Correlates of South African subject leaders' perspectives and their perceived competence on instructional leadership

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Too often, instructional leadership is perceived as an area of competence for principals with less focus on teachers, especially those with subject leadership responsibilities. In the study reported on here we investigated the perspectives of subject leaders and their perceived competence in instructional leadership as a basis for its correlation. Two hundred and five subject leaders from a purposive sample of 100 primary schools across 5 education districts of the Free State province in South Africa were surveyed on their knowledge, beliefs and perceptions of instructional leadership, in relation to their perceived competence. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics, correlation coefficients and regression. The results show that beliefs about instructional leadership tend to correlate negatively with perceived competencies and make no impact on such competencies. On the other hand, knowledge and perceptions showed significant correlation and are thus considered to be the better predictors of subject leaders' perceived competencies on instructional leadership. Further examination using regression analysis shows that perceptions may have a high impact on perceived competence. Consequently, we recommend interventions to deliberately target subject leaders' perceptions of instructional leadership to promote a more distributed practice of subject leadership in schools.

Keywords: distributed leadership; heads of departments; instructional leadership; perspectives; South Africa; subject leaders

Introduction

The emerging central goal of uplifting the standard of education in schools depends largely on the leadership for learning and teaching, or what is often referred to as instructional leadership (Jaca, 2013; Louis, Dretzke & Wahlstrom, 2010). Subject leadership, which refers to a combination of authority, power, initiative and suitable professional action to enhance teaching and learning in a specific subject falls under this umbrella of instructional leadership (Field, 2002). Experienced teachers who are assigned the responsibility to lead subjects within subject departments are called subject leaders. As part of the school management team, subject leaders serve as the key source of support for both learners and subject teachers when it comes to addressing problems related to learning and teaching in the classroom (Ghavifekr & Ibrahim, 2014). It is expected of them to have sufficient knowledge to lead subject departments effectively. Being subject leaders, they may have additional responsibilities towards the whole school and may thus slot into the more familiar role of a head of department (Department of Basic Education, 2016). This article is limited to a rather specific but critical aspect of their work, which is of instructional leadership.

Among other roles, subject leaders are expected to monitor teachers' work and give feedback as "facilitative leaders" (Lashway, 2002:2). Monitoring and giving feedback on teaching and learning are variables that characterise instructional leadership and have a significant impact on the teachers' practice and learners' performance respectively (Ghavifekr & Ibrahim, 2014). As instructional leaders, subject leaders spend time observing and helping teachers to improve performance (Bambi, 2012). They are also expected to encourage communication among subject teachers whereby they discuss their work-related problems and thus prevent isolation (Blase & Blase, 2004).

Considering the crucial roles that subject leaders perform, some scholars (Bipath & Nkabinde, 2013; Rajoo, 2012) suggest that the position of the heads of department, as subject leaders, is a rather neglected level of management as most interventions and support programmes tend to target school senior managers, particularly the principal. Other scholars (Hallinger, 2009; Printy, 2010) claim that very little reference is made to teachers, departmental heads or even deputy principals as instructional leaders and there is often little or no discussion of instructional leadership as a distributed or shared function. Therefore, other stakeholders in the school management team, including subject leaders, remain uncertain about their contribution to the general instructional leadership of the whole school. This notion also disengages subject leaders from instructional leadership and promotes isolation in terms of instructional leadership functions in a school. Thus, there is a gap in the application of instructional leadership in schools (Davidson, 2012).

Due to the existing gap in the literature, some scholars (Bipath & Nkabinde, 2013; Fluckiger, Lovett, Dempster & Brown, 2015; Hallinger, 2009) argue that, subject leaders will continue to lag behind on the requisite instructional leadership knowledge as there are few, if any, capacity-building programmes in place to develop them. Knowledge of instructional leadership is needed to provide an understanding of the activities that need to be executed at the departmental level to maximise achievement of the school vision and mission, which consequently gives confidence to the subject leaders. Evans (2014) confirms that subject leaders' knowledge of instructional leadership can lead to relevant support to teachers and can also impact positively on learners' results. Furthermore, beliefs about instructional leadership can have an impact on some leadership behaviour

