prime focus of this study was the persistent low academic performance of rural public K-12 schools in Ghana and the exploration of the instructional leadership practices administrators can apply to enhance student achievement in these schools in rural communities. This study used Hallinger and Murphy's (1985) instructional management model for the principal's instructional leadership role. This model provides a reasonable basis for considering instructional leadership as different contexts allow principals and school leaders the flexibility of effective instructional leadership via varied leadership styles.

The study revealed that administrators supporting teachers to teach efficiently by organizing regular staff development programs to enhance their expertise often affect school and student performance. The study designated that the depth and reflexivity of principals' perceptions of effective instructional leadership varied based on principals' demographics, availability of human and material resources, and the geographical setting of schools. However varied the perception about the significance and effectiveness of instructional leadership and the role of instructional leaders in K-12 schools, it is vital for

quality student achievement. Therefore, institutionalizing and sustaining Hallinger and Murphy's (1985) instructional management model in Ghana's rural public K-12 schools is essential for the principal's instructional leadership practices. This instructional model, potentially enhancing teachers' instruction, may support school quality and high student achievement, particularly in Ghana's rural K-12 public schools.

Effective instructional leadership requires the building and safeguarding respectful and collegial relationships between instructional leaders and teachers and among teachers themselves. It involves establishing direction and objectives for professional development, mentorship, teacher practice, and supervision and evaluation. With the implementation of purposeful professional development programs by instructional leaders, the quality of teacher instructional practice may be enhanced.

Furthermore, instructional leaders may ensure quality teaching instruction and student learning in a rural K-12 school. They may guarantee that classrooms are equipped with essential facilities and relevant teaching and learning materials to enhance teacher instruction and student learning processes. There must be the protection of instructional time such that the teachers and students abide by and maximize the instructional hours. School administrators must collaborate with teachers to plan the implementation of the curriculum, and its assessment, supervise and evaluate classroom instructional activities and offer feedback for improvement to impact quality performance.

This impact is directly related to the professional learning directions that address the significant concerns for student improvement. These professional development programs for teachers may serve as the stimulus for broader reflective teacher practices

analysis and purposeful evidence-based decision-making relative to the directions for professional development for teachers. It may also enhance other training programs focused on teacher quality interventions that impact school improvement and student achievement. With the transformation of rural schools, students may advance to college and higher education to acquire knowledge to better their lives and that of their families, communities, and society positively.

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Appendix: Interview Protocols

Instructional leadership Practices that Support Student Achievement Interviews

Introduction

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. I have scheduled this interview to last for about one hour. During this time, we have some questions that we would cover and some follow-ups if needed. If time begins to run out, it may be necessary to interrupt you to push ahead and complete this line of questioning.

You have been selected to speak with me today because you have been identified as someone who has great knowledge to share about administration, teaching, learning, and student achievement in this district. This research project focuses on exploring the instructional leadership practices that administrators provide that support student achievement that can be applied in the rural K-12 public school districts in Ghana. This study will ascertain what may need to change or be implemented more consistently to increase student achievement in rural K-12 schools in Ghana. This study does not aim to evaluate your techniques or experiences. Instead, I am are trying to learn more about specific activities administrators (principals) can undertake to provide instructional leadership to improve teaching and learning to support increased student achievement in rural school districts.

To facilitate my note-taking, I would like to audiotape our conversations for the session today. Please sign the release form. For your information, only the researcher on this project will be privy to the tapes that I will eventually destroy after the tape's

transcription. Besides, you signed a form devised to meet human subject requirements.

Essentially, this document indicates that:

All information will be held confidential.

1. Your participation is voluntary, and you may stop at any time if you feel uncomfortable.
2. This interview is not intended to cause any personal damage or discomfort.

Do you have any questions to ask?

Are you ready to begin?

Interviewee Background

What is your highest qualification?

What is your position?

How long have you been ...

----- in your present position?

----- in this district?

1. Briefly describe your role (Circuit Supervisor, Principal, Teacher) as it relates to student learning and achievement (if appropriate).

- a. How are you involved in teaching, learning, and assessment here?
2. What instructional leadership practices do administrators implement to support public K-12 schools in Ghana to enhance student achievement.
 - a. When you review and analyze your student achievement data, what patterns do you see in terms of achievement gaps? Are there particular groups that struggle, and what have you done to work with them specifically? What strategies work best in raising achievement levels for all students?
 - b. What strategies have you found most helpful to assist principals and teacher to increase student achievement in deprived communities
 - c. Are you involved in evaluating teaching, learning, and assessment practices at either the school or district level? How is this achieved?
 - d. How do evaluating instructional leadership practices at the school or district level improve teaching strategies to enhance student achievement?
 - e. What motivates teachers to use innovative teaching and assessment techniques in their teaching?
 - f. What types of professional development opportunities do you see emerging in schools that focus on teaching and learning strategies to increase student achievement? (Institutional or Behavioral?)
 - g. Are there any particular characteristics that you associate with principals who are interested in innovative teaching/learning initiatives in rural schools?

- h. How do administrators ascertain what may need to change to increase student achievement in public K-12 schools in Ghana?
 - i. How do administrators ascertain what may need to be implemented to increase student achievement in public K-12 schools in Ghana?
 - j. Describe how teaching, learning, and assessment practices are evaluated in this school or district, and how helpful are they in improving school effectiveness and student achievement?
3. What skills will administrators, supervisors, and teachers need to implement instructional practices that improve student achievement in the rural public K-12 schools in Ghana?
- a. What challenges do circuit supervisors face in improving student achievement in Ghana's public schools?
 - b. What challenges do administrators face in improving student achievement in Ghana's public schools?
 - c. What challenges do Teachers face in improving student achievement in Ghana's public schools?
 - d. How can these barriers be overcome?
 - e. Are there opportunities for rural and urban circuit supervisors, administrators, and teachers to share strategies and initiatives?
 - f. Can you give me some examples?

- g. What motivates you to participate in instructional development programs and apply them in your instructions in your school?
- h. How frequently are these instructional development programs organized, and how often do you attend such programs?

Post Interview Comments

Thank you for your answers. I do appreciate your time and availability.

Do you have any questions for me?

Once again, thank you, and I am grateful. Goodbye, and God bless you.