

Research Article**Challenges Encountered by School Principals and Teachers that Impede the Optimal Use of Instruction Time in South African Schools ***Edmore DONGO ¹  Vimbi Petrus MAHLANGU ² **Abstract**

The purpose of this article is to investigate the challenges encountered by school principals and teachers in South African schools in ensuring that instructional time is optimally used during contact time. Challenges that impede the optimal use of instruction time are extensively investigated as they are encountered daily by school principals and teachers. This article therefore sought to understand the impact of these challenges on the smoothing flowing and delivery knowledge during teaching and learning activities. In this article, data was collected through semi-structured interviews and document analysis. School principals and post level 1 teachers were individually interviewed with the intension to investigate and understand what challenges do they encounter during contact time in regard to the optimal use of instruction time. All interviews were then transcribed, coded and themes developed. School principals and teachers from township schools encounter similar challenges with their counterparts in former Model C schools. However, if all school principals work hand in gloves with teachers and other stakeholders, then a number of challenges encountered they encounter will be minimised resulting in improved learners' academic performance. Some participating teachers could have some reservations to speak openly particularly if the challenges were as a result of some weaknesses pertaining to how their school principals manage instruction time. As subordinates, teachers could try to protect their school principals in fear of being victimised regardless of being assured of their names' anonymity and confidentiality of the information shared. This article's finding and recommendations thereof may be used by the school principals, teachers and the Department of Basic Education as source of information in identifying the timewasters that impedes the optimal use of instruction time and the strategies that can be employed in order to minimise or eradicate them. Based on this study, school principals and teachers can revisit the way they deal with such challenges with the aim to improve the effective use of instructional time. This article provides both theoretical and empirical contribution to the existing literature on the challenges encountered by school principals and teachers pertaining the optimal utilisation of instruction time. In addition, it also highlights some recommendations that give advice to school principals and teachers on how they can minimise or eradicate these challenges for the betterment of learners' academic performance.

Keywords: Time management, timewasters, instructional time, effective teaching and learning, learners' academic performance

1. INTRODUCTION

Worldwide, time has become one of the most important limited resources (Ayeni, 2020; Cattaneo, Oggenfuss & Wolter, 2017; Kayode & Ayodele, 2015). The success of teaching and learning processes in any school is also mainly influenced by the time factor (Jez & Wassmer, 2015). Schools are faced by a dilemma in which allocated instructional time is always disturbed or interrupted by a number of timewasters leading to poor or unexpected learners' academic performance. In South Africa, school principals and teachers experience a number of challenges in the form of timewasters which frustrate smooth flowing of teaching and learning activities. Ideally, "the time that teachers and learners spend on instructional matters is limited by the hours in a day, the days in a week and the weeks in a school year" (Cattaneo et al., 2017:1). In essence, this implies that any time lost during contact time bears negative results on the overall completion of work schedule and

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ultimately affects the general performance of learners. Apparently, some researchers unanimously agree that there is a direct and positive relationship between the optimal use of instruction time and the academic performance of learners (Cattaneo et al., 2017; Fisher & Berliner, 1985; Wedel, 2021). School principals, as instructional leaders, should know that any instruction time lost is very unlikely to either be reclaimed or replaced (Bush, 2013). Therefore, there is no room for timewasters if schools anticipate to achieve good learners' academic results.

1.1. Purpose of the Study

This article argues that whenever there is limited or no timewasters to instructional time, then learners' results are more likely to improve. However, to achieve this in schools, school principals and teachers have to work on strategies that reduces or eradicate some timewasters during contact time. When time is managed properly, enough time prevails for teaching and learning, engendering positive academic results (Khan, Farooqi, Khalil & Faisal, 2016; Master, 2013). Timewasters encountered by teachers in township schools are similar to those encountered by their counterparts in former Model C schools.

1.2. Background of the Study

The background to this study emanates from the timewasters encountered by teachers during teaching and learning activities. Teachers always complain about the lack of time to complete teaching and learning activities (Ekundayo, Konwea & Yusuf, 2010). Time ought to be effectively managed so that timewasters to instruction time are minimised. School principals as instructional leaders have to ensure that conducive environments prevail in their schools suppressing any chances of timewasters. Sadly, a number of school principals, more so in township schools, tend to compromise their instructional leadership roles by focusing on other activities, which Mestry, Moonsammy-Koopasammy and Schmidt (2013) identify as administrative duties rather than curriculum and instruction duties. By merely ignoring their instructional leadership practices pertaining to instructional time, school principals are opening a gap of timewasters that is likely to affect their schools' overall academic results.

1.3. Literature Reviews

In this article, literature reviews talk about timewasters and how does these frustrate teachers and ultimately affect the academic results of learners. It also spells out why time management skills and effective classroom management are a requirement in schools in order to improve the optimal use of instruction time. In case where instruction time is lost, ways of compensating such time is also discussed as part of literature.

1.3.1 Time management skills

Time management can be described as the effective and optimal use of available instruction time with the aim to achieve the intended main objective of the school which is teaching and learning (Bush, 2013). Ultimately, the main objective of any school is improved learner academic performance. Undoubtedly, time management is considered to be a vital predictor of learning outcomes. Consequently, better or poor learner academic results are a consequence of effective and poor time management in schools, respectively (Khan et al., 2016; Ling, Heffernan & Muncer, 2003).

Effective time management skills in schools can help school principals in achieving their instructional leadership goals (Goldring, Grissom, Neumerski, Blissett, Murphy, & Porter, 2019). The main purpose of time management in schools is to maximise the use of allocated instruction time (Van Deventer & Kruger, 2003; Kayode & Ayodele, 2015). In their instructional leadership roles, school principals should support and develop their teachers so that they are enriched with time management skills so that they can effectively manage instruction time in order to achieve educational excellence in academic results (Shava & Heystek, 2018). Well-managed time minimises unnecessary timewasters of instruction time (Khan et al., 2016). Teachers with sound time-management skills always prioritise their instructional time for the sake of effective teaching and learning activities. These teachers take

charge of controlling every minute of instruction time, unlike those without such skills (Ayeni, 2020; Boniwell, 2004).

1.3.2 Salient timewasters

By consuming or limiting instructional time, time wasters tend to disrupt the efficient flow of teaching and learning processes (Vannest, Soares, Harrison, Brown & Parker, 2010). Effective school leaders put in endless effort to curtail time-wasting practices in their institutions (Van der Merwe, 2018). Time wasters can build up to a significant loss in instructional time if improperly managed. Bush (2013) asserts that it is doubtful that any missed instructional time brought on by time wasters will be made up for or restored. Among the many typical ways that students waste time in class include tardiness and absenteeism, as well as school briefings, assemblies, and breaks, unscheduled disruptions of class, and insufficient lesson preparation by teachers.

The best use of instructional time can be harmed by absenteeism. According to Ibrahim and Mohammed (2019), absenteeism among instructors and students appears to be more common in township and rural schools compared to the former Model C schools. Similarly, improper management of tardiness might result in a loss of instructional time (Fish, Finn & Finn, 2011). The following, among others, are some of the detrimental effects of tardiness on teaching and learning: disruptions of classes, loss of instructional time, rise in unacceptably disruptive student behavior, and low academic achievement of students (Osae, 2017).

Many South African rural and township schools are performing poorly, according to Maile and Olowoyo (2017), due of the ineffective use of instructional time. The ineffective planning and handling of school briefings, assemblies, and breaks appear to be a major factor in the reduction of instructional time in schools. Daily breaks in instruction time brought on by tardy start times for lessons or the school day should be avoided or minimized. This is crucial since the daily amount of missed instructional time can readily increase if a combination of delays from briefings, assembly, and breaks are used (Rogers, Mirra, Seltzer & Jun, 2014).

There seem to be a lot of disruptions in schools, but they can basically be minimized or avoided. Unexpected school visits, unexpected school closings, and mobile phone use by teachers and students during class time are all common interruptions to instruction. Teachers can use all of the allotted instructional time efficiently if they have properly prepared their lessons. The best use of class time is positively impacted by a lesson that has been well prepared (Legotlo, 2014). Lesson planning and preparation facilitate teaching and learning execution and enhance the efficient use of class time, according to Kayode and Ayodele (2015).

1.3.3 Effective classroom management

Effective classroom management is a skill that aids teachers in fostering and sustaining a supportive learning environment that results in efficient use of class time (Ibrahim, 2017; Kyriacou, 2014). Classroom management is also defined by Martin and Sass (2010) as the steps teachers use to control student behavior in relation to the teaching and learning processes. The tone of the classroom is set by the teacher's behavior and interactions with the students during contact time, which can encourage students to pay closer attention and develop their confidence. This reduces interruptions brought on by students' behavioral issues (Burton & Chapman, 2012).

During contact time, teachers should work to establish and maintain a safe learning environment that supports efficient teaching and learning. Oddly enough, according to Jones and Jones (2012), many teachers, whether seasoned or less experienced, frequently struggle to establish and maintain a well-managed classroom where students may learn effectively. The effectiveness of the teaching and learning process, which depends on how well teachers manage their classes during class time, determines the success of any school principal (Protheroe, 2010). The efficiency with which instructional time is used to achieve the desired goal depends on the teacher's ability to manage the classroom while teaching and learning.