(Anderson, Krajewski, Goffin & Jackson, 2008). Thus, the way instructional leadership is applied in the subject department is shaped by the beliefs of subject leaders on what instructional leadership is and/or is not. The beliefs about instructional leadership may also influence the perceptions of subject leaders, which, in turn, serve as a guide to their behaviour and influence the working climate of the subject department (Smith, Mestry & Bambie, 2013). All this literature is rather silent on the correlation between the perspectives of subject leaders and their perceived competence in instructional leadership. With this article we seek to fill this gap by answering the following questions:

1) What are the subject leaders' beliefs, perceptions and knowledge of instructional leadership?
2) How do subject leaders' perspectives (knowledge, beliefs and perceptions) correlate with their perceived competencies in instructional leadership?
3) To what extent do subject leaders' knowledge, beliefs and perceptions of instructional leadership influence their perceived competencies?

These questions were created with acknowledgement of some prior research indicating that subject leaders' perspectives inform their perceived competence (Anderson et al., 2008; Evans, 2014; Smith et al., 2013). The first question seeks to explore areas of knowledge, beliefs and perceptions that subject leaders have regarding the execution of instructional leadership practices in schools. The second question searches for the relationship between perspectives and perceived competencies of subject leaders, while the last question explores the impact of subject leaders' perspectives on their perceived competencies.

We begin with a detailed discussion of the perspectives on instructional leadership, competence and correlations between the two concepts as theoretical ideas, which underpinned the study. This is followed by a brief discussion of the research design, outlining how the study was executed and then empirical findings are presented followed by a discussion of the findings and recommendations.

Literature Review
Subject leaders' perspectives on instructional leadership
The structural and/or functional organisation of schools into (subject) departments is fairly familiar in most societies. The departments function as sectors that frame teachers' professional experiences in important ways (De Lima, 2008). In such instances, the leadership of the subject department often rests upon the shoulders of the subject leader. For this reason, the core purpose of subject leadership is to provide professional leadership and management for subjects to secure high-quality teaching, effective use of resources, and improved standards of teaching, learning and achievement for the learners (Fletcher & Bell,

1999). It is this role of subject leaders that has received increasing attention as it determines the purpose of schooling.

In the context of the global economy, the success of a nation depends largely on the fundamental knowledge, competencies and skills of its people (Blase & Blase, 2004; Thorpe & Tran, 2015). To ensure competence in subject leadership, the Teacher Training Agency (TTA) in the United Kingdom set out requirements and a number of expectations for subject leaders. The key areas of knowledge for subject leaders are classified into four categories, namely, teaching and learning; strategic direction and development of the subject; effective deployment of staff and resources; and leading and managing staff (TTA, 1998). These categories fall under the umbrella of instructional leadership, and subject leaders' roles revolve around these knowledge areas.

As some scholars have begun to suggest that knowledge (Thorpe & Tran, 2015), beliefs (Anderson et al., 2008), and perceptions (Santamaría, 2014) may be critical to action and behaviour, it is important to understand how these variables shape the perceptions of competence to engage in activities of instructional leadership initially.

The instructional leadership practices of the subject leaders are determined by the level of knowledge they have (Evans, 2014). In the South African context, some literature has drawn attention to a decline in learner performance as a result of not mastering the knowledge and skills appropriate to their grades (Davidson, 2012). By inference, the knowledge of instructional leadership that subject leaders bring to their daily practices should be considered in how they execute the roles. A study that investigated subject leaders' knowledge found that they have insufficient knowledge on how to provide adequate support to the teachers and to manage their subject departments effectively (Bipath & Nkabinde, 2013). Although the literature is not as vocal about the relationship between instructional leadership knowledge possessed by subject leaders and their competence to execute, there is adequate prior research to suggest that knowledge influences the individual's beliefs and vice-versa.

