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Leadership Capacity for Foundational Literacy and Numeracy in Oshikoto Region Junior Primary Schools

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Abstract

This study examined principals' reported FLN leadership practices and constraints in Oshikoto region junior primary schools to develop context-responsive proposals informed by transformative, distributed and data-informed leadership. Principals are expected to lead foundational literacy and numeracy (FLN), but evidence on how teaching and administrative demands shape this work in Namibian junior primary schools remains limited. The study employed a convergent mixed-methods design, informed by pragmatism, using one questionnaire containing closed and open-ended questions. Frequencies and percentages described nine leadership practices; thematic analysis examined reported barriers. The strands were analysed separately and integrated by comparing practice patterns with explanations of implementation conditions. Materials provision (60.0%) and curriculum monitoring (56.7%) were reported more often than lesson observation (40.0%), formative-assessment monitoring (30.0%), coaching (25.0%) and lesson-planning support (10.0%). All participants reported classroom teaching responsibilities. Qualitative summaries identified competing administration, resource shortages, uneven professional support and difficulties involving families. The findings revealed organisational constraints such as transformative, distributed, and data-informed leadership, which provide complementary lenses for a proposed six-part model centred on time, shared responsibilities, evidence use, professional learning, resources, and family participation. The study concluded that strengthening FLN leadership in Oshikoto junior primary schools requires an integrated approach that connects leadership responsibilities with adequate organisational capacity. The study recommends an integrated approach: transformative leadership directs attention to equity, distributed leadership organises shared responsibility, and data-informed leadership connects assessment with teaching responses. The study informs regional planning and leadership development by highlighting principals' FLN leadership practices and the constraints affecting their implementation.

Key terms: Distributed leadership, foundational literacy and numeracy, instructional leadership, organisational capacity, transformative leadership.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The study examined principals' reported FLN leadership practices and constraints in Oshikoto region junior primary schools to develop context-responsive proposals informed by transformative, distributed and data-informed leadership. National assessment evidence establishes the seriousness of the wider problem. A ministerial statement reported that, in the 2024 National End-of-Phase Grade 3 Literacy and Numeracy Assessment, only 32 per cent of learners reached the 40 per cent numeracy pass threshold, while 5 per cent scored at least 75 per cent (Ministry of Education, Innovation, Youth, Sport, Arts and Culture, 2025). These national assessment results establish the wider context but do not measure principal effectiveness or establish Oshikoto-specific proficiency.

Existing Namibian evidence does not yet answer the specific question examined here. Naruseb's (2025) qualitative study of ten public primary principals in Khomas explored understandings and challenges of instructional leadership. Gabriel and Mpofu (2024) examined Grade 3 reading activities in Oshana, while Hamukonda and Luneta (2023) investigated Grade 1 number teaching in the same region. These studies illuminate leadership perceptions and classroom pedagogy, but their settings and units of analysis do not provide a profile of nine FLN leadership practices across Oshikoto's eight circuits. Nor do they establish how such a profile can be interpreted alongside principals' accounts of competing responsibilities.

This study addresses the bounded gap by combining descriptive practice indicators with qualitative accounts of implementation conditions. It neither claims that Namibia lacks leadership research nor tests three theories together. Transformative, distributed and data-informed leadership guide interpretation and practical proposals. Organisational capacity matters because knowledge of effective practice does not determine whether leaders have the time, staff, and resources to enact it. The study considers reported practices alongside their reported constraints. In Namibia's junior primary phase, reading with understanding, oral language, writing and basic number concepts support subsequent curriculum learning. By the end of Grade 3, learners need a foundation for the more demanding reading and mathematical work that follows. Research in Oshana identifies both established reading activities and weaknesses in the pedagogy used to teach early number concepts (Gabriel & Mpofu, 2024; Hamukonda & Luneta, 2023). These findings make regular instructional support a practical leadership concern.

International indicators contextualise different populations and outcomes. Simulations of pandemic disruption estimated that 70 per cent of children in low- and middle-income countries could not read and understand a simple text by age ten (World Bank et al., 2022). The Global Education Monitoring Report Team (2025) instead discusses harmonised African end-of-primary minimum-proficiency evidence in reading and mathematics. Differences in geographical coverage, age or grade, domains and estimation methods prevent direct comparison. Neither indicator was measured here.

Foundational learning requires coordination between curriculum, teaching materials, assessment and professional support. UNICEF and Hempel Foundation (2023, 2024) document progress in national commitments alongside uneven implementation of foundational-learning measures. Piper and Dubeck (2024) similarly emphasise coherent, structured pedagogy provision rather than isolated inputs. Together, these sources suggest that school leadership matters partly because it connects resources and professional learning to daily teaching. However, national policy monitoring and programme synthesis cannot establish how individual Oshikoto principals allocate their time.