Engaging students and reducing disruptive behavior are two things teachers must do in order to establish and maintain an effective classroom (Egeberg, McConney & Price, 2016). Egeberg et al. (2016) further emphasize that excellent instructional teachers always manage the best use of their instructional time because they possess abilities for both controlling student misbehavior and preventing misbehavior from arising in the first place. Behavior issues are reduced when students are motivated and actively involved in teaching and learning activities. As a result, instruction time can be used to the fullest extent possible because no time will be lost on addressing students' behavioral issues (Savage & Savage, 2010; Weinstein & Romano, 2014).

1.3.4 Increasing instruction time

Although school administrators make every effort to protect instructional time, it is nonetheless usual to run into some time wasters during contact hours. Offering more lessons is one approach to make up for the time lost to timewasters. Wedel (2021) claims that one of the simplest strategies to raise students' academic achievement is to extend instruction time. Conducting additional lessons outside of the regular allotted school time is a typical approach to extend the amount of instruction time. Principals of schools should make sure that any additional instructional time is utilized effectively because it is related with high expenditures of compensating teachers who teach additional classes (Andersen, Humlum & Nandrup, 2016; Gromada & Shewbridge, 2016).

Teachers can provide students more time and opportunity to connect with the subject matter by lengthening the time spent in class (Heafner & Fitchett, 2015). Increased instructional time for teaching and learning is a key component of many governments' efforts to boost students' academic performance, according to Andersen et al. (2016). This can be done as morning or afternoon lessons, before or after regular school hours. Some schools provide extra classes on weekends and even during school breaks in addition to during the week. Increased instruction time gives students more time to learn, increasing their opportunity to enhance and have a favorable impact on their academic achievement (Gromada & Shewbridge, 2016; Ntuli, 2018).

Principals of instructional schools must convince instructors and students to take extra classes because doing so enhances the performance of all regularly enrolled participants (Bush, 2013). According to Ntuli (2018), extra classes help teachers and students cover the required material that was left out due to interruptions or a lack of instruction time during contact time. Additionally, the additional instructional time may be used for remedial education, which can help students who are struggling academically and thereby broaden their knowledge base (Meroni & Abbiati, 2016; Ntuli, 2018). However, learners must also be given some "free time" to decide what to do with it within the calendar for the additional sessions; otherwise, boredom and impatience would quickly overtake them and render the goal of the additional instruction time meaningless (Mokoena, 2016).

2. METHOD

2.1. Research Methodology

In this study, the researchers used a qualitative research methodology. This research strategy gave the researchers a thorough qualitative understanding of the difficulties faced by school administrators and teachers in their attempt to fully utilize the allotted instructional time during contact time (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Rensburg, Alphaslan, Du Plooy, Gelderblom, Van Eeden & Wigston, 2011). Because of COVID-19 protocol rules, the researchers were unable to physically visit the research locations, but they were still able to collect information from school administrators and instructors through semi-structured, one-on-one telephone interviews and document analysis.

In this study, an interpretive/constructivist paradigm was utilized to comprehend and explain the complicated issues school administrators and instructors in township and former Model C schools confront because of some timewasters that have a negative impact on the quality of teaching and learning (Patton, 2002). The difficulties school administrators and instructors face in their day-to-day

work to ensure that there is effective teaching and learning during contact time were thoroughly investigated as a result of this paradigm (Cohen Manion & Morrison, 2008; Trao & Quang, 2015).

2.2. Participants

Despite the fact that all township and former Model C schools in the province of Gauteng were included in the target demographic, the researchers (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010) purposely chose four public high schools: two township and two former Model C schools. A total of 16 people from this population were chosen to make up the study's sample. All participants provided the researchers with their information voluntarily (Magashoa, 2013). The 12 teachers who were chosen for the program have at least five years of classroom experience and are employed at the same post level by all four school principals.

Prior to participating in this study, the school administrators and chosen instructors received assurances from the researchers that their real identities would be kept secret and that the information, opinions, and input they provided would be treated in confidence (Lichtman, 2010). The names of schools, school principals, and teachers were coded to comply with these standards. As a result, the schools in the township and the previous Model C were given the names School A and B and Schools X and Y, respectively. Similar to this, school leaders from Model C schools and township schools were labeled as PA, PB and PX, PY, respectively. Similarly, instructors from township and previous Model C schools were labeled as TA1, TA2, TA3; TB1, TB2, TX1; TX2; TX3; and TY1, TY2; and TY3; respectively.