In a study that investigated the beliefs of teachers on instructional leadership, Tam (2015) found that belief is a state of mind whereby individuals view something to be a reality, based on the knowledge possessed. As the beliefs serve as a filter that sifts possibilities, there is a remarkable interaction between subject leaders' self-efficacy beliefs and execution of their instructional leadership roles (Hallinger, Hosseingholizadeh, Hashemi & Kouhsari, 2018). Self-efficacy beliefs contribute to the leadership of subject departments in two important ways, namely, resolution in the

case of problems, and consolidation of efforts towards a particular action (Paglis, 2010). Both are vital behaviours for subject leaders. In the case of problems within the subject department, effective subject leaders apply their own measures based on their efficacy beliefs about how to resolve such problems. On the other hand, sharing positive beliefs with the teachers about the improvement of teaching practice and the learning process can unfold the strategies for the application of instructional leadership within the subject department. Negative beliefs about their instructional leadership role lead subject leaders to avoid satisfying or to ignore the requirements of their roles, as described by the TTA (1998) for example. They may be more interested in satisfying certain roles if these agree with their personal interests. This is confirmed by the study conducted by Hallinger (2009), which found that the belief that instructional leadership is only a jurisdiction of the principal alone influences the current practices of subject leaders. Therefore, subject leaders' beliefs originate from what they know, and their beliefs may influence their perceptions about instructional leadership.

Other studies that have been conducted to explore perceptions about the instructional leadership roles of subject leaders (Glover, Miller, Gambling, Gough & Johnson, 1999; Smith et al., 2013), reveal that senior managers perceive the role of subject leaders as less innovative, and that subject leaders lack the skills to run their subject departments. In contrast, the subject teachers who work more directly with subject leaders, perceive subject leaders as a source of information for improving learning, teaching and job performance (Ghavifekr & Ibrahim, 2014).

Although stakeholders in schools differ on their perceptions regarding the instructional leadership roles of subject leaders, it is important to note that the contextualisation of instructional leadership in subject departments is determined by the perceptions of the immediate subject leaders (De Lima, 2008). The subject leaders' perceptions hold power to influence the climate of the subject department positively or negatively, depending on how subject leaders perceive instructional leadership (Allen, Grigsby & Peters, 2015). As a result, positive perceptions can improve competence, while negative perceptions decrease competence and may impact on learning and teaching negatively.

Perceived competence in instructional leadership
Some authors (Ng, Nguyen, Wong & Choy, 2015) maintain that, to compete on the international knowledge market, it is important for countries to fulfil the increasing demand for highly skilled and competent workers. Therefore, the leadership competence of subject leaders in schools is important for the attainment of effective learning and teaching outcomes. The level of competence in instructional leadership is probably dependent on the degree of leadership content knowledge, and the beliefs and perceptions of subject leaders. The literature claims that the role of subject leaders as instructional leaders is negatively influenced by contextual factors, such as the overall school policy, the lack of support when appraising teachers, and the school's financial position, which limits the availability of resources for each subject (Fletcher & Bell, 1999). These claims affect the instructional leadership practices of subject leaders and lead them to perceive themselves as incompetent (Santamaría, 2014). On the other hand, Karisa (2015) attests that subject leaders who execute fewer instructional leadership practices may be regarded as incompetent in their roles. The main contributing factor to subject leaders' incompetency may be that they struggle to interpret the boundaries of their instructional leadership roles (Seobi & Wood, 2016). There is thus a gap in the knowledge of instructional leadership, which creates confusion and impacts on teaching and learning.

In the South African context, where there are still major issues about the competence of subject leaders (Bipath & Nkabionde, 2013; Davidson, 2012), performance standards have been introduced in the form of an Integrated Quality Management System (IQMS) to address the levels of competence by employees within schools (Department of Education, Republic of South Africa, 2009). As for the subject leaders, three performance standards have been introduced in addition to those of subject teachers to focus on the administration of resources, personnel, and decision making and accountability. Evaluating subject leaders' competence using this model does not seem to be producing valid results as it is conducted within the school and no external stakeholders are involved in monitoring the effectiveness of its implementation. Thus, we seek to explore the level of perceived competence of subject leaders in instructional leadership against their perspectives and to begin a study to understand the relationship between the two variables.

