University of Hormozgan

Iranian Journal of Educational Research

Print ISSN: 1735 - 563X Online ISSN: 2980 - 874X

Homepage: http://ijer.hormozgan.ac.ir

Educational and Behavioral Research Center

Challenges Newly Appointed Female Principals Encounter Executing Instructional Leadership: Context of Rural Primary Schools

Saltiel Kholoolo Collen Mataboge✉

Ph.D. Senior Lecturer, Department of Educational Leadership and Management, College of Education, University of South Africa,1Preller Street, Muckleneuk, 0003. South Africa, Ematabsk@unisa.ac.za

Article Info

Article type:

Review Article

Article history:

Received 18 Aug. 2024

Received in revised form 14 Sep. 2024

Accepted 8 Sep. 2024

Published online 01 Dec. 2024

Keywords:

Instructional leadership,

Female principals,

Rural primary schools,

Leadership challenges,

Gender bias

ABSTRACT

Objective: This conceptual paper seeks to explore the challenges newly appointed female principals encounter in executing instructional leadership within the context of rural primary schools. The main question for the study is: What are the key obstacles that newly appointed female principals face in implementing effective instructional leadership in rural educational settings?

Methods: This paper adopts a qualitative approach, with data collection rooted in an extensive review of scholarly studies, recent books and peer-reviewed articles. The data is analyzed within the interpretive paradigm which generates a deeper understanding of the intricate challenges faced by these female leaders.

Results: Findings suggest that newly appointed female principals in rural schools often grapple with issues such as gender bias, limited access to professional development, community resistance to female leadership and inadequate resources. Practical implications include the need for targeted leadership training programs, mentorship opportunities and community engagement strategies to support newly appointed female principals in these challenging environments.

Conclusions: By mitigating these challenges, the study provides valuable insights for policymakers, teachers and stakeholders with the aim to enhance the effectiveness of instructional leadership in rural primary schools thereby quality education.

Cite this article: Mataboge, S.K.C. (2024). Challenges newly appointed female principals encounter executing instructional leadership: context of rural primary schools. *Iranian Journal of Educational Research*, 3 (4), 33-50.

DOI: https://doi.org/10.22034/3.4.33

© The Author(s).

Publisher: University of Hormozgan.

DOI: https://doi.org/10.22034/3.4.33

[Downloaded from ijer.hormozgan.ac.ir on 2026-11-20]

[DOI: 10.22034/3.4.33]

Introduction

Newly appointed school principals, occasionally referred to as "novice" principals, face a myriad of challenges as they assume into leadership roles and responsibilities (Tintore et al., 2022). These challenges can be particularly daunting given that the transition from teaching to administration encompasses a substantial change in responsibilities and expectations (Gonçalves, 2024). Globally, research has revealed several significant challenges that newly appointed principals should resolve. The most frequently mentioned challenge is the sense of professional isolation and loneliness (Tintore et al., 2022). Principals, particularly those in their early years may feel detached from their colleagues and without the required support networks to navigate the intricate nature of their newly acquired responsibilities (Brown, 2024; Tahir, 2020). According to Tamadoni & Rezvan (2023), newly appointed principals in African schools frequently encounter significant difficulties such as low school infrastructure, high poverty and resources that are scarce. The abilities of the principal to lead and manage their schools efficiently can be significantly impacted by these contextual factors (Tintore et al., 2022). For example, a study in South Africa found that newly appointed principals struggled to balance their administrative duties with the need to provide basic services which encompasses access to clean water and electricity for their students (Mbana & Sinthumule, 2024).

Navigating the intricate connections and expectations among several stakeholders, such as teachers, parents, and the broader community, is a significant challenge for newly appointed female principals globally and South Africa is no exception in this instance (Tintore et al., 2022; DeCrosta & Spear, 2024). Undoubtedly, newly appointed female principals must act compassionately to balance the needs and demands of the diversified groups often with little training or no support at all (Brown, 2024). Similarly, the newly appointed female principals may have significant challenges in leading and managing effective instruction and learning processes in their rural primary schools (Shah et al., 2024). This may include challenges with implementing curriculum changes, supporting teacher development and ensuring achievement of students through the attainment of quality education (Tahir, 2020).