Namibia's National Standards and Performance Indicators for Schools provide an established framework for school improvement (Ministry of Education, 2005). Leadership research suggests that principals influence learning through staff development, collaboration and organisational conditions (Harris & Jones, 2023; Leithwood et al., 2020). These accounts complement Piper and Dubeck's (2024) emphasis on coherent instructional support: leadership matters when organisational arrangements enable teachers to use materials and improve teaching. This study examines those arrangements through principals' reported practices in Oshikoto.

The study objectives were to describe regular FLN leadership engagement, identify reported barriers and propose implementation strategies. Existing practices were investigated empirically; the model was developed interpretively, not tested as an intervention. The research questions included:

1. To what extent did principals report regular engagement in FLN leadership practices?
2. What barriers did principals report in implementing FLN strategies?
3. What strategies for strengthening FLN leadership can be proposed from the integrated findings and theoretical framework?

Ultimately, the study presents the framework, literature, questionnaire design and findings, then discusses implications and limitations before offering prioritised recommendations.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Transformative Leadership

Transformative leadership examines inequitable arrangements and the action needed to change them (Shields, 2010). It differs from transformational leadership, which emphasises organisational direction, motivation, and change: transformative leadership explicitly asks whose interests are served and which groups remain excluded. Applied to FLN, it directs attention to access to suitable-language texts, learning support and participation. These are analytical concerns rather than inequalities measured in this survey. The framework therefore guides questions about resource allocation and inclusion without treating principals' equity commitments as established findings.

Distributed Leadership

Distributed leadership locates leadership practice in interactions among people and their working conditions (Spillane, 2006). In a Namibian school, the principal may coordinate with a head of department, senior teacher or grade team, where these roles exist. Teachers can lead planning and assessment moderation, while the school board can support family participation and resource oversight. Small schools may need shared circuit support rather than additional committees. The principal retains accountability. Lin (2022) links distributed leadership with autonomy, collaboration and teacher innovativeness, but these associations do not demonstrate improved FLN attainment in Oshikoto region. Distribution is therefore proposed as supported coordination, not simply the transfer of workload.

Data-Informed Instructional Leadership

Data-informed instructional leadership connects evidence to decisions about teaching and support. Black and Wiliam (2009) locate formative assessment within pedagogy: evidence becomes useful when it informs subsequent teaching and learning. Classroom checks may include listening to oral reading, examining writing or observing number tasks. Standardised assessments use common administration and scoring

procedures; their results may also inform teaching, but they differ from ongoing classroom checks. Learner work, attendance records and teachers' observations provide additional evidence. Principals can help teachers interpret these sources, identify learning needs and review instructional responses. Anand et al.'s (2023) review of management interventions adds an organisational perspective: assessment routines must be considered alongside support and implementation conditions. Together, the sources distinguish collecting information from using it to improve instruction.

Recent policy evidence reinforces this distinction. UNICEF and Hempel Foundation (2026) report that assessment data are more widely used for national policy and planning than to inform classroom practice across all schools. Around seven in ten reporting countries used assessment data nationwide for planning, compared with four in ten for classroom practice. This identifies an implementation gap, whereas Black and Wiliam (2009) explain the pedagogical process needed to bridge it. Neither source establishes how Oshikoto principals use assessment information; this requires local evidence.

The three perspectives perform different functions within the proposed framework (Black & Wiliam, 2009; Shields, 2010; Spillane, 2006). Transformative leadership supplies the equity purpose; distributed leadership identifies who participates and how expertise is coordinated; data-informed leadership supplies the recurring process of identifying needs, responding and reviewing. Organisational capacity is a proposed enabling condition across these relationships. Protected time makes collaboration feasible, usable resources make agreed responses possible, and professional knowledge supports interpretation. These are theoretical propositions, not statistically tested mediation or moderation effects. The framework allows low practice frequencies to be considered alongside capacity constraints without excluding alternative explanations such as differences in priorities or expertise.

Instructional Support and Professional Learning

International research agrees that leadership works through the conditions of teaching, but offers different kinds of evidence. Leithwood et al. (2020) synthesise broad claims about successful leadership, whereas Persson et al. (2025) analyse longitudinal teacher ratings and achievement data from 1,919 Swedish schools. In the latter study, collaboration partly explained the association with final-year grades, but the relationship differed for standardised test scores. Much of the pattern reflected stable differences between schools. Consequently, collaboration should not be presented as a universal causal route to learning improvement, and findings from Sweden cannot be transferred directly to Namibian junior primary schools.