The relationship between subject leaders' perspectives and perceived competence needs to be specified as it has a direct impact on the performance of students and subject teachers, and on the entire school context (Finley, 2014). In this regard, individuals' competence in instructional leadership is grounded in their perspectives. It is likely that subject leaders with sufficient knowledge, positive beliefs and perceptions about instructional leadership perform better in their subject departments, and that can lead to their executing leadership roles with confidence. They

can make sound decisions for their subject departments to the benefit of both learners and teachers. Glover et al. (1999) argue that their competence can be seen in the outcomes. Nevertheless, instructional leadership competence, as perceived by subject leaders, may determine the impact of perspectives in its application.

As for subject leaders with negative viewpoints towards instructional leadership, they may tend to neglect some of their instructional leadership roles, and their subject departments are inclined to show poor learner performance (Fluckiger et al., 2015). The Annual National Assessment indicates a deterioration in learner performance in primary schools (Davidson, 2012). The cause of this decline might be the influence of subject leaders' perspectives towards instructional leadership. This decline would raise questions as to whether there is a correlation between subject leaders' perspectives and perceived competence in instructional leadership. We presents findings from a preliminary country-specific investigation of these issues.

Methodology

Correlations between subject leaders' perspectives and their perceived competence in instructional leadership were explored as a basis for understanding their practices. A quantitative method using a survey was chosen for the research in primary schools within the Free State province of South Africa. A questionnaire was deemed appropriate for this study because it is inexpensive, practical, and it can cover every aspect of the topic (Mouton, 2015).

The questionnaire contained interrelated sections and closed-ended questions with a set of responses from which the respondents chose one answer (Maree, 2016). A five-point Likert scale with options ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) was used, and the respondents selected answers that best suited their views. This made it easier for the respondents to complete the questionnaire (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014).

The first section of the questionnaire gathered biographical information about respondents, while the second section collected information about the current knowledge and beliefs of the respondents on instructional leadership. The third section probed the way respondents perceive their role as instructional leaders, and the fourth section focused on their perceived competence in their daily practices and instructional leadership roles. The questionnaire was designed in this way to make it easy to complete and analyse (Creswell, 2014).

The instrument was adapted from questionnaires set by other scholars (Rajoo, 2012), and criterion validity was used as it permitted for modification of an existing instrument to help in answering the research questions (Mouton, 2015).

The questionnaire was then tested in a pilot study to confirm that it was of a good standard and to verify whether it was able to elicit the required data (Mhlanga & Ncube, 2003).

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS version 24) was used to compute all items in the instrument to determine which items measured which factor. The results of factor analysis (according to the extraction method called Principal Component Analysis) allow for the extraction of the three components to be used when measuring perspectives (knowledge, beliefs and perceptions). The split-halves reliability test was used as it allowed the instrument to be divided into two separate sections of items and scores that can be associated by means of a correlation coefficient (Maree, 2016). The reliability of the instrument was tested for both sub-items, namely, perspectives (knowledge = 0.808, beliefs = 0.266, and perception = 0.540) with overall Cronbach Alpha of 0.755 and perceived competence with a Cronbach alpha of 0.784. The overall results show a Cronbach's alpha of 0.749, which indicates a high level of internal consistency for the scale used for the survey data according to the benchmark provided by De Vellis (2003).

A descriptive research design with a purposive sampling method was applied. Participants were purposely selected based on their knowledge and understanding of subject leadership according to the needs of the study. The study targeted only permanently employed subject leaders in primary schools. The reason being that subject leaders in acting positions might have little knowledge and understanding of their role, and they may not be able to identify all the challenges surrounding the position, which was the main concern of the study. Verification of the respondents' position in the school was done with the principals of the sampled schools before the process of collecting data commenced. Individuals who were interested in taking part in the study without being in the position of subject leadership (e.g.: subject teachers, deputy principals and principals) were rejected as they did not meet the required profile.

Twenty primary schools were selected to represent each of the five districts in the Free State province. A total of 100 schools were sampled from farm areas, semi-rural areas, townships and towns. Participants were considered from all primary school phases (foundation, intermediate and senior phase). This helped us gather information on the perspectives of subject leaders from various school contexts and phases. In some schools, one subject leader was responsible for all school subjects, while in other schools, work was distributed equally among available subject leaders. What was common among the schools was that all subject leaders shared the same job description and

were expected to perform the same instructional leadership roles.