2.3. Data Collection

Two specific data collection techniques was used:

Data was mostly gathered through a few one-on-one conversations with each participant. At a time that worked for them, each school's principal and teacher underwent a telephone interview (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Enough information about the difficulties participants face in dealing with time wasters that prevent them from making the most of instruction time during teaching and learning activities was received from them. The researchers verbatim transcribed every interview they performed after audio-recording the conversations in order to analyze them.

2.4. Data Analysis

Data received from documents and data obtained from interviews were compared. Documents provide easily accessible data that are typically less vulnerable to participant manipulation than interviews (Prior, 2008). The school's curriculum policies, the minutes of staff meetings and morning briefings, the school principal's notes to teachers, the monitoring instruments used to keep an eye on teaching and learning activities, and the internal and external whole-school evaluation reports were all examined. The researchers reviewed and noted all of the comments, ideas, announcements, and recommendations made by school principals and instructors on the difficulties they face that prevent the efficient use of instructional time in these documents.

All of the data was organized and divided into sizable, manageable chunks, as proposed by Chivanga and Monyai (2021), in order to gain a comprehensive and in-depth comprehension of the phenomenon under study.

3. FINDINGS

The findings revealed a number of challenges encountered by school principals and teachers which they identified as timewasters impeding the optimal use of instructional time in their schools. Below is a discussion of the main challenges with which all the participants identified and raised in this study.

3.1. Late Coming of Learners

One of the issues that results in lost instructional time, according to the data gathered, is learners who arrive late. The first period in the morning is a severe concern, complained TA2 from School A regarding this situation. I know their time is always a concern, so one of my hopes is that, uh, I don't get the first periods. I have to wait till the students arrive at school. They are tardy. TY2 expressed a similar view when he remarked, "We have students who only arrived at school long after nine o'clock. Our school begins at seven thirty. It seriously disrupts classroom instruction. The administrator of the school, PX, also voiced his displeasure about students arriving late by emphasizing that "late arrival of students is a challenge more so to students that comes from remote areas... Every time they enter the classroom, they force the teacher to interrupt, disrupting class time. The principal of school Y expressed great concern over students arriving late, saying that it "...is a severe concern in this school since it leads to unnecessary movement of students during contact time interrupting teaching and learning activities" (Extract from minutes of staff meeting). One solution to this problem is for school administrators to work closely with parents to ensure that students arrive at school on time. In order to prevent disruptions to the lesson's orderly progression, schools should also make sure that any tardy arrivals are detained in a school hall and only allowed to enter the classroom at the end of the first or second period during change-over time.

3.2. Teacher Absenteeism

The findings also revealed that it is also very rare to see a school with a 100 % teacher attendance on a daily basis be it township or former Model C schools. From School B, P_B indicated that, *"There are some cases where you find that we have got a number of educators who are absent and this affect contact time"*. The same challenge was also raised in by T_{Y1} who revealed that, *"... uhm... teacher's absenteeism is one of our biggest problems at our school. And that wastes a lot of time. Uhm... as soon as learners pick up that there are like four, five, maybe six uh teachers absent, then... oh... discipline and everything goes out of the window and to control the school and the learners is almost impossible"*.

School principals are advised to put stringent measures in place in minimizing teacher absenteeism. In addition to the above, it is recommended that whenever a teacher is absent, there must be some relief teachers who take care of that teacher's learners. Effective teaching and learning can only take place when both the teacher and learners are present in the classroom (South African Government, 2009; Taylor, Van der Berg & Mabogoane, 2013). School principals need to take note that, while learner absenteeism usually affects the absent learner directly, teacher absenteeism negatively affected the whole class's instruction time.

3.3. Unannounced Visits

In as much as teaching and learning activities should never be interrupted, the findings revealed that unannounced visits from either parents or education officials was still a challenge leading to instructional time wasting in schools. T_{A1} complained, *"You are teaching at nine o'clock and suddenly someone is sent to you, you are wanted at the office there's a parent. Or sometimes you are actually told that there's an official who wants to see you – he is at the office. It means you have to leave your class unattended and attend to that parent or official, so that one is also a disturbance"*. T_{X2} in School X also proclaimed that, *"...yeah, there are many times when they (district officials) just pop up and then they want you to come to the office or they come to your class, and when they come to class, the whole lesson stops. Now you need to attend to them"*.

It is recommended that unannounced visits should be strictly controlled so that teaching and learning is not compromised. School principals can have it as a police that education officials and parents only visit school upon appointment, unless their visit does not require the presents of any teacher, otherwise they should visit during lunch or outside contact time after school. Van der Merwe (2018) also reiterated that unannounced visits from education officials should not take teachers out of the class for this can have negative impact on the optimal use of instruction time in schools.

3.4. Prolonged Morning Briefings

Uncontrolled and prolonged morning briefings is one challenge also identified as impeding the optimal use of instruction time. On this issue, T_{A1} had this to say, "...this is a problem at our school. Because you will find out that eeh... when you attend a briefing, the briefing will end up being a meeting and it can actually take away almost fifteen to twenty minutes of our teaching time...eeh... our briefings always encroach into contact time". It was also mentioned by the principal in one of the previous minutes from School B that, "we are trying a new strategy of ending the school at 14:30 in order to have enough time for our briefings so that we do not encroach on contact time" (Extract from minutes of a staff meeting). Morning briefings should be meant for sharing information, hence School principals ought to ensure that they plan and stick to the program of the briefing. It is also recommended that school briefing being held during lunch or after school so that should there be a delay due to arising issues, no instruction time is put at stake. Any unplanned short briefing can easily turn into a full meeting encroaching into contact time which then will affect the learners' academic performance.

3.5. Untimely Announcements via the Intercom

While the use of intercoms has become one common way that modern schools use as a communication channel in which announcements can be made to learners and teachers, the participants in this study also mentioned its untimely use as another challenge they encountered as a timewaster that interrupts the optimal use of instruction time during contact time. T_{B1} from School B complained to say, "... with the intercom, you need to stop teaching because they are going to say attention to everybody. Then you stop teaching and say what it is they want, and yes teaching time is compromised there because even these learners they start to say attention, attention". From School X, T_{X2} also said, "Uh... number one challenge is definitely the intercom. Uhm... you are teaching something, and you have it, and then there is an announcement. Then you have to stop, and you carry on, then there is another announcement. Uhm... when you add those 1, 2 minutes, it actually adds up to a lot of minutes, and sometimes as a teacher you forget where you were, and now you must start all over again. So, it definitely does cause an in convenience when it comes to learning and teaching". From school Y, T_{Y1} had this to say, "... but there are sometimes announcements just come through. Why? I don't know, and yes that is why some of our teachers are on the brink of breaking intercoms as well as cutting the wires because yes! That is so disruptive. It's not even funny because now you have to stop and get everybody's attention and then you have to try to get hold of the attention and start somewhere but then you lost your position where you were in the lesson".

School principals ought to control hoe the school's intercom is used. They can do that by ensuring that they make use of the intercom when it's a real emergency, otherwise it is recommended that for individual messages, it is better to send a messenger directly to the affected person. According to [Fitzsimons \(2011\)](#), the little instruction time lost whenever there is an announcement to be put across during contact time can amount to hours and finally days within the academic year.

4. CONCLUSION

This article investigated the challenges encountered by school principals and teachers that impede the optimal use of instruction time in South African township and former Model C schools. The argument brought by this research is that although school principals in former Model C schools seem to have better strategies in managing instructional time than their counterparts in township schools, both experience the same challenges. In the majority of South African schools, tardiness among students and instructor absences are commonplace. Additionally, a large amount of instructional time is lost as a result of unscheduled parent and educational official visits, protracted morning briefings, and tardy intercom announcements. However, learners are more likely to arrive early at school when parents make sure their kids leave the house on time. Additionally, if the

Department of Education took strict action against teachers who took uncalled-for absences, teacher absences would decline. Principals of schools can drastically cut down on the time that is typically wasted by such timewasters by strengthening school procedures about when and what time visitors should meet with teachers, how long a briefing should be, and when to make an announcement over the intercom.

4.1. Contribution to literature

This research added to the already existing literature that if school principals need to effectively protect instructional time, then they should work towards minimising and eradicating any time waster to teaching time. Teaching and learning time should under no circumstance be disturbed or interrupted unless it is an emergency. Effective teaching and learning only takes place where there is smooth flow of curriculum delivery in which both teachers' and learners attention directed to the business of the day for the whole duration of the period.

4.2. Implications for research, practice and/or society

The findings and recommendations thereof emanating from this research may be used by education officials, in particular school principals, teachers and department of education at large as source of information in regard what challenges leading to timewaster are encountered in schools and how they can be minimized. School principals can improve their instructional leadership roles in managing instruction time by collectively working with teachers, learners and parents in ensuring that timewaster to instruction time are dealt with accordingly. Whenever schools manage to minimise timewasters to instruction time, then improved learners' academic performance is assured leading to the general improvement of the socio economic of the school.

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