In the South African context, this is particularly evident as principals often inherit underperforming schools with deeply entrenched educational challenges (Ramrathan, 2024). Thus, the complexity of educational policies and the need to align their school's practices with these policies can be a

[Downloaded from ijer.hormozgan.ac.ir on 2026-11-20]

[DOI: 10.22034/3.4.33]

significant challenge for newly appointed female principals (Klein, 2023). As a result, navigating the bureaucratic landscape and ensuring compliance with constantly evolving regulations can be a daunting task especially for those new to the role (Laforest & Smith, 2024). In the same vein, challenges faced by newly appointed school principals are multifaceted and often deeply rooted in the broader socio-economic and political contexts in which they operate. Understanding and addressing these challenges is crucial for supporting the success and effectiveness of school leadership both globally and within the South African education system.

Background

Gender Inequalities and Patriarchal Norms

Cansoy et al. (2024) argued that the patriarchal practices and gender disparities prevalent across many African countries constitute significant challenges for newly appointed female principals of rural primary schools. In South Africa, for example, women are underrepresented in school leadership positions with only a small percentage of principals being females (Theoharis, 2024). Similarly, this disparity practices are deeply rooted in cultural attitudes that view leadership as a masculine domain which makes it difficult for women to assert their authority and command respect from staff, parents and the community as a whole (Thelma & Ngulube, 2024). Coincidentally, these perceptions of women as less capable leaders create impediments for newly appointed female principals who must constantly prove their competence and overcome prejudices to be recognized and respected in their leadership roles. Undoubtedly, the challenges posed by gender inequalities and patriarchal norms can significantly undermine the ability of newly appointed female principals to effectively execute instructional leadership as they navigate a system that often does not fully support or value their insightful leadership.

Lack of Mentorship and Support

In many instances, newly appointed female principals lack access to effective mentorship and support systems that could guide them through the complexities of instructional leadership (Theoharis, 2024). Nonetheless, many rural schools operate in isolation, leaving these newly appointed female leaders without the necessary networks and resources to resolve the unique challenges they face. This lack of support can impede their abilities to implement instructional practices that improve teaching and learning including quality education (Myende & Magaua, 2018). Notably, without access to experienced mentors or peer support networks, newly appointed

[Downloaded from ijer.hormozgan.ac.ir on 2026-11-20]

[DOI: 10.22034/3.4.33]

female principals in rural settings are often left to navigate the demands of instructional leadership on their own (Smith, 2023). Consequently, they may lack the guidance and advice needed to effectively support teachers, implement curriculum and instructional strategies, and foster a positive learning environment. Similarly, this isolation can be particularly challenging for women entering school leadership roles, as they may not have the established connections or professional development opportunities available to their male counterparts (Thelma & Ngulube, 2024). The absence of a supportive system can significantly impede the ability of female principals to drive meaningful change and improvement within their rural primary schools.

Work-Life Balance Challenges

Balancing the demands of school leadership with personal/family responsibilities might be particularly challenging for newly female principals in rural primary schools (Theoharis, 2024). The expectation of fulfilling traditional gender responsibilities, such as parenthood and household tasks, may bring about significant stress and impede their ability to focus on instructional leadership (Cansoy et al., 2024). This work-life imbalance may lead to burnout and decreased effectiveness in the main job duties that are carried out by the newly appointed female principals. Even in demanding leadership roles, many rural African communities still expect women to carry the majority of domestic tasks. Female principals must balance the obligations of leading a school with the requirements of their families and households. This can be a daunting endeavour, leaving little time or energy for them to completely devote themselves to the instructional leadership duties that are crucial to enhancing student outcomes. As a consequence, the constant struggle to balance work and home life can lead to stress, exhaustion, and feelings of guilt or inadequacy, undermining the ability of female principals to lead effectively (Maslach & Leiter, 2022). Without adequate support systems or flexible work arrangements, this work-life conflict can ultimately undermine their capacity to drive meaningful change and improvements within their rural primary schools.

Inadequate Infrastructure and Resources

Undoubtedly, rural primary schools in many African countries often suffer from a lack of basic infrastructure and resources, which can impede the efforts of female principals to execute effective instructional leadership (Myende & Magaua, 2018). Thus, inadequate classroom facilities, limited access to teaching materials, and poor technological infrastructure can make it difficult for principals to implement innovative instructional practices and support teachers' professional

[Downloaded from ijer.hormozgan.ac.ir on 2026-11-20]

[DOI: 10.22034/3.4.33]

development (Nkambule & Amsterdam, 2019). Newly appointed female principals in rural primary schools face a multitude of challenges that can hinder their ability to exercise effective instructional leadership. Similarly, Basharat & Alam (2024) found that these challenges include gender inequalities, lack of mentorship and support, work-life balance issues and inadequate infrastructure and resources. Addressing these barriers requires a multifaceted approach, involving policy changes, targeted professional development programs, and community-based support systems to empower and enable female school leaders to succeed in their critical role (Eden et al., 2024).