The total number of subject leaders in all the sampled schools was 231 and questionnaires were personally distributed to all participants in the sampled schools. Most of the completed questionnaires were immediately handed back to the researcher while others were returned by email. The total number of returned surveys was 205, and that total ($N = 205$) was used to represent the entire sample of the study.

Permission to conduct this research was sought from the Department of Education (DoE) which oversees all the schools, from the University of the Free State, from the sampled schools, and from the participants. We adhered to the ethical principles of human rights, honesty, fairness, respect for individuals' reputation, and confidentiality of collected information to ensure that the respondents were not exposed to any risk by taking part in this study (Creswell, 2014; McMillan & Schumacher, 2014).

Data Analysis
As a large number of respondents participated, the information from the data collected was analysed using descriptive statistics. The frequency, mean ranks and percentages were considered to describe the perspectives of the respondents on instructional leadership and their perceived competence. Correlation analysis was also done to explore the relationship between subject leaders' perspectives and perceived competence using the Pearson Correlation coefficient.

Findings
We explored the relationship between subject leaders' perspectives and perceived competence in instructional leadership. Knowledge, beliefs and perceptions about instructional leadership were investigated as the sub-variables of the main variable, perspectives, and correlated with the perceived competence in instructional leadership, as previously discussed. We assumed that subject leaders' perspectives and perceived competence would correlate significantly. However, the null hypothesis was that there would be no correlation between perspectives and perceived competence in instructional leadership. The research findings for each sub-variable of perspective are given in Table 1 below.

Table 1 Perspectives on instructional leadership

Knowledge of instructional leadership ($N = 205$)		
Sub-scales	*M*	*SD*
Making plans and implementing them	4.20	0.770
Initiating a teacher support programme	4.20	0.785
Spending more time in the teaching role	4.36	0.831
Systematic organisation of teaching and assessment of learners	4.31	0.781
Effective monitoring of the curriculum	4.30	0.781
Collaborative decision making	4.33	0.774
Reporting progress to senior management	4.36	0.758
Representing the school	3.95	0.800
Overall knowledge of instructional leadership	4.25	0.808
Beliefs about instructional leadership ($N = 205$)		
Sub-scales	*M*	*SD*
School leadership as the responsibility of the principal alone	1.86	0.823
Requesting help from senior managers ensures more effective decision making	4.15	0.746
Learner achievement is likely to improve if subject leaders are knowledgeable on instructional leadership	4.33	0.879
Overall beliefs about instructional leadership	3.44	0.266
Perceptions about instructional leadership ($N = 205$)		
Sub-scales	*M*	*SD*
Instructional leadership as focused on effective management of the curriculum	4.59	0.625
Addressing problems related to teaching and learning diversity	4.31	0.773
Significance of knowledge of instructional leadership as relevant to change management	3.85	0.626
Overall perceptions about instructional leadership	4.25	0.540

Note. Scale: 1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = uncertain; 4 = agree; 5 = strongly agree.

Knowledge of Instructional Leadership
Table 1 above represents the sub-scales used to explore knowledge of instructional leadership according to the highest mean scores: spending more time in the teaching role ($M = 4.36, SD = 0.831$), and reporting progress to senior management ($M = 4.36, SD = 0.758$) reported high. Collaborative decision making ($M = 4.33, SD = 0.774$), systematic organisation of teaching and

assessment of learners ($M = 4.31, SD = 0.781$), and effective monitoring of the curriculum ($M = 4.30, SD = 0.781$) followed.

Both making plans and implementing them, and initiating a teacher support programme were next, with the mean score ($M = 4.20$) and standard deviation of 0.770 and 0.785 respectively. The least reported sub-scale was representing the school to external stakeholders ($M = 3.95, SD = 0.800$), and

the overall mean score for knowledge of instructional leadership ($M = 4.25$, $SD = 0.808$) demonstrated an assurance of responses. Generally, responses on overall knowledge of instructional leadership indicate that respondents reported sufficient knowledge of instructional leadership.