Namibian research brings the instructional issues closer to this setting. Gabriel and Mpofu (2024) used secondary interview and observation data to describe phonological and interactive reading activities in selected Oshana classrooms. Hamukonda and Luneta (2023), using an interpretative design, found varied number-teaching strategies but weaknesses in the pedagogical skills needed to apply them. The studies differ in subject and emphasis: the reading study documents activities in use, while the numeracy study identifies limitations in their execution. Together they indicate why observing teaching and following up professional learning may be more informative than checking curriculum coverage alone. Neither study estimates the effect of principals' support on learner achievement.

Naruseb (2025) found that Khomas principals understood instructional leadership but reported difficulties implementing it and needed ongoing support. This challenges an explanation based only on leaders' lack

of awareness. Mthanti and Msiza (2023), writing from South Africa, also emphasise principals' role in teacher professional development. Their contextual evidence complements, rather than replicates, the programme-level synthesis of Piper and Dubeck (2024), which connects instructional materials with training and ongoing support. Across these sources, professional learning appears more credible when tied to classroom application. The remaining question for Oshikoto is whether principals report undertaking these recurring activities while meeting other obligations.

Evidence on coaching sharpens this comparison. Kraft et al.'s (2018) meta-analysis of 60 causal studies found improvements in instruction and learner achievement, although effects were smaller in larger programmes. Much of the evidence concerned United States literacy programmes, limiting direct transfer to Namibia. In contrast, Piper and Dubeck (2024) synthesise structured pedagogy in sub-Saharan Africa, where materials, initial training and ongoing support form a coherent package. Both support sustained instructional assistance, but neither establishes coaching quality in the present schools. This makes the low reported coaching frequency a priority for investigation rather than proof of weak teaching.

Resources and Family Participation

Policy monitoring and school-level research identify related problems at different levels. UNICEF and Hempel Foundation (2023, 2024, 2026) track national implementation measures, including the use of assessment evidence. The Global Education Monitoring Report Team (2025) draws on principal and parent-representative surveys in approximately 300 primary schools and interviews with local authorities in five African countries. This wider range of perspectives complements policy monitoring, although Namibia was not one of the five focus countries. Together, these sources emphasise implementation conditions; neither provides estimates of shortages in Oshikoto. The present study therefore examines resources, workload and support as connected concerns without assuming that any one factor causes the reported practice pattern.

Family participation also requires a clear distinction between involvement in school activities and engagement with children's learning. Goodall and Montgomery (2014) describe these as different points on a continuum, cautioning against treating school contact as the only form of engagement. Read alongside Shields's (2010) concern with inclusion, this directs attention to whether school expectations accommodate families' languages, time and learning resources. The Global Education Monitoring Report Team (2025) adds African evidence that includes parent representatives, whereas the present study records only principals' perspectives. Low meeting attendance should therefore not be equated with parental indifference. Families' own accounts would be needed to assess how proposed support fits their circumstances.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a convergent mixed-methods design and informed by pragmatism, which was appropriate because the research questions required both a numerical description of principals' reported FLN leadership practices and an interpretive account of the conditions they associated with implementation. The quantitative and qualitative strands were collected during the same general phase through one questionnaire containing closed-ended and open-ended questions, analysed separately, and brought together during interpretation. This design was suitable for the study because neither strand alone could address the full purpose: frequencies could show how commonly particular practices were reported, while open-ended responses could provide contextual explanations of the demands and

constraints that principals said they experienced. Frequencies described practices, qualitative responses explored constraints, and integration informed practical proposals.

The study covered Omuthiya, Onankali, Onathinge, Onkumbula, Onyaanya, Onyuulaye, Oshigambo and Oshivelo circuits in Oshikoto. The total population sampling included all 60 eligible principals who headed schools offering junior primary education and specialised in Junior Primary Education. These principals were eligible because their leadership responsibilities and professional background placed them in a position to report on school-level coordination, curriculum monitoring, instructional support, assessment practices and constraints affecting FLN implementation. The study used total population sampling rather than selecting a probability or non-probability subsample. This approach was justified by the manageable size of the population and the study's intention to obtain coverage of every eligible principal within the specified regional and professional boundaries. All 60 eligible principals participated, giving a 100 per cent response rate for that defined population.

Data were collected using one piloted questionnaire comprising closed-ended and open-ended questions. The instrument addressed nine distinct FLN leadership practices and invited principals to describe barriers encountered when implementing FLN strategies. The closed-ended items generated the practice indicators reported in Table 1; the open-ended items generated the written accounts used to identify implementation themes. A single questionnaire was appropriate for the region-wide census because it enabled the same core questions to be put to all 60 principals and generated both standardised responses and contextual descriptions within one data-collection process. The questionnaire focused on principals' reports; it did not directly measure classroom practice, school resources, teacher competence or learner achievement.

Quantitative responses were analysed descriptively using frequencies and percentages. For each of the nine independent practice indicators, the number of principals reporting regular engagement was divided by the 60 participating principals and expressed as a percentage. The use of descriptive statistics was consistent with the first research question, which asked the extent to which principals reported regular engagement in specified practices. The indicators were analysed separately and were not combined into an overall leadership score. Since the study sought to describe the defined eligible population and did not formulate hypotheses about group differences or causal relationships, inferential tests were not necessary for the reported objectives. The percentages should be interpreted as self-reported regular engagement, not as direct observations of practice, measures of frequency or duration, or evidence of quality or effectiveness.

Responses to the open-ended questions were analysed thematically. The reported process involved familiarisation with the responses, coding, refinement of themes and interpretation in relation to the research questions, following the broad approach described by Braun and Clarke (2006). The resulting themes concerned competing administrative and teaching responsibilities, shortages of learning resources and infrastructure, uneven professional support, and barriers to family participation. The themes were used to interpret the quantitative patterns, not to estimate the prevalence of barriers across schools.

Ethical Considerations

Permission was sought and obtained from the Director of Education in Oshikoto Region. Appointments were arranged with participating principals before data collection. Participation was voluntary and based

on informed consent. De-identified reporting and secure data storage protected confidentiality. These arrangements constituted regional administrative authorisation and participant consent. The self-reported, cross-sectional data describe the eligible population but cannot establish causal effects. The proposed model was not independently validated.

4.0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Participant Profile

The participants were 60 principals responsible for junior primary education, comprising 28 Female principals (46.7%) and 32 Male principals (53.3%), as presented in Figure1. All were specialised in Junior Primary Education and had served as Heads of Department for Junior Primary for at least two years before becoming principals. This establishes prior leadership experience within the same educational phase. The participant profile shows a small numerical difference between Male principals (53.3%) and Female principals (46.7%). Both groups were represented, but this distribution does not establish gender equity in appointments or differences in leadership effectiveness. As the study did not compare leadership practices by gender, the figures describe the participating population only.

All 60 principals specialised in Junior Primary Education and had served as Heads of Department in the same phase for at least two years. This establishes relevant prior leadership experience and suggests opportunities to develop familiarity with curriculum coordination and teacher support. However, these opportunities should not be treated as evidence that particular competencies were acquired or applied effectively. Leithwood et al. (2020) emphasise that successful leadership depends on how leaders enact practices and respond to their school contexts. Complementing this broader evidence, Naruseb's (2025) study of Namibian primary school principals identified a continuing need for targeted professional development, guidance and resources. Together, these sources suggest that previous leadership experience provides a relevant foundation, while ongoing support and suitable working conditions remain important.

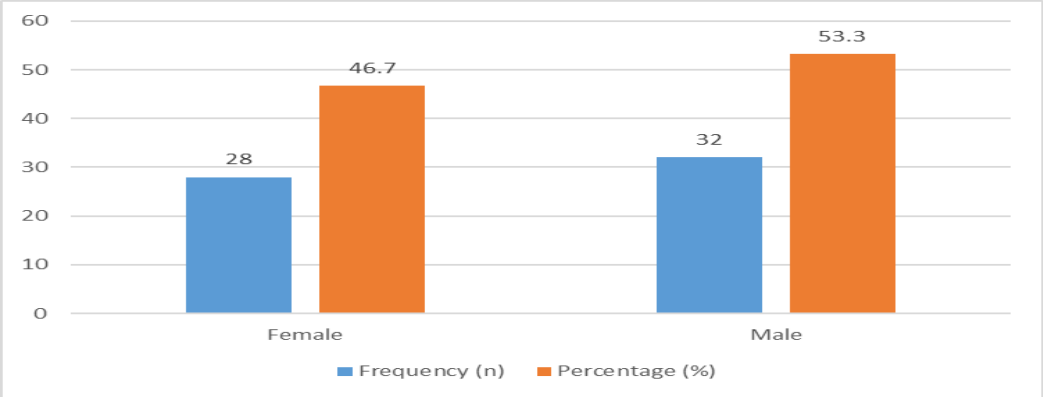


Figure 1: Gender Distribution of Participating Principals

Note. $N = 60$. *Gender is described without inferential comparisons.*

Reported FLN Leadership Practices

Table1 presents the nine independent practice indicators. Provision or mobilisation of materials was reported by 36 principals (60.0%), followed by curriculum monitoring by 34 (56.7%). Action planning was reported by 27 (45.0%) and lesson observation by 24 (40.0%). These figures describe reported regular engagement, not observed frequency, duration or quality.

Table 1. Principals Reporting Regular Engagement in FLN Leadership Practices

FLN leadership practice	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Provision or mobilisation of FLN learning materials	36	60.0
Monitoring implementation of the junior primary curriculum	34	56.7
Developing or reviewing a school FLN action plan	27	45.0
Observing literacy or numeracy lessons	24	40.0
Monitoring teachers' use of formative assessment	18	30.0
Providing instructional coaching and feedback	15	25.0
Using standardised assessment data for improvement	12	20.0
Supporting teachers with lesson planning	6	10.0
Training teachers to make low-cost teaching aids	6	10.0

Note. *N = 60 for each indicator. Practices are not mutually exclusive; percentages do not sum to 100 per cent.*

Formative-assessment monitoring was reported by 18 principals (30.0%), coaching and feedback by 15 (25.0%), and use of standardised assessment data by 12 (20.0%). Lesson-planning support and training teachers to make low-cost aids were each reported by six principals (10.0%). The descriptive difference between materials provision and coaching was 35 percentage points. This was complemented by qualitative findings where participants stated that:

> *After observing a lesson, I discuss possible improvements with the teacher. However, my teaching and administrative duties make regular follow-up difficult.* Participant P1&P15.

> *We discuss the assessment results to identify areas where learners are struggling. The challenge is turning those results into specific teaching activities and checking whether the learners improve.* Participants P20&P18.

> *I encourage teachers to plan together and use locally available materials, such as bottle tops for counting. However, we have limited time for practical sessions on preparing and using these materials.* Participants P4&22.

Reported Implementation Barriers

All 60 100 per cent principals reported classroom teaching responsibilities. The qualitative summary also described administrative demands involving reporting, staffing, learner welfare and procurement. No time-use records establish the teaching load or hours spent on these tasks. Accordingly, the evidence supports competing responsibilities but does not establish that every participant taught a full timetable.

The resource theme concerned shortages of graded readers, workbooks, manipulatives, assessment materials and classroom space, together with restricted ICT access, connectivity and electricity. This was supported by qualitative findings; participants revealed that:

> *We have too few graded readers for learners to practise individually. Teachers must ask learners to share books, which limits opportunities for each learner to read during the lesson.* Participants P8; P30; P45&P58.

The professional-support theme identified uneven training in early literacy, phonics, numeracy routines, differentiation and formative assessment. The summary linked large classes and staffing shortages with difficulties providing individual support and arranging peer observation. It also described a need for follow-up after workshops. These accounts complement the low reported coaching and planning-support figures. This was complemented by the open-ended question where participants stated that:

> *We need more practical training on teaching phonics and number concepts, especially when learners in the same class have different learning needs. With large classes, teachers find it difficult to give each learner individual support.* Participant P 39; P55; P 50 & P53.

> *The workshops introduce useful ideas, but we need follow-up support when teachers try them in their classrooms. Staff shortages make it difficult to arrange peer observation and discuss what is working.* Participant P28; P36&P47.

The family-participation theme grouped reported obstacles into economic and time pressures (poverty and work commitments), geographical access (distance), and communication or learning-support difficulties (adult literacy, language and uncertainty about how to assist). This was supported by the qualitative finding we found here: participants revealed that:

> *Some parents tell us that their work commitments make it difficult to attend school meetings or help with learning activities at home. Families facing financial difficulties also struggle to provide reading materials.* Participants P7; P14; P24& P46.

> *Some families live far from the school, and travelling to meetings is difficult when transport is unavailable or unaffordable. This limits opportunities for us to discuss learners' progress with them.* Participants P 32; P44; P 55 & P57.

> *Some parents say they are unsure how to help with reading and number activities, particularly when the materials are in a language they do not understand well. They need practical demonstrations of activities they can do with their children.* Participants P 15; P19; P25 & P30.

Integration of Findings

Table2 compares the two strands. The qualitative accounts offer possible explanations for the quantitative pattern, while the percentages indicate which reported practices warrant attention. Neither strand establishes that workload or shortages caused low engagement. There is no participant-level analysis of agreement or contradiction, and qualitative theme counts are unavailable.

Table 2. Interpretive Integration of Practice Indicators and Reported Conditions

Quantitative pattern	Qualitative account	Interpretation and boundary
Teaching responsibilities: 60/60; observation: 24/60; coaching: 15/60	Competing teaching and administrative demands	Protected time may help; teaching hours and causal effects were not measured.
Materials provision: 36/60; training in low-cost aids: 6/60	Shortages of texts, manipulatives and infrastructure	Provision and usability need attention; no school inventories verify severity.
Formative assessment: 18/60; standardised data: 12/60; planning support: 6/60	Uneven professional support and difficulties following up training	Support for evidence use is plausible; skill levels and effects were not assessed.
No quantitative family-participation indicator	Economic, distance and communication barriers in the thematic summary	Interpretation from thematic accounts; family perspectives and prevalence were not assessed.

Discussion

Leadership Practices and Instructional Support

The clearest pattern distinguishes broad oversight from recurring instructional support: materials provision and curriculum monitoring were reported more often than coaching and planning support. This accords with Leithwood et al.'s (2020) distinction between organising provision and developing the instructional programme. The survey does not explain individual priorities. Capacity constraints, interpretations of regular engagement, role expectations and expertise are competing explanations; low frequencies establish neither poor commitment nor structural failure.

All participants had at least two years of Junior Primary departmental leadership experience: relevant background, but no assurance of instructional-support quality. Leithwood et al. (2020) emphasise staff development and organising instructional work; Naruseb (2025) identifies Namibian principals' continuing support needs. Together, these studies suggest considering previous leadership roles alongside present working conditions. This study did not test associations between years of leadership experience and FLN practices.

The Namibian classroom studies help explain why this distinction matters. Reading activities documented by Gabriel and Mpofu (2024) and number-teaching difficulties identified by Hamukonda and Luneta (2023) point to the need for subject-specific professional dialogue. Such dialogue could connect lesson observation to a manageable change in practice. However, these external studies cannot verify what happened in the participating Oshikoto classrooms. The present findings identify a support priority, while direct observation and learner evidence would be needed to establish its instructional consequences.

Assessment use requires similar caution. Formative-assessment monitoring was reported by 30.0 per cent of principals and standardised-data use by 20.0 per cent, indicating uneven engagement with different evidence sources. These figures do not measure assessment quality or its influence on teaching. Black and Wiliam (2009) explain why instructional responses matter, while UNICEF and Hempel Foundation (2026) identify a wider gap between assessment systems and classroom use. Their evidence operates at different levels but supports a shared practical implication: leaders should help teachers interpret results and plan

responses. Persson et al. (2025) further show that leadership associations differ between achievement measures, cautioning against treating all assessment outcomes as interchangeable.

Organisational Capacity and Shared Responsibility

Teaching responsibilities and administrative demands provide a plausible context for limited time for supervision. Naruseb (2025) similarly reports implementation difficulties despite principals' understanding of instructional leadership. Read with Harris and Jones (2023), this suggests that professional competence and organisational opportunity should be considered together. It remains an interpretation, since neither workload effects nor commitment were measured independently in the present study.

Distributed leadership offers one practical response. Routine coordination of assessment, resources and meetings can be assigned to suitably supported staff, potentially freeing the principal for focused supervision and follow-up. However, teachers' workload must be reviewed at the same time. Spillane's (2006) emphasis on people and situations, together with Lin's (2022) evidence on collaboration and autonomy, suggests that clear authority and available time are central. In a small school, a circuit-supported arrangement may be more feasible than adding several internal leadership posts. This proposal requires testing against actual staffing and timetable conditions.

Resource and professional-support themes reinforce the need to connect support measures. Materials without guidance may be underused, while training without follow-up may be difficult to apply. Mthanti and Msiza (2023) emphasise principals' role in teacher development; Piper and Dubeck (2024) link materials to ongoing instructional support; and Kraft et al. (2018) show the potential and implementation limits of coaching interventions. Their methodological differences matter: qualitative accounts identify support needs, while intervention studies examine effects under particular conditions. The present survey reports practice frequencies and constraints, but does not establish which support measure would produce the greatest local improvement.

For family participation, the findings support examining accessibility rather than attributing low involvement to lack of interest. Goodall and Montgomery's (2014) distinction between school involvement and engagement with learning complements Shields's (2010) attention to exclusion. Together, these perspectives suggest that flexible communication and practical learning activities may be more useful than measuring participation only through attendance at school events. However, the reported barriers come from principals' thematic accounts. The study cannot establish families' motivations, the frequency of each barrier or whether the proposed responses would meet families' needs. Direct family consultation is therefore necessary before implementation.

Proposed Model for Strengthening FLN Leadership

The integrated findings and literature inform the six-component proposal in Figure2. Quantitative indicators identify areas of limited reported engagement; qualitative summaries suggest implementation conditions; the theoretical framework guides possible responses. The model is not a participant-endorsed consensus, a statistically estimated model or evidence of improved learner outcomes. Its contribution is to organise actionable hypotheses for a subsequent pilot.

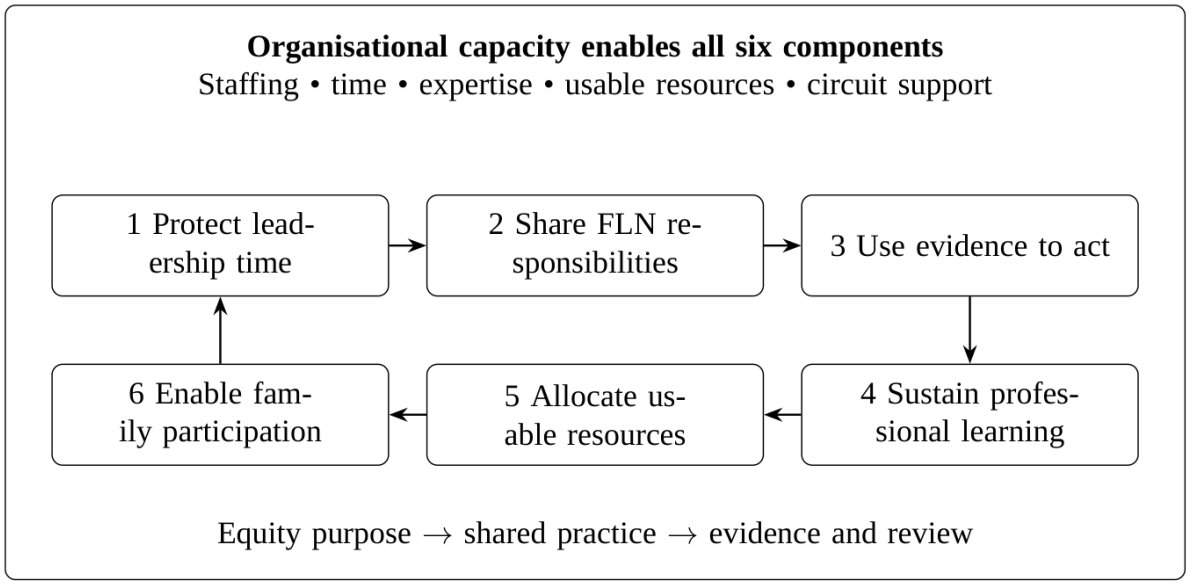


Figure 2: Proposed Six-Component Model for FLN Leadership Capacity

Note. *Arrows indicate a proposed recurring improvement cycle, not tested causal effects. Review of learner needs should inform the next allocation of time, responsibilities and resources.*

Protect Instructional Leadership Time

The regional education directorate and circuit inspectors should first review principal teaching loads, reporting demands and available cover. Principals can then schedule a feasible recurring block for lesson visits, learner-work review and feedback. Where release is limited, a short protected block is more realistic than an extensive new monitoring requirement. This responds to the reported coexistence of teaching duties and low engagement in recurring support; the appropriate allocation should be determined locally, not inferred from the survey. This recommendation draws on the organisational account of leadership in Leithwood et al. (2020) and the implementation concerns identified by Naruseb (2025).

Distribute Explicit FLN Responsibilities

The principal should agree responsibilities with staff based on demonstrated early-grade expertise, willingness to support colleagues, and realistic workload capacity. In a larger school, a head of department or senior teacher and grade representatives can coordinate assessment, planning and resources. In a small school, one designated teacher may work with the principal and a circuit colleague. Roles should specify decision authority, allocated time and simple reporting arrangements. School-board representatives can support family engagement and resource oversight, while qualified staff retain professional teaching decisions. The principal should review progress and resolve workload conflicts rather than assume that delegation itself creates capacity. The emphasis on supported roles combines Spillane's (2006) account of distributed practice with Lin's (2022) findings on autonomy and collaboration.

Use Evidence to Guide Targeted Teaching

A reading cycle could begin with a short, curriculum-aligned check of letter–sound knowledge and oral reading in the language of instruction. If a group struggles to blend sounds, the teacher could provide brief guided blending practice with suitable decodable texts, supported by a peer demonstration. After a

locally agreed interval, a comparable check would guide regrouping or further support. A numeracy cycle could use tasks on counting sets and explaining tens and ones. If learners count by rote but cannot represent quantities, targeted practice with counters and bundles could precede reassessment. These are illustrative proposals, not activities observed or evaluated in the study. The cycle links the formative-assessment rationale of Black and Wiliam (2009) with the instructional-support approach described by Piper and Dubeck (2024).

Sustain Professional Learning

Circuit staff should link workshops to focused school-based follow-up. Teachers could demonstrate one literacy or numeracy routine, plan together, observe its use and review learner work. Principals or designated coordinators should record the teaching issue, agreed support and follow-up outcome rather than only attendance. Cluster meetings can share expertise across small schools. The proposal responds to the reported gaps in coaching and planning support, while recognising that protected time and staffing are necessary to sustain it. It combines the coaching evidence reviewed by Kraft et al. (2018) with the continuing support emphasised by Mthanti and Msiza (2023).

Allocate Resources by Need and Usability

Schools should prepare a short inventory of texts, writing materials, manipulatives, assessment tools and access constraints. Circuit and regional staff can compare requests against enrolment, language needs and existing provision. Appropriate-language readers and usable low-cost number materials should take priority over technology purchases that depend on unavailable electricity or connectivity. Monitoring should consider whether materials reach classrooms and support agreed teaching activities. This is an equity-oriented allocation principle; the survey itself does not rank schools by need. This connects Shields's (2010) equity perspective with Piper and Dubeck's (2024) emphasis on usable instructional materials.

Make Family Participation Accessible

Schools should consult families about preferred languages, meeting times, and ways to support learning. Short demonstrations of shared reading, storytelling or counting with household objects can provide practical entry points. School boards and community organisations may help arrange access, but should not replace the education authorities' responsibility for core resources. A pilot should record who participates, which activities are useful and whose needs remain unmet. This would provide the direct family evidence absent from the present study. The approach draws on Goodall and Montgomery's (2014) emphasis on engagement with learning and the broader stakeholder perspective in the Global Education Monitoring Report Team (2025).

Implementation Priorities and Responsibilities

Implementation should proceed in stages: regional and circuit officials first assess workload, staffing, and minimum resource gaps with principals; principals and designated teacher leaders then pilot manageable observation, coaching, and assessment-review routines with circuit support; regional officials review feasibility, costs, classroom use, and learner progress before expansion. Family representatives should inform participation arrangements throughout. These responsibilities do not imply established funding, release time or effectiveness.

Limitations of the Study

Total population sampling covered all 60 principals meeting the study's eligibility criteria across the eight circuits. It does not make the findings representative of principals without the specified specialisation, other regions or future cohorts. Detailed per-circuit, school-location, enrolment and staffing distributions were unavailable, limiting contextual comparison. Complete participation does not remove measurement error: social desirability may inflate reported observation, coaching and assessment monitoring, while recall errors or different interpretations of regular engagement may produce inconsistent responses. No observation schedules, coaching logs or assessment records independently verified the frequencies. Teaching responsibilities were reported but not measured in hours.

The qualitative account is available as thematic summaries without verified participant quotations or a coding audit trail, limiting evaluation of the themes and minority views. One questionnaire supplied both strands, so convergence does not constitute independent corroboration. The analysis did not link individual workload indicators to practice frequencies or include teachers', families' or learners' perspectives. The cross-sectional design and absence of learner outcomes prevent causal conclusions. Future work should verify school characteristics and qualitative evidence, then combine observations, time-use records and learner assessments in a longitudinal pilot of the proposed model.

5.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion: The study concluded that strengthening FLN leadership in Oshikoto junior primary schools requires an integrated approach that connects leadership responsibilities with adequate organisational capacity. Drawing on transformative, distributed and data-informed leadership perspectives, the proposed six-component model emphasises protected instructional leadership time, shared leadership responsibilities, evidence-informed instructional decisions, sustained professional learning, needs-based resource allocation and accessible family participation. These components provide a context-responsive framework for addressing the implementation challenges identified in the study. Nevertheless, the model remains an interpretive proposal derived from the integrated findings and theoretical perspectives; its effectiveness in improving instructional practices and learner outcomes requires further piloting and empirical evaluation.

Ultimately, the study contributes a regional account of principals' reported FLN leadership practices and the organisational constraints accompanying their implementation. It highlights the importance of moving beyond curriculum monitoring and resource provision towards more consistent instructional supervision, assessment-informed teaching support and collaborative professional development. The findings provide a basis for informing regional education planning and developing practical strategies for strengthening foundational literacy and numeracy, while recognising that improvements in learner achievement cannot be inferred from the present study.

Recommendations: The study recommends an integrated approach: transformative leadership directs attention to equity, distributed leadership organises shared responsibility, and data-informed leadership connects assessment with teaching responses. The immediate priority is for regional and circuit authorities to review workload and minimum resources. Principals and teacher leaders should then pilot manageable coaching and assessment-review routines, with accessible family participation. Subsequent evaluation should examine implementation, teaching quality and learner progress before wider adoption. The

contribution is a context-specific account of reported FLN leadership and a practical proposal for strengthening its organisational conditions, with clear limits on claims about effectiveness.

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