The purpose of this research is to "explore the challenges newly appointed female principals encounter in executing instructional leadership within the context of rural primary schools".

The main question is: "What are the key obstacles that newly appointed female principals face in implementing effective instructional leadership in rural educational settings?"

Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework for the study on "Challenges Newly Appointed Female Principals encounter executing instructional leadership: Context of Rural Primary Schools" is rooted in several key theories and models that explore leadership, gender and rural education. This framework aims to provide a structured lens through which to examine the unique challenges faced by female principals in rural settings particularly as they navigate the demands of instructional leadership.

Transformational Leadership Theory: This theory was developed by Burns (1978) and furthered by Bass (1985) both emphasizes the role of leaders in inspiring and motivating followers to achieve beyond expectations. In the context of rural primary schools, transformational leadership is crucial as it allows female principals to foster a shared vision, build strong relationships and drive change despite the constraints of their respective environment. The theory highlights the importance of vision, inspiration and individualized consideration which are critical as newly appointed female principals work to establish their leadership identity and influence instructional practices. On the other hand, the Distributed Leadership Theory: as proposed by Spillane (2006) which suggests that leadership is not the sole responsibility of the principal but is shared among various members of the school community. This theory is particularly relevant in rural contexts, where resources are limited, and principals often rely on teachers and community members to share leadership

[Downloaded from ijer.hormozgan.ac.ir on 2026-11-20]

[DOI: 10.22034/3.4.33]

responsibilities. For newly appointed female principals, understanding and utilizing distributed leadership can help mitigate challenges related to isolation and workload, allowing for a more collaborative approach to instructional leadership.

Concurrently, the feminist leadership theory explores the unique challenges and opportunities that women face in leadership roles emphasizing the importance of gendered experiences in shaping leadership styles and outcomes. This theory is essential for understanding the specific barriers newly appointed female principals encounter such as gender bias, stereotypes and the pressure to conform to traditional gender roles (Ocio, 2024). The theory also highlights the potential for female leaders to bring a more inclusive and empathetic approach to leadership which can be particularly effective in rural school settings. In the same vein, the role congruity theory posits that women in leadership roles often face prejudice when their leadership style is perceived as inconsistent with societal expectations of femininity. In rural primary schools, newly appointed female principals may encounter resistance or skepticism from staff, parents, or community members who hold traditional views on gender roles. This theory helps explain the additional layer of challenges female principals face in establishing authority and credibility in their instructional leadership roles.

On the one hand, Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory provides a framework for understanding the multiple layers of influence on an individual's development including the microsystem, mesosystem, ecosystem, macrosystem and chronosystem. In the context of rural education, this theory can be applied to analyze how the various environmental factors such as community norms, geographic isolation, socio-economic conditions and educational policies may impact the experiences of newly appointed female principals. The theory highlights the importance of considering the broader rural context when examining the challenges of instructional leadership in rural primary schools.

As a result, these theoretical frameworks have combined leadership theories pertaining to gender perspectives and the contextual considerations to provide a comprehensive lens for exploring the challenges faced by newly appointed female principals in rural primary schools (Hoyt & Simon, 2024). By integrating these theories, the framework offers insights into the complexities of instructional leadership in rural settings and highlights the unique barriers and opportunities that female principals encounter as they navigate their roles.

[Downloaded from ijer.hormozgan.ac.ir on 2026-11-20]

[DOI: 10.22034/3.4.33]

Literature review

Instructional leadership is a crucial aspect of school leadership and it is particularly important for newly appointed principals in rural primary schools. Researchers have highlighted the unique challenges that female principals face in executing instructional leadership in these contexts (Bush & Glover, 2016). Globally, studies have shown that female principals often encounter gender-based barriers in their leadership roles. In the United States, for example, female principals are more likely to face discrimination, lack of respect and work-life balance issues compared to their male counterparts (Mertler, 2024). Similarly, in the United Kingdom, female principals have reported experiencing challenges related to work-life balance, as well as a lack of role models and mentors (DeCrosta & Spear, 2024). These challenges can hinder their ability to effectively engage in instructional leadership.

In the African context, the situation is often more challenging for female principals. In many African countries, patriarchal societal structures and cultural norms can create significant barriers for women in leadership positions (Maboe, 2021). For instance, a study in Kenya found that female principals faced resistance from teachers and community members, who were less willing to accept their authority and expertise (Mertler, 2024). Additionally, the lack of professional development and mentoring opportunities for female principals in Africa can further exacerbate the challenges they face in executing instructional leadership (Cansoy et al.,2024). In the South African context, the challenges for female principals in rural primary schools are multifaceted. Historically, the education system in South Africa has been deeply influenced by gender-based biases and patriarchal structures (DeCrosta & Spear, 2024).). This legacy continues to shape the experiences of female principals who often face discrimination, lack of support from community members and work-life balance issues (Kyambade et al., 2024). Furthermore, the rural context adds an additional layer of complexity, as these schools tend to have limited resources, infrastructure, and access to professional development opportunities (Cansoy et al., 2024).

The adversarial effects of these challenges on instructional leadership are significant. When female principals are unable to effectively engage in instructional leadership, it can have a direct impact on student learning and academic achievement (DeCrosta & Spear, 2024). For example, a study in Tanzania found that female principals who faced significant gender-based barriers were less able to provide instructional support to teachers, which ultimately led to lower student performance

[Downloaded from ijer.hormozgan.ac.ir on 2026-11-20]

[DOI: 10.22034/3.4.33]

(Subramaniam & Shuib, 2019). Similarly, in South Africa, a study by Kyambade et al., (2024) found that female principals in rural schools often lacked the confidence and support to effectively monitor and evaluate instructional practices, which hindered their ability to provide meaningful feedback and guidance to teachers. This, in turn, contributed to lower student achievement in these schools.

Furthermore, the lack of mentoring and professional development opportunities for female principals in rural contexts can limit their ability to develop the necessary skills and knowledge to engage in effective instructional leadership (Cansoy et al., 2024). Without access to training and support, these principals may struggle to implement research-based instructional strategies, analyze student data and provide targeted feedback to teachers (Mertler, 2024). To address these challenges, researchers have emphasized the importance of creating supportive environments for female principals in rural primary schools. This includes providing mentoring programs, targeted professional development opportunities, and networking platforms that allow female principals to share best practices and receive guidance from experienced leaders (Maboe, 2021). Additionally, efforts to challenge gender-based biases and promote gender equity within the education system can help to create a more inclusive and empowering environment for female principals (DeCrosta & Spear, 2024). Undoubtedly, these challenges which are often rooted in gender-based biases and cultural norms, can have adverse effects on student learning and academic achievement. To address them it is crucial to implement supportive measures that empower female principals and enable them to effectively engage in instructional leadership.

Material and Methods

This is a qualitative study which comprised of literature review as a research method. A systematic literature review was conducted drawing predominantly on sources based on scholarly books and articles published during (2016-2024). To explore knowledge and understanding pertaining to the "challenges newly appointed female principals encounter in executing instructional leadership within the context of rural primary schools". Fan et al., (2022) elucidate that integrative literature review is a form of research that reviews, critiques and synthesizes representative literature on a topic in an integrated approach such that new perspectives on the topic are compiled. An integrative literature review is a special kind of systematic literature review that permits the

[Downloaded from ijer.hormozgan.ac.ir on 2026-11-20]

[DOI: 10.22034/3.4.33]

combination and synthesis of findings. In the analysis of the reviewed scholarly books and articles in understanding the topic, the interpretivist paradigm was applied within a local context with its limitations that have deep social and cultural foundations (Pervin & Mokhtar, 2023). The reflections are based on the authors' subjective perspectives about the topic under discussion.

Data collection

In the systematic literature review exploring the impact of teacher redeployment and how social justice is affected in secondary schools in South Africa, recent evidence from sources published between (2016–2024) was meticulously gathered. This comprehensive approach sought to cover nuanced insights into the topic regarding the "challenges newly appointed female principals encounter in executing instructional leadership within the context of rural primary schools". By analyzing a range of recent scholarly books and articles, this review seeks to reflect on the "challenges as encountered by newly appointed female principals in executing instructional leadership within the rural primary schools".

Data analysis

The analysis of the literature on "the impact of teacher redeployment and how social justice is affected in secondary schools in South Africa" adopts an interpretivist paradigm within a local context as highlighted by Pervin & Mokhtar (2023). This approach acknowledges the deep social and cultural foundations inherent in rural primary schools by recognizing the limitations of a purely objective stance. By embracing subjective perspectives, the author reflects on nuanced aspects of the topic by considering the intricacies of interpersonal dynamics, community norms and power structures. This interpretive lens allows for a deeper understanding of the complexities surrounding "challenges newly appointed female principals encounter in executing instructional leadership within the context of rural primary schools" (Muldoon et al., 2024). Through this holistic approach, insights emerge that are essential for crafting effective interventions and strategies to match the specific needs of rural primary school contexts.

Results

The challenges faced by newly appointed female principals in implementing effective instructional leadership in rural educational settings are multifaceted and often exacerbated by the unique contextual factors of rural communities. These obstacles can have significant adverse effects on

[Downloaded from ijer.hormozgan.ac.ir on 2026-11-20]

[DOI: 10.22034/3.4.33]

the ability of female principals to lead and transform educational outcomes in these contexts. A key obstacle in prevalence is the gender-based biases and stereotypes that female principals often encounter (Npadiswe & Mathipa, 2021). In many rural communities, there are deeply rooted patriarchal norms and expectations that can undermine the authority and credibility of female principals in executing their respective roles. This can manifest in resistance from teachers, staff, parents and even the broader community to accept the leadership of a female particularly in traditionally male-dominated roles and environments (Theoharis, 2024). Examples of this can be seen in studies from South Africa where female principals have reported being subjected to sexist remarks, having their decisions questioned and facing challenges in gaining the respect and cooperation of their staff (Npadiswe & Mathipa, 2021).

Again a significant obstacle is the lack of adequate support and mentorship for female principals in rural settings (Npadiswe & Mathipa, 2021). Rural schools often have limited access to professional development opportunities, networking, and peer support, which can be particularly crucial for newly appointed female principals as they navigate the unique challenges of their role. This can lead to feelings of isolation and make it more difficult for them to develop the necessary skills and strategies to effectively lead effective teaching and learning within the rural primary schools (Wieczorek & Manard, 2018). Consequently, the multiple responsibilities and expectations placed on female principals in rural settings can also present a significant challenge. In addition to their instructional leadership duties, rural principals are often required to fulfil a wide range of administrative, community engagement, and even maintenance tasks (Wieczorek & Manard, 2018). This can result in an overwhelming workload that makes it difficult for female principals to focus on their core instructional leadership responsibilities.

In the same vein, the resource constraints and limited funding often experienced by rural schools can impede the ability of female principals to implement effective instructional leadership practices. Notably, these constraints include a lack of access to modern teaching resources, technology and professional development opportunities for teachers (Zuckerman, 2024). In the South African context, for example, many rural schools face significant infrastructure challenges which comprise of a a lack of reliable electricity and access to clean water which further exacerbate the challenges faced by female principals in rural primary schools (Npadiswe & Mathipa, 2021). The adverse effects of these obstacles can be substantial. Newly appointed female principals may

[Downloaded from ijer.hormozgan.ac.ir on 2026-11-20]

[DOI: 10.22034/3.4.33]

struggle to establish their authority and credibility which can undermine their ability to effectively take a lead regarding their instructional improvement efforts and initiatives (Npadiswe & Mathipa, 2021). The lack of support and mentorship may also lead to feelings of isolation and self-doubt and make it more difficult for them to develop the necessary skills and strategies to navigate the unique challenges of their roles as managers and leaders (Wieczorek & Manard, 2018). In some instances, the overwhelming workload and resource constraints may prevent female principals from dedicating the necessary time and attention to their instructional leadership responsibilities such as conducting classroom observations, providing tough feedback to teachers and implementing professional development programs (Wieczorek & Manard, 2018). This can ultimately negatively impact the quality of teaching and learning within the school and perpetuate the cycle of underperformance in rural educational settings.

Mitigation strategies

To mitigate these obstacles, a multifaceted approach is indispensable. At the policy level there is a need for targeted interventions to mitigate gender-based biases and stereotypes and to provide the most needed support and professional development opportunities for female principals in rural schools (Npadiswe & Mathipa, 2021). This may include mentorship programs, leadership training and networking initiatives that specifically accommodate to the needs of female principals in rural contexts. Once again at the school and community level, it is crucially imperative to promote a culture of respect, collaboration and support for female principals in rural schools. As a point of departure, these initiatives may involve engaging with staff, parents and the broader community to build an understanding and appreciation for the unique contributions that female principals can bring to in the rural schools (Theoharis, 2024). Similarly, establishing a strong partnership with local organizations and community leaders can help to expand the resources and the support available to female principals and to better resolve the specific challenges faced by rural schools (Zuckerman, 2024).

Once more, at the individual level, female principals in rural settings can benefit from developing strategies to manage their workload, prioritize their instructional leadership responsibilities and diversified roles by building resilience in the face of adversarial various rural schools (Wieczorek & Manard, 2018). This could include strategies for effective time management, delegating tasks with accountability and seeking out peer support and mentorship opportunities for developmental

[Downloaded from ijer.hormozgan.ac.ir on 2026-11-20]

[DOI: 10.22034/3.4.33]

purposes. Thus, Thelma & Ngulube (2024) found that the key obstacles faced by newly appointed female principals in implementing effective instructional leadership in rural educational settings are multifaceted and deeply rooted in gender-based biases, resource constraints and the unique contextual factors of rural communities. The mitigation of these challenges will require a comprehensive and multi-level approach that will resolve systemic barriers, fosters supportive school and community environments and empowers female principals to develop the necessary skills and strategies to lead their schools effectively (Sarkio et al.,2024). By doing so, we can help to ensure that all students in rural educational settings have access to high-quality instructional leadership, regardless of the gender of their principal and achieve the ideal of quality education in rural primary schools.

Discussion

The findings of this study reveal the multitude of complexities that newly appointed female principals encounter in executing their instructional leadership in rural primary schools. Newly appointed female principals in rural primary schools face unique challenges that are rooted in the context of rurality (Myende & Maifala, 2020). These principals are by law expected to ensure quality education for learners while simultaneously navigating the administrative and managerial tasks that characterize their role (Republic of South Africa, 1996; Department of Basic Education, 2014). However, the rural context presents exacerbated barriers such as a lack of basic infrastructure, scarcity of qualified teachers and the prevalence of poverty-related social ills (Bhengu & Myende, 2016; Myende & Hlalele, 2018). Again, the study highlights the need for specialized training and support to empower newly appointed female principals in rural schools with the necessary astute skills and knowledge to effectively lead in their context (Fullan, 1998). Thus, policymakers and educational authorities should consider the unique challenges faced by newly appointed principals and provide tailored professional development programs that resolve the complexities of leading in a rural setting (Mestry, 2017). In the same vein, the study suggests the importance of adaptive and enabling leadership approaches that empower rural principals to navigate the multifaceted challenges of their respective contexts (Myende & Maifala, 2020). By acknowledging and mitigating the specific needs of rural principals, educational stakeholders can

[Downloaded from ijer.hormozgan.ac.ir on 2026-11-20]

[DOI: 10.22034/3.4.33]

better support them in fulfilling their instructional leadership responsibilities and ensuring quality education for students in rural primary schools.

Recommendations

Newly appointed female principals in rural primary schools often face unique challenges in executing effective instructional leadership (Burkhauser, 2017; Versland & Erickson, 2017). To address these challenges, several strategies can be made. Initiatives could be made towards providing targeted professional development programs that are focused on instructional leadership skills and strategies for rural contexts which can help build the capacity of these newly appointed female principals (Mette et al., 2016).In the same vein, by establishing mentoring programs that pair experienced rural principals with novice female principals can yield the sharing of knowledge and strategies for navigating the rural context.

In addition, school districts should consider implementing distributed leadership models that empower teachers and other staff to take on instructional leadership roles which may be reducing the burden on the newly appointed female principal in rural primary schools (Versland & Erickson, 2017). Thus, policymakers should also ensure that rural schools have access to adequate resources both financial and human to support the principal's instructional leadership efforts (Burkhauser, 2017). By addressing these challenges holistically newly appointed female principals in rural primary schools can be better equipped to exercise effective instructional leadership and drive student success with quality education.

Practical implications

The findings from this study highlight the significant challenges that newly appointed female principals face in executing instructional leadership in the context of rural primary schools. These principals encounter numerous challenges which includes lack of support from the community, limited resources and difficulties in mitigating social ills that impede student learning (Myende & Maifala, 2020). To address these challenges, policymakers and education authorities should provide targeted professional development programs to equip female principals with the necessary astute skills and knowledge to effectively lead teaching and learning in rural primary scools (Myende & Maifala, 2020). In the same vein, targeted funding and resources should be allocated to rural schools to enhance infrastructure that precisely effective support teaching and learning with quality education. It is of critical. Fostering strong partnerships between schools,

[Downloaded from ijer.hormozgan.ac.ir on 2026-11-20]

[DOI: 10.22034/3.4.33]

communities, and stakeholders can also help mitigate the unique challenges faced by female principals in rural primary schools.

Data availability statement

The article and its supplementary material include the data that supports the findings of this study on the challenges encountered by newly appointed female principals in executing instructional leadership in rural primary schools. However, any additional information or inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author. Thus, access to certain data may be subject to privacy considerations.

Ethics statement

Since this is a theoretical paper, no data was gathered from human participants, and so no official ethical approval was necessary. The study upholds ethical standards in academic research by ensuring precise citation and recognition of sources. Theoretical viewpoints are thoroughly examined in relation to their original authors and their respective contributions.

Author contributions

The author contributed to the study's conception and design, conducted material preparation, data collection and analysis inclusive of the approved the final submitted version of the article.

Funding

The author did (not) receive any support from any organization for the submitted work.

Conflict of interest

The author declares that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

[Downloaded from ijer.hormozgan.ac.ir on 2026-11-20]

[DOI: 10.22034/3.4.33]

References

Arroyo, D. (2022). Women's leadership in education: A perspective from Chilean school leaders. Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Nottingham.

Basharat, L., & Alam, M. J. (2024). Workplace Environment for Gender Equality and Sustainable Career Planning: The Case of Bangladesh. In People, Spaces and Places in Gendered Environments (Vol. 34, pp. 77-97). Emerald Publishing Limited.

Bhengu, T. T., & Myende, P. E. (2016). Leadership for rural school improvement: Lessons from a South African case study. The Journal of Social Sciences, 46(1), 1-11. https://doi.org/10.1080/09718923.2016.11893504

Brown, C. P. (2024). A Case Study of Principals' Sensemaking of the Learning Experiences of Kindergarteners and How this Appears to Affect Them as Instructional Leaders. Journal of School Leadership, 34(3), 259-294. https://doi.org/10.1177/10526846231222516

Burkhauser, S. (2017). How much do school principals matter when it comes to teacher working conditions?. Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 39(1), 126-145. https://doi.org/10.3102/0162373716668028

Bush, T., & Glover, D. (2016). School leadership and management in South Africa: Findings from a systematic literature review. International Journal of Educational Management, 30(2), 211-231. https://doi.org/10.1108/IJEM-07-2014-0101

Cansoy, R., Kılınç, A. Ç., & Türkoğlu, M. E. (2024). Barriers to school principals' effective instructional supervision practices: evidence from a centralised educational context. Educational Studies, 1-18. https://doi.org/10.1080/03055698.2024.2322942

DeCrosta, L., & Spear, A. M. (2024). Hegemonic masculinity and institutional betrayal: an oppressive silencing of the feminist ear in Burkina Faso secondary schools. Gender and Education, 36(3), 266-282. https://doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2024.2320923

Department of Basic Education. (2014). The South African Standards for Principalship: Enhancing the performance of school principals. Pretoria: Department of Basic Education.

Eden, C. A., Chisom, O. N., & Adeniyi, I. S. (2024). Education policy and social change: Examining the impact of reform initiatives on equity and access. International Journal of Science and Research Archive, 11(2), 139-146. https://doi.org/10.30574/ijsra.2024.11.2.0372

[Downloaded from ijer.hormozgan.ac.ir on 2026-11-20]

[DOI: 10.22034/3.4.33]

Education Labour Relations Council. (2016). Personnel Administrative Measures (PAM). Pretoria: Department of Basic Education.

Gonçalves, S. (2024). Leadership, Ethics, and Innovative Approaches in Higher Education. The Bloomsbury Handbook of Values and Ethical Change in Transformative Leadership in Higher Education, 144-68.

Hoyt, C. L., & Simon, S. (2024). Social psychological approaches to women and leadership theory. In Handbook of research on gender and leadership (pp. 65-83). Edward Elgar Publishing.

Klein, K. (2023). It's complicated: Examining political realities and challenges in the context of research-practice partnerships from the school district leader's perspective. Educational Policy, 37(1), 56-76. https://doi.org/10.1177/08959048221130352

Kyambade, M., Tushabe, M., & Namatovu, A. (2024). Work life balance and women representation in leadership positions in Ugandan public universities. SN Social Sciences, 4(8), 1-27. https://doi.org/10.1007/s43545-024-00947-0

Laforest, R., & Smith, S. R. (2024). Teaching public policy in North America: Adapting to uncertain times. In Handbook of Teaching Public Policy (pp. 474-488). Edward Elgar Publishing.

Maboe, K. A. (2021). Challenges faced by female principals in rural primary schools in South Africa. South African Journal of Education, 41(2), 1-9. https://doi.org/10.15700/saje.v41n2a1823

Maslach, C., & Leiter, M. P. (2022). The burnout challenge: Managing people's relationships with their jobs. Harvard University Press.

Mbana, Z., & Sinthumule, N. I. (2024). What is there to drink? Water (in) justice in the democratic South Africa. Frontiers in Water, 6, 1354477. 1-14. https://doi.org/10.3389/frwa.2024.1354477

Mertler, C. A. (2024). Action research: Improving schools and empowering educators. Sage Publications.

Mestry, R. (2017). Empowering principals to lead and manage public schools effectively in the 21st century. South African Journal of Education, 37(1), 1-11. https://doi.org/10.15700/saje.v37n1a1334

[Downloaded from ijer.hormozgan.ac.ir on 2026-11-20]

[DOI: 10.22034/3.4.33]

Mette, I. M., Nieuwenhuizen, L., & Hvidston, D. J. (2016). Teachers' perceptions of culturally responsive pedagogy and the impact on leadership preparation: Lessons for future reform efforts. International Journal of Educational Leadership Preparation, 11(1), n1.

Myende, P. E., & Hlalele, D. (2018). Improving academic performance in rural schools: Focusing on the context. Perspectives in Education, 36(2), 30-42. https://doi.org/10.18820/2519593X/pie.v36i2.3

Myende, P. E., & Magaua, N. R. (2018). Instructional leadership in rural school contexts: Barriers and strategies. South African Journal of Education, 38(2), 1-11. https://doi.org/10.15700/saje.v38n2a1440

Myende, P. E., & Maifala, S. (2020). Complexities of leading rural schools in South Africa: Learning from principals' voices. International Journal of Rural Management, 16(2), 225-253. https://doi.org/10.1177/0973005220930382

Nkambule, T., & Amsterdam, C. (2019). Challenges facing rural school principals in a South African province. SAGE Open, 9(2), 1-12. https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244019846273

Ocio, A. R. (2024). 'Theory is beautiful': Resistance and counter-resistance to gender equality in teacher training. Higher Education Quarterly, 78(3), 693-708. https://doi.org/10.1111/hequ.12478

Ramrathan, L. (2024). Critical Reflections on Teacher Education in South Africa. Springer Nature.

Republic of South Africa. (1996). South African Schools Act, No. 84 of 1996. Pretoria: Government Printer.

Sarkio, Katri, Tiina Korhonen, and Kai Hakkarainen. (2024). "Multidisciplinary perspective on a Finnish general upper-secondary school's educational change: strengthening and hindering factors." Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research: 1-16. https://doi.org/10.1080/00313831.2024.2360897

Shah, D. B., Gurr, D., & Drysdale, L. (2024). School Leadership and Management in Sindh Pakistan: Examining Headteachers' Evolving Roles, Contemporary Challenges, and Adaptive Strategies. Education Sciences, 14(5), 440. https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci14050440

Smith, L. (2023). The Perceptions of School and District Leaders on Principal Mentorship. Immaculata University.

[Downloaded from ijer.hormozgan.ac.ir on 2026-11-20]

[DOI: 10.22034/3.4.33]

Subramaniam, A., & Shuib, M. (2019). Gendered leadership in Tanzanian schools: Navigating the challenges. Educational Management Administration & Leadership, 47(5), 755-770. https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143218775428

Tahir, L. M. (2020). Implementing teacher leadership in Malaysian schools: Exploring secondary principals' perspectives. School of Education, Universiti.

Tamadoni, A., & Rezvan, R. (2023). A systematic review of key contextual challenges facing school principals: Research-informed coping solutions.

Thelma, C. C., & Ngulube, L. (2024). Women in Leadership: Examining Barriers to Women's Advancement in Leadership Positions. Asian Journal of Advanced Research and Reports, 18(6), 273-290. https://doi.org/10.9734/ajarr/2024/v18i6671

Theoharis, G. (2024). The school leaders our children deserve: Seven keys to equity, social justice, and school reform. Teachers College Press.

Tintore, M., Cunha, R. S., Cabral, I., & Alves, J. J. M. (2022). A scoping review of problems and challenges faced by school leaders (2003–2019). Educational Management Administration & Leadership, 50(4), 536-573. https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143220942527

Versland, T. M., & Erickson, J. L. (2017). Leading by example: A case study of the influence of principal self-efficacy on collective efficacy. Cogent Education, 4(1), 1286765. https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2017.1286765

Zuckerman, S. J. (2024). Beyond the school walls: collective impact in micropolitan school-community partnerships. In Thinking Ecologically in Educational Policy and Research (pp. 98-111). Routledge.

[Downloaded from ijer.hormozgan.ac.ir on 2026-11-20]

[DOI: 10.22034/3.4.33]