Beliefs about Instructional Leadership

The beliefs of subject leaders about instructional leadership were investigated using three different sub-scales from the highest mean score, namely, learner achievement is likely to improve if subject leaders are knowledgeable on instructional leadership ($M = 4.33$, $SD = 0.879$). This was followed by the sub-scale indicating that requesting help from senior managers ensured more effective decision making ($M = 4.15$, $SD = 0.746$).

Although the least-reported sub-scale was that instructional leadership was believed to be the responsibility of the principal alone ($M = 1.86$, $SD = 0.823$), the SD value for the sub-scale was significantly high, and this indicated a positive reply. The overall beliefs of respondents about instructional leadership accumulated a higher mean score ($M = 3.44$, $SD = 0.266$), which shows a dependability in responses. In summary, the overall SD was lower, and it indicates that beliefs contribute negatively to the subject leaders' competencies.

Perceptions about Instructional Leadership

As seen in Table 1, the perceptions of subject leaders about instructional leadership were explored using three sub-scales, and the outcomes are presented here from the highest mean score to the lowest. Instructional leadership as focused on the effective management of the curriculum received the highest mean score ($M = 4.59$, $SD = 0.625$), and instructional leadership as addressing problems related to teaching and learning diversity followed ($M = 4.31$, $SD = 0.773$). Although the significance of knowledge of instructional leadership as relevant to change management was ranked the lowest ($M = 3.85$, $SD = 0.626$), the overall perception of respondents about instructional leadership reported was very high ($M = 4.25$, $SD = 0.540$). This also indicates that perceptions have a high impact on competencies in instructional leadership.

Perceived Competence in Instructional Leadership

The way subject leaders perceive their competence in instructional leadership was explored in terms of six different aspects, as demonstrated in Table 2 below.

Table 2 Perceived competence in instructional leadership ($N = 205$)

Sub-scales	M	SD
Improving learner performance	3.89	0.881
Unlocking career opportunities for teachers	3.66	0.970
Distributing instructional leadership roles through delegation	4.00	0.810
Organising capacity-building programmes	3.49	1.083
Effectively managing time	3.98	0.819
Minimising disruptions during learner contact time	4.09	0.818
Overall perceived competence	3.85	0.784

Note. Scale: 1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = uncertain; 4 = agree; 5 = strongly agree.

Table 2 highlights the competencies of instructional leadership as perceived by the subject leaders. Minimising disruptions during learner contact time ($M = 4.09$, $SD = 0.818$) was rated very high, and was followed by distributing instructional leadership roles through delegation ($M = 4.00$, $SD = 0.810$). Effective time management ($M = 3.98$, $SD = 0.819$), and improving learner performance ($M = 3.89$, $SD = 0.881$) were also reported often. Unlocking career opportunities for teachers ($M = 3.66$, $SD = 0.970$), and organising capacity-building programmes ($M = 3.49$, $SD = 1.083$) were the least-often reported sub-scales. For perceived competence in instructional leadership, the accumulated mean score was 3.851, with a standard deviation of 0.784. This demonstrates that the results are reliable.

Correlations between Perspectives and Perceived Competence in Instructional Leadership

It is important to verify the claims of the respondents about their knowledge, beliefs and perceptions regarding instructional leadership by relating them to their perceived competence. As the study also sought to explore the relationship between subject leaders' perspectives (knowledge, beliefs and perceptions) of instructional leadership and their perceived competencies, correlation coefficients were calculated. The findings are presented in Table 3 below.

Table 3 Correlation analysis between perceived competence and subject leaders' perspectives ($N = 205$)

		Perceived competence	Knowledge of instructional leadership	Beliefs about instructional leadership	Perceptions about instructional leadership
Perceived competence	Pearson Correlation	1	586*	.107	.734*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.128	.000

Note. *Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

As shown in Table 3 above, the correlations were significant and positive between perceived competence of instructional leadership and subject leaders' knowledge of instructional leadership ($R = .586$, $p = .000$) as well as perceptions about instructional leadership ($R = .734$, $p = .000$) at the significance level of 0.01 respectively. However, the correlation between subject leaders' beliefs about instructional leadership ($R = .107$, $p = .128$) and perceived competence was found to be insignificant. This seems to indicate that beliefs about instructional leadership have nothing to do with perceived competence. As a result, beliefs are considered an inappropriate predictor of subject leaders' competencies in instructional leadership.

Regression analysis was performed to include only the two perspectives (knowledge and perceptions) and to explore to what extent the subject leaders' knowledge and perceptions of instructional leadership predict their perceived competencies. The outcome of the analysis is presented in Table 4 below.

Table 4 Summary of regression analysis of subject leaders' perspectives (knowledge and perceptions) on instructional leadership

	Coefficients			*f*-test	
Sub-scale	Unstandardised	Standardised	Sig.	*f*	Sig.
(Constant)	0.605		0.28	137.401	.000
Knowledge	.289	.240	.000		
Perceptions	.759	.595	.000		

Note. Significant at $p < 0.01$; Multiple $R = 0.759$, $R^2 = 0.576$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.572$.

As shown in Table 4, an approximate average of the difference between perceived competencies and perspectives about instructional leadership is explained by the variations in the knowledge and perceptions about instructional leadership. The *f*-test ($f = 137.401$, $p < 0.01$) related independent variables (knowledge and perceptions) and show that they were significant, indicating that perspectives (knowledge and perceptions) inform perceived competence, which is the dependent variable. In agreement with the standardised coefficients, the regression is specified by:

Perceived competence = 0.605 + 0.289 knowledge + 0.759 perceptions

This indicates that perceptions appear to be a stronger predictor of subject leaders' competencies when compared to knowledge of instructional leadership. Although knowledge and perceptions are both predictors of subject leaders' competence, the results show that the impact of perceptions is more prominent in subject leaders' competencies in instructional leadership.

Discussion

We sought to investigate subject leaders' perspectives and perceived competence and correlate these with instructional leadership. Generalisations were limited to the subject leaders who participated in the study and not necessarily to the entire population. The National Standards for Subject Leaders (TTA, 1998) emphasise that subject leaders' responsibilities demand that they be knowledgeable of various subjects' content and that they lead the teachers who teach these subjects effectively.

The results of this study show that the subject leaders are knowledgeable in terms of planning for their subject departments, supporting teachers, systematically organising teaching and learning activities, imparting teamship, and reporting progress to senior managers, as required by the National Standards for Subject Leaders (TTA, 1998), with an overall mean score of 4.25. Therefore, there is an assumption that they understand their role, as specified in the Personnel Administrative Measures (Department of Basic Education, 2016). This outcome does not align with the specific view of Fluckiger et al. (2015) that middle leaders have insufficient knowledge of instructional leadership.

The results show that subject leaders' beliefs have an insignificant impact on perceived competence in instructional leadership. However, other results of this research indicate that subject leaders do not subscribe to the belief that school leadership only focuses on the principal as the head of the institution, as suggested by some scholars (Bas, 2012; Ghavifekr & Ibrahim, 2014; Louis et al., 2010; Yasin, Bashah, Zainal, Pihie, Fooi & Basri, 2016). It is, therefore, believed that instructional leadership is the jurisdiction of all stakeholders in schools regardless of their position.

It is also important to note that subject leaders believe in consulting with senior managers for effective decisions within their subject departments. This confirms that subject leaders are not fully independent in the implementation of instructional leadership roles, as highlighted by Bipath and Nkabinde (2013). However, their subject departments run according to the wishes of their seniors. The reason might be that there are certain challenges that obstruct them from executing their professional role in a meaningful way. This also supports other literature (Hallinger, 2009) which indicates that middle leaders are not given a chance to "run with the ball" for the benefit of learning and teaching.

From the findings of this study, it is apparent that the subject leaders perceive instructional leadership as focusing on the management of the

curriculum in the school to benefit learning and teaching. This supports some literature (Ghavifekr & Ibrahim, 2014; Hairon, Goