

Distributive and Instructional Leadership Practices in Centres for Learners with Intellectual Disabilities in Gauteng Province, South Africa: A Qualitative Exploration

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Abstract:- Background: This study aimed to investigate how distributive and instructional leadership is practiced by managers at Special Care Centres for Learners with Intellectual Disabilities in the Gauteng Province of South Africa. It explores how centre managers implement distributive and instructional leadership within these institutions.

Methodology: The study employed a qualitative research approach using semi-structured interviews as the research instrument. The sample consisted of ten (n=10) managers in the Gauteng Province of South Africa, who were purposefully chosen for the study.

Findings: The centre managers experience challenges such as a lack of knowledge and skills in practicing distributive and instructional leadership, insufficient support from the provincial government on how to utilize these leadership styles, and low awareness and participation among Special Care Centre staff.

Conclusion: Centre managers' lack of knowledge, support, and staff engagement underscores the urgent need for targeted training and resources to improve leadership in Special Care Centres.

Key words: Special Care Centre, Intellectual Disability, Centre Managers, Distributive Leadership, and Instructional Leadership.

1 INTRODUCTION

Distributed leadership and instructional leadership have played key roles in promoting teaching practices and learning aspects in all learning institutions across the globe, Special Care Centres (SCCs) not excluded. Distributed leadership entails the sharing of leadership roles among different stakeholders; it ensures teamwork and collective decision making among team members due to the aspect of shared leadership [1]. This approach recognizes that effective leadership in SCCs for Learners with Severe to Profound Intellectual Disability (LSPID) is distributed among caregivers, support staff, and even

self-contained learners with intellectual disabilities, rather than located in one person such as a centre manager. By contrast, instructional leadership focuses attention on the educational mission, with an emphasis on teaching and learning towards the betterment of learners' outcomes [15]. This approach involves setting goals, providing teaching support, and developing a supportive environment for the carers, support staff, and LSPID.

Leadership in education takes different shapes in different parts of the world. In the US, for instance, there is an increased application of shared leadership approaches in education institutions as a means of informing capacity from educators and coming up with innovative learning classrooms that meet learners' needs. In marked contrast, since time immemorial, Finland has placed a strong emphasis on practical teaching leadership. Institutions heads play a leading role in not only determining what ought to be taught but also in supporting educators. This has achieved stunning results in student performance and educator well-being.

In fact, the practice of instructional and distributive leadership in South Africa has been shaped by the socioeconomic realities of the country and the persistent legacies of apartheid era policy. Studies show that instructional and distributive leadership has increasingly started to become a potential solution to various challenges faced by educational institutions in South Africa [5].

2 LITERATURE REVIEW: DISTRIBUTIVE AND INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

2.1 Introduction

The leadership of SCCs is a significant link to improved learning outcomes among special needs and intellectually disabled learners. This literature

review discusses distributive leadership, which would foster the collaborative efforts of stakeholders in education, and instructional leadership, which places priorities on clear objectives in addition to program management to enhance teaching quality. Success of both is, again, greatly dependent on the quality of the training provided for the managers of such a centre. Insufficient training of their capabilities curtailing their capacity for leadership, collaboration, and teaching consequently affects the experiences of the learners negatively. Besides, broad-based professional development will also enable SCC managers to overcome the challenges of facilitating positive change that will enhance educational outcomes.

2.1.1 Distributed Leadership

Distributive leadership can be characterized as the collective mode of leading that recognizes various individuals' leadership contributions within an institution. As [21] illustrate, no one leader-however talented or experienced-can carry out in educational contexts many of the tasks of leadership without drawing on the leadership capital represented by others. This is particularly true for SCCs with internal and external complications impinging on the core responsibilities of such organizations. Additionally, [15] emphasises that distributive leadership advances "leaderful" organizations, whereby leadership is distributed by different kinds of stakeholders themselves. In brief, it fosters an atmosphere of connectedness and teamwork rather than heavy reliance on top-down management.

Distributed leadership is characterized by its capability to develop leadership from within the organization. Regarding [4], this style of leadership is based on the assumption of a multitude being able to do leadership; thus, this type of leadership encourages workload sharing in a fair way considering the competency and skill set of each employee. In the distributed approach to leadership, there exists an interrelationship among the employees to align all towards the set goals and vision of the organization, with resultant performance in the organization.

The major benefits of distributive leadership in SCC are that this approach takes some burdens away from the centre managers. Indeed, the power of having many stakeholders assume leadership positions takes away the micromanaging aspect that allows the managers to do more strategic oversight. This is based on [3]. However, it is very important to

differentiate distributive leadership from the concept of delegation. According to [19], while delegation includes delegating some responsibility to subordinates, distributive leadership fosters an environment in which all staff members participate in leadership. It must be differentiated in order to build a successful organizational culture...

Despite the benefits of distributive leadership, it is not devoid of criticism. As [23] and [17] suggest that distributive leadership merely dresses up the notion of delegation as good, hence being less effective. They also advise that distributive leadership should not be seen as the panacea of educational ills but rather, in practice, this concept demands certain conditions with regard to organizational dynamics and the capacity of individuals.

2.1.2 Instructional Leadership

On the other hand, though distributive leadership is related to the process of shared leadership within institutions, instructional leadership addresses the pedagogical quality of teaching and learning within the same institutions. With rising numbers of accountability measures within education systems, SCC managers are, in one way, forced toward instructional improvement with a focus on curriculum, instruction, and assessment. As stated by [11] and [25], it is only where such best practices are spearheaded by an effective instructional leader that gains can be mooted for realization into educational outcomes.

Further, [27] proposed that instructional leadership demands centre managers to be at the centre not to be outstanding leaders nor caregivers themselves but to build caregivers through inspiring creativity, support, and providing other resources needed. This role is considered highly critical in putting up an enabling environment to allow the participation and academic attainment of the learners. This view was supported by [14] as he propounded the framework on instructional leadership with three dimensions of setting the institution's goal, organizing the educational program, and shaping a positive learning environment.

This first dimension defines the mission of the institution, and thus it is fundamental in having an explicit academic focus. According to [26], a well-framed mission gives a scaffold for the transformation of the institution while SCC managers are expected to communicate this mission to all the stakeholders with clarity and in an effective manner.

The second-dimension refers to the monitoring of the education program, which is one of the gravest responsibilities that confront SCC managers in their line of duty. Many of these responsibilities can indeed be devolved, but an overall co-ordination of instructional activities is still required. This is what [14] emphasize. One final dimension adds the focus that the establishment of an "academic press," based on high expectations and continuous improvement, is one avenue to create an excellence culture in SCC.

2.1.3 Preparatory programmes

The selection of adequately qualified leaders who possess the essential abilities is seen as critical to effectively operating SCCs for LSPID. According to [34], pre-service training, induction phases, and ongoing in-service education during one's career are all key components of professional development that centre managers must prioritize. According to [28], this component is extremely important for the successful and efficient operation of SCCs. Pre-service training is provided within higher education institutions by training candidates through degree programs or other alternative routes. According to [29], relevant courses of instruction that constitute in-service education are those aimed at preparing serving managers to better address the changing needs of society.

However, most managers begin duties without sufficient training, sometimes because the founders of most SCCs are parents of disabled children who have somewhat low levels of numeracy and literacy skills and thus could not originally equip them with management skills. According to [39], most of the SCCs were founded by parents with disabled children who had low numeracy and literacy skills. This lacuna in the programs may turn into severe consequence to ensure how the managers conduct the distributive and instructional leadership-for instance, driving decision-making processes collaboratively or well-guiding instructional practices. It, in fact, negates the educational outcomes for LSPID. For example, poorly trained managers may not feel confident and competent to help create the supportive environment in which teams collaborate to enhance teaching effectiveness-one of the key components of successful leadership in SCC.

2.1.4 Conclusion

The literature review confirms the following: first, that leadership is even more important in SCCs to enable better education outcomes for learners with

special needs and intellectual disabilities; secondly, two big concepts of leadership in SCCs are distributive leadership-where collaboration among different stakeholders in the SCCs is fostered-and instructional leadership, which relies on clear objectives and effective management of programs to develop higher quality teaching. In both of these leadership styles, heavy dependence would have to rely on the sufficiency of the preparatory programs for the centre managers themselves. Poor training limits their capacity to work with others and train others well, which could have disastrous consequences for the educational experiences of LSPIDs. Therefore, comprehensive professional development would become quite crucial in providing the necessary empowerment to leaders in SCCs to act on addressing challenges and creating desired change within their institutions.

3 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The qualitative research design was utilized to explore distributive and instructional leadership methodologies that managers apply in the SCCs for LSPID. Interviews conducted on centre managers were semi-structured, thus allowing for full investigation into their experiences and perceptions regarding leadership methodologies. Qualitative research methodologies provide opportunity for participants to give their views on a particular phenomenon in various forms. It would hence provide an in-depth understanding of how distributive and instructional leadership practices would be applied in these special centres.

3.1 Aim of the study

The qualitative research study had aimed at gaining insight into the ways in which managers in SCCs for LSPID exercised distributive and instructional leadership, and the study used an interpretive paradigm. This approach allowed an in-depth inquiry into the subjective experiences of centre managers, taking into account the contextual factors that influenced their real-life experiences when applying distributive and instructional leadership SCCs [37].

3.1.1 Main research question

How do SCC managers perceive and address the benefits and challenges of task sharing among staff while implementing instructional leadership to enhance teaching and learning for learners with intellectual disabilities?

3.1.2 Sub-Research Questions

- What are the perceived benefits and challenges of task sharing among staff in SCCs?
- How do centre managers implement and oversee instructional leadership to enhance teaching and learning for learners with intellectual disabilities?
- How well prepared are managers to engage with distributive and instructional leadership challenges?

3.1.3 Objectives

- To analyse the implementation of distributive leadership and task-sharing practices among managers and staff in SCCs.
- To evaluate the role of instructional leadership in promoting effective teaching and learning outcomes within these centres.
- To assess the preparedness of managers to effectively address challenges related to distributive and instructional leadership.

3.2 Methodology

Qualitative research is of particular importance in gaining insight into concealed and hidden aspects such as social norms, gender roles, ethnicity, and religion, because it allows the researcher-a person or groups-to study their perceptions and meanings from their experiences [24]. The approach emphasizes understanding existing conditions as perceived by the participants without manipulating the phenomenon under study, and the researcher is viewed to be a 'research tool' in the collection of data. This study employed a qualitative method in order to place the experiences of the participants at the centre and to ensure that the researcher was familiarized with the research problem, hence offering a smoother flow of the research process.

3.3 Research Design

The study is underpinned by the interpretive paradigm in order to facilitate the centre managers' experiences being fully explored. As stated by [24], the primary objective of interpretive research is to develop an elaborate view about any particular phenomenon while considering the context under scrutiny. This approach attempts to offer insight into how different groups of people interpret and give meaning to the things they experience.

Data were analysed both during and after the gathering phase. Qualitative data analysis is a

continuous, iterative process comprising simultaneous data collection, data analysis, and data reporting rather than flowing from one procedural step to another. Data analysis included reading and re-reading transcripts, categorizing statements of importance, and identifying themes that cut across data. It was a specific investigation method that contextualised the findings by considering unique situations of each centre manager, representing a more complete understanding of heterogeneity in experiences.

Ontology and epistemology of this study are embedded in the aspect that reality is a social creation and perceived differently by different people [30]. Meaning is developed through interactions between individual groups. This means the accessed world of an individual through interaction with the actors of the situation.

3.5 Participants Selection

This targeted a purposive sample of ten (n=10) managers who provide leadership and management in SCCs in Gauteng Province, South Africa. For this research, participants were chosen precisely because of their position and experience with the subject being studied. Purposive sampling was used for the sampling of the centre managers since the researcher would enlist participants who are familiar or experienced with the phenomenon to be studied. Moreover, purposive sampling was applicable because participants were selected in regard to availability and willingness to participate along with their capacities to share experiences and ideas in an articulate, expressive, and reflective way [2]; [31].

3.6 Data Collection

The data were collected through semi-structured interviews that lasted for 60-90 minutes. These interviews probed into how managers in the SCCs for LSPID exercised distributive and instructional leadership and provided opportunities for articulating thoughts and feelings by participants. With permission from the participants, audio recordings of interviews were made, and verbatim transcripts were developed. Audio data were supplemented by field notes recording non-verbal cues and contextual observations.

3.7 Data Analysis

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews. Data analysis began during data collection and extended beyond the close of the data

collection period. Qualitative data analysis is not a linear, step-by-step activity but an ongoing, iterative process of data collection, data analysis, and data reporting that basically run parallel and are interdependent on one another throughout the research process [24]. The data analysis included multiple readings of the transcripts, categorizing statements of importance, and the development of higher order themes. The findings were put in perspective within the particular situations of each centre manager, thus allowing the full magnitude of heterogeneity in experiences to be given [37].

3.8 Validity

According to [18], validity is the trait that indicates if the research has measured what it is designed to assess, and thus how accurate the results will be. To ensure internal validity, semi-structured interview questions were reviewed by specialists, including my supervisor. All interviews were transcribed as quickly as feasible and shown to interviewees to ensure that they agreed with the transcription.

3.9 Ethical Considerations

This was approved by the University of South Africa Ethics Committee on 2023/07/05 with reference number 35066334/37/AM, and further approval was obtained from the Gauteng Department of Health with reference NHRD REF. GP_202307_066. Pseudonyms are used in the article, thereby ensuring confidentiality. Data is stored on a password-protected electronic device within a safe environment. Debriefing sessions for all participants took place on the transcribed data, which included any emotional issues that came up during the interviews.

3.10 Limitation of the Methodology

In a nutshell, qualitative research makes use of various data sources, such as interviews, observations, documents, past records, and audio-visual materials, to help acquire a more complete picture of the investigated phenomenon, according to [20]. As [38] has mentioned, no data source holds an absolute advantage over any other, but rather they are complementary. Another advantage of using multiple sources of data, according to [38], is the development of a line of investigation that includes triangulation and collaboration. This is a limitation of the research as the researcher only used individual semi-

structured interviews with centre managers. The data collected was limited as it lacked triangulation and collaboration.

3.11 Summary

This section outlines how the interpretive paradigm was used in the present research to explore a research goal from the participants' perspective. It sheds light on the reasoning that drives their behaviour. The research approach discussed is one that focuses on SCC and looks into its daily operations in a natural setting. It also deals with the instruments of data collection, the processes of data interpretation and analysis, the validity of findings, ethics, and limitations arising from the technique of study.

4 DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Introduction

The section preceding data presentation and analysis described the approach to be used in the study of how managers at SCCs for LSPID use distributive and instructional leadership. Instruments used in data collection included interviews with centre managers as the main method. These interviews were intended to gain insight into the experiences of the managers and their perceptions about the leadership strategies employed in such centres. The present study sought to achieve an understanding of how distributive and instructional leadership were experienced and exercised by managers in SCCs for LSPID. Accordingly, data are presented and analysed in line with the following objectives:

- To analyse the implementation of distributive leadership and task-sharing practices among managers and staff in Special Care Centres.
- To evaluate the role of instructional leadership in promoting effective teaching and learning outcomes within these centres.
- To assess the preparedness of managers to effectively address challenges related to distributive and instructional leadership.

4.2 Description of Participants and Special Care Centres

4.2.1 Description of Participants

The table 1 below summarises the background information of participants.

Table1: Background information of the participants

SN	Participant (p)	Gender	Age range	Academic qualification	Qualification in special / inclusive education	Qualification in leadership and management	Experience as centre manager (years)
1	P#01	F	60–69	Gr. 11	No	No	26
2	P#02	F	60–69	Gr. 12	No	No	24
3	P#03	F	40–49	Gr. 12	No	No	13
4	P#04	F	50–59	Gr. 12	Yes	No	19
5	P#05	M	50–59	BA degree	No	Yes	14
6	P#06	F	40–49	Diploma	No	No	2
7	P#07	F	50–59	Gr. 11	No	No	15
8	P#08	M	40–49	Gr. 12	No	No	2
9	P#09	M	60–69	Diploma	No	No	4
10	P#10	F	60–69	Gr. 11	No	No	24
	%			Gr. 11	30		
		F	70	40–49	30	Gr. 12	40
		M	30	50–59	30	Dip	20
				60–69	40	BA	10
						No	90
						Yes	10

The table 1 gives background information on the ten (n=10) study participants, showing the gender, age range, academic qualifications, special/inclusive education qualifications, leadership, and management training, and experience as centre managers. They were seven females and three males between the ages of 60-69 and 50-59 years. The participants differ in their academic qualifications: Grade 11, Grade 12, diploma, and BA degree. Only one of the respondents was qualified in special/inclusive education and another in leadership and management. The manager of the Centres experiences ranges from 2 to 26 years with most over ten years.

Overall, what these data reveal is a disturbing trend: while there is variation in participants' academic qualifications, there is a serious lack of both special/inclusive education qualifications and formal leadership and managerial training. This lack of preparation could have serious implications for the effectiveness of leadership within Special Care Centres.

4.2.2 Description of Special Care Centres

The table below summarises the description of Special Care Centres.

Table.2 Centre information

CN	Region in Gauteng	Supported by GDSD, GDE, & GDoH	Established by	Managed by	Location
1	Johannesburg	GDE & GDoH	Mothers of disabled children	Mother of a disabled child	Township
2	Sedibeng	GDE & GDoH	Mother of a disabled child	Mother of a disabled child	Township
3	Sedibeng	GDE & GDoH	Mother of a disabled child	Mother of a disabled child	Suburb
4	Ekurhuleni	GDE & GDoH	An individual with disability experience	Former worker in disability institution	Township
5	Tshwane	GDE & GDoH	Church	Pastor	Township
6	Tshwane	GDE, GDoH, & GDSD	Mothers of disabled children	Former volunteer and a physically disabled person	Township
7	Sedibeng	GDE & GDoH	Mothers of disabled children	Former volunteer	Township

CN	Region in Gauteng	Supported by GDSD, GDE, & GDoH	Established by	Managed by	Location
8	Johannesburg	GDE & GDoH	Mother of a disabled child with disability experience	Brother of a disabled child and former volunteer	Township
9	Tshwane	GDE & GDoH	Church	Former volunteer	Suburb
10	Ekurhuleni	GDE & GDoH	Mother of a disabled child	Mother of a disabled child	Township

The table 2 provides critical information about ten (n=10) Special Care Centres found in various locations of Gauteng Province, each of which supports LSPID. In this regard, these facilities are supported by the Gauteng Department of Social Development (GDSD), Gauteng Department of Education (GDE), and Gauteng Department of Health (GDoH). Their various origins with the majority having been formed by mothers of children with disabilities attest to a strong grassroots engagement within the centres. Others were initiated by individuals who had previously worked within disability services, that is, from within institutes or church-related professionals.

5. DATA ANALYSIS

5.1 Category: Leadership and management mitigation strategies

The findings from the study show that centre managers adopt leadership and management styles as mitigating strategies when faced with management challenges. Data obtained for the current study centred on two management models, namely distributive and instructional leadership styles.

5.1.1 Objective 1: To analyse the implementation of distributive leadership and task-sharing practices.

According to the findings, centre managers use distributive leadership. During the semi-structured interviews, the centre managers were asked if they support task sharing and what the benefits are. P#03 responded as follows to the topic of task sharing:

Last year what I did was that I put a different staff member in charge every month. I said, as centre manager, every month a different staff member acts a manager for a certain activity to introduce innovative ideas and be allowed to change rules at the centre. So, everybody has the chance to implement an activity and work with others.

Furthermore, when asked about the advantages of task sharing, P#03 stated the following:

This is how I share the tasks. When it comes to preparations for events, I let the teachers give me the

ideas of what they want to do with the children, and we share the tasks they have produced for organising events.

When asked about task sharing, P#04 stated the following:

We do not hold everything. Sometimes, as I have said, you need to teach others so that you share the knowledge. As you share the knowledge, you need to delegate some of the staff. That this is your month to do this, make sure you control this. Next time or quarter I change to the other one as supervisors. I do not have one supervisor.

When P#04 was asked about the benefits of sharing tasks, she cautioned about levels of sharing, stating the following:

It is the easy and the right one because it gives me time to rest. You cannot hold everything by yourself, except office work, because you must be incredibly careful. Like now we are having a meeting, I cannot call them. Office, work I share with the office manager, like now she is preparing for the audit.

P#06 described task sharing at her centre as follows:

I do share tasks with them. I believe that some of them when they come here, I look at their CVs, and I see that they have some qualification of sort, even if they came for caregiving position. If I see something that directs the work, I know you will be able to do, and I just call the person and say, can you do this for me.

P#06 described the benefits of task sharing as follows:

The benefits of sharing tasks are first, that you get the work done in time. Remember if I must keep everything to myself when I am going to finish. And, not only that, but they also learn. I like I said, if am not here, they will be able to do the work. So those are the benefits.

In short, distributive leadership supports the involvement of more actors in centre administration due to the complexity and existence of various obligations that look impossible to manage well

unless such functions are delegated to other staff members. According to the findings of the study, centre managers can teach other staff members to pass on their abilities. As regards this facet of distributive leadership, the comments of the centre managers underlined the fact that centre managers can teach other staff members to pass on their abilities. It can thus be deduced that centre managers practice distributive leadership and that it is an acceptable lens through which to study the centres since the managers promote task sharing. In this style of leadership, managers have to distribute responsibilities so that the increasing external demands of the centre are met.

5.1.2 Objective 2: To evaluate the role of instructional leadership in promoting effective teaching and learning outcomes.

Instructional leadership promotes the development of teaching and learning, and SCCs are no exception. In an SCC, the centre manager oversees the process of instructional leadership. When the centre managers were asked about their roles, one of the functions highlighted was their oversight of instructional leadership within the SCC. For example, P#10 explained instructional leadership by saying, “I am checking my children, and checking my caregivers if they do the right thing, like stimulation, morning ring, and education work. And I feed the children. I stimulate the children, am the mother of the children.” P#04 was asked how she incorporates instructional leadership, and explained as follows:

I need to be involved every day. I check the administration, check the kitchen staff and food to see if kids are eating right, monitoring of everything that is happening here. Checking if the programs in the classrooms are being followed.

When P#04 was questioned about the duties of managing a centre, she mentioned instructional leadership in her response, she said, “I check if the people in charge of the classroom are doing what they are supposed to do, as they are professionals in their field.” P#02 echoed P#04's sentiments, stating, “I also check every day to ensure the kids are well cared for and that the teachers are effectively stimulating and teaching the children.” P#08 supported the concept of instructional leadership by explaining, “From the finance side to the stimulation side—by ‘stimulation side’ I mean the classrooms focused on stimulation—I oversee that the overall operation of the centre runs smoothly.” Finally, P#05 described his role, which includes instructional leadership, by

saying, “I check on the staff attending to the children in classrooms, make sure they are well, and ensure they provide the services they are expected to provide

An educational institution's core business is teaching and learning, and in the case of SCCs, it extends to include stimulation and education services. Centre managers were expected to manage these services. Through the results, it appeared that centre managers were providing instructional leadership through class supervision. For instance, centre managers described instructional leadership as a style of leadership centered on the collection and management of resources for stimulating and educating services provision. This was clearly evident since the management emphasizes providing basic outputs such as qualified caregivers, clean products, teaching and learning resources, stimulation materials or resources, among others to offer quality education and other services in the centres for LSPID.

5.1.3 Objective 3: To assess the preparedness of managers to effectively address challenges related to distributive and instructional leadership.

Appointing the right people to be centre managers and equipping them with the appropriate abilities are critical to centre management. To be effective, managers must have the right academic credentials and have participated in professional development programs. The data presented and analysed here gives an overview of the participants' pre-service and in-service credentials. When asked about her academic qualifications, P#02 responded as follows:

I have Matric, ECD [Early Childhood Development] level 1 and ECD level 4. I did ECD level 4 with Martin. The level 1 I did it with Seth. And then I did caregiver carer with Forest Town Special School. And then I did the learning program with Western Cape Department of Education.

Additionally, when P#02 was asked about on-the-job training, she said, “The one at Forest town is for disability and the one in Western Cape was about disability. We also did a course at Mama with G on autism.”

P#03 explained that “my qualifications are, I have, I studied through Matric, but I did not go into education. I studied hairdressing.” As a follow-up question, P#03 was asked about the training attended while working as a manager, and she responded as follows:

I have done some courses with Department of Education. Can I name those? So AAC, Augmentative and Alternative Communication training, cerebral palsy, and I also did cerebral palsy at Baragwaneth Hospital. I did alternative therapy with a private practitioner, also some training at Johannesburg Gen as well. I have done many over the years. With the department we have done feeding, assistive devices and ECD [early childhood development]. With Mental Health, we have done fire management, kitchen safety, or food safety. Some of the trainings were out and some were at the centre.

P#01 explained her academic qualifications as follows:

I was only a parent who passed Grade 11 at school, and then I got married. Then I had kids. The first child was fine, but the second child was born with cerebral palsy (CP), and that is where my challenges began.

P#01 described her in-service training as follows:

Through the Chris Hani Baragwaneth with therapists, we had many training courses. If they have a mother who is in denial about the child, they will call and say come and help, and I will go to that mother and share the ideas and the pain. And we have done courses with education and health departments.

This training of institutional leadership both pre- and in-service could allow SCC management to become more efficient and effective. Traditionally, the SCCs in South Africa did not have the necessary resources to address a number of serious issues in management; recent policy guidelines introduced knowledge, concepts, and skills necessary for effective management. These guidelines spur centre managers into creating interactive learning environments for learners with intellectual disabilities with an emphasis on adapting and accommodating services. Further, they give insight into staffing, teaching methods, infrastructure, testing, and equipment as well as specialized care services according to the [9]; [10].

Operating Special Care Centres in South Africa poorly implement the policy documents because two-thirds of managers in charge have only Grade 12 certificate or less. For effective implementation of reform, the centre managers should be with appropriate pre-service and in-service training in SCC management. However, very few preparation programs are available hindering the leadership and management. However, on the positive side, in-

service training on the provision of stimulation and education services was provided to managers from the DoH and the DBE.

6. DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

6.1 Discussion on objective1: Distributive leadership and task-sharing practices

The analysis of the implementation of distributive leadership and task-sharing practices in the centres provides important lessons that can be learned regarding how centre managers enable collaboration and enhance operational efficiency. Through semi-structured interviews with the various managers, it was evident that the practice of distributing leadership roles and responsibilities empowers the staff and enables a dynamic, responsive organizational environment.

6.1.1 Distributive Leadership in Action

These findings show that the managers of centres actively practice distributive leadership through rotating management tasks amongst the staff members. P#03 explained that this was through putting different staff in charge each month for leading activities and hence giving the power to innovate new ideas and change some rules. This style not only diversifies the experience of the team but also brings ownership and accountability among team members. P#03 emphasized one of the most important aspects of event planning: group responsibility. The SCC staff come in with their input on activities; that instils collaboration and creativity.

On a related note, P#04 shared that distributive leadership, in itself, is about sharing the knowledge and teaching; an ethos is imbibed within the very nature of distributive leadership. Thus, by rotating or shifting the supervisory role for a certain period of time, P#04 distributes the load of leadership and increases the efficiency of the team members to address tasks promptly. Such a claim can be corroborated by studies showing how distributive leadership engenders shared responsibility and how it leads to enhanced job satisfaction and commitment to the organization [22].

6.1.2 Benefits of Task Sharing

Several managers mentioned some of the positive aspects of task sharing. For example, P#06 highlighted that task sharing ensures work completion on time and has some developmental benefits for the staff; identification of qualification and capacity gives reason to a manager to delegate

responsibilities matching the strengths of the team members. This strategic delegation not only helps in the smooth running of the centre but also prepares the staff for management positions that may arise in the future, hence reinforcing the idea of sharing tasks being important in planning succession [12].

Moreover, from P#04, the understanding of workload goes beyond the ability to delegate. By sharing his burden, he prevents burnout for himself and keeps focused on the main administrative tasks. A balance such as this must be struck, especially within those high-level environments where good leadership is essential [16].

6.1.3 Implications for Practice

These findings therefore suggest that distributive leadership and the practices of task sharing become an imperative in response to the increasing demands made of centre managers. Such centres that engage more of their staff in leading can thus respond to complex challenges and deliver higher services and team cohesion. Furthermore, the training of staff members for various diverse roles secures the organization in its resilient and adaptive capability against change.

6.2 Discussion on objective 2: Instructional leadership in promoting effective teaching and learning

Assessment of instructional leadership within SCCs demonstrates its importance in improving teaching and learning outcomes. In this regard, interviews with the centre managers reveal that instructional leadership is not simply a principle of oversight but a whole approach wherein the educational and developmental needs of the children are actively promoted.

6.2.1 The role of centre managers

The insights from the participants further indicate centre managers are central agents of instructional leadership. For example, P#10 indicated pragmatic strategic steps; a manager needs to observe the activities of caregivers and children to ensure that the right practice on education is conducted. Moreover, this has been defined as being at the forefront of instructional leadership; directing or leading educators towards improving teaching of learners [22]. Similarly, P#04 and P#02 gave emphasis on how necessary it is to be concerned daily with the education programs as well as to see that the staff members are playing their proper roles. The whole

process of constant monitoring is critical to ensuring that high levels of the standards of care and education are provided, which again reinforces the concept that instructional leadership becomes effective with active involvement and participation in the process as opined by [16].

P#08 further highlights the multi-faceted role of the instructional leader in stating, "Usually, the management tries to manage the centre not only in terms of finance but also in education." The statement further evokes that educational practices are not only sustained but also developed by focusing appropriate resources and operational effectiveness in support of the same. The emphasis of the managers on the smooth flow of the centre further indicates that they want an environment which will be helpful for teaching and learning.

6.2.2 Promoting quality education

The findings also bring out that instructional leadership in SCCs is essentially assurance of focus on quality education through strategic distribution of resources. Centre managers are aware that competent caregivers, learning materials, and hygiene products are all necessary outputs that are important in the delivery of quality educational services. This view is augmented by studies indicating that effective instructional leadership embraces resource management as the key to providing ideal learning conditions for children [13].

Furthermore, the role descriptions by the participant indicate that they are quite aware of how their leadership affects outcomes in education. In the case of P#05, he pointed out that part of instructional leadership is seeing to it that the staff provides expected services. In fact, accountability is one important aspect of instructional leadership wherein centre managers can play an important role both in caregiver performance and child development outcomes by creating a culture of responsibility and support for the former [8].

6.3 Discussion on objective 3: To assess the preparedness of managers to effectively address challenges related to distributive and instructional leadership.

Findings on the state of preparedness of SCC managers in responding to challenges of distributive and instructional leadership in SCCs are thus very revealing of the status of management affairs in the institutions. Data indicate that although some of the managers have undergone different kinds of training,

a large proportion still lacks requisite academic qualifications and comprehensive professional development consistent with reforms stipulated in the recent policy guidelines [9]; [10].

In fact, participants such as P#02 and P#03 combine different educational backgrounds with training experiences. For example, P#02 has done several ECD courses besides some specific training related to disabilities, revealing a very proactive attitude toward professional development. On the other hand, even though P#03 has elaborated on extensive diversified training, this emanates from a non-educational academic background and hence is not fully aligned to the needs of instructional leadership in SCCs. The inconsistency gives the following insight: although a number of managers go in for advanced trainings, the majority still have lacking basic educational qualifications as ordered for effective leadership.

Participant P#01's story further highlights that of managers who came from the non-traditional background. Having a child suffering from cerebral palsy undoubtedly brought real-life experience into her management practice in terms of the needs of the learners with disabilities, but the limited formal qualifications of having only completed Grade 11 indicate the challenges of many managers in SCCs. This does raise questions about the general competence of leadership in these centres, given the complexity of the needs their populations present.

Taken all together, these findings would suggest that a proportion of managers benefit from the in-service training given by the DoH and DBE; however, the fundamental issue is that this is just supplementing a grave deficit in pre-service training programs. In this regard, the informal or ad-hoc nature of training relied upon from participants would seem to suggest a patchwork approach to professional development in which managers are likely to be less than fully equipped to meet the diverse challenges arising with instructional and distributive leadership.

7. CONCLUSION

Such findings from this study carry important lessons learned in the practice of distributive and instructional leadership in SCCs and in the preparedness of centre managers to handle the various challenges linked to such practice. In particular, the analysis demonstrates that effective distributive leadership addresses task-sharing and rotation of responsibility among staff to empower personnel and create a collaborative environment that

enhances operational efficiency. They actively engage their teams with leading roles that foster accountability shared among all team members and also develop a cadre for leading staff in the future.

These findings, from this perspective, highlight the strategic function that managers play within the centres of reclaiming quality education through resource management and hands-on management. In addition, monitoring the educational practices also requires a deep commitment on their part to lofty standards of care and learning outcomes for the children with intellectual disability.

The research nonetheless points out acute deficiencies in terms of academic qualifications and professional training among the majority of SCC managers. While some have undergone relevant training, an overwhelming number still lacks the basic qualification to lead an organization effectively. This inadequacy points to the importance of extensive pre-service training programs that are tailored to the requirements of instructional and distributive leadership.

Therefore, focused professional development of SCC managers becomes so crucial in order to ensure improvement in leadership practice and educational outcome. In this respect, addressing the current gaps in training and qualifications is considered crucial in better equipping SCC leaders with the ability to deal with the multi-faceted challenges they face, thereby providing a more sensitive and appropriate learning environment for learners with special needs.

Acronyms

DBE	Department of Basic Education
DoE	Department of Education
DoH	Department of Health
GDE	Gauteng Department of Education
LSPID	Learners with Severe to Profound Intellectual Disability

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Ethical Clearance

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Data Availability Statement

Anonymised data from this study can be made available on request from zondanizimba@yahoo.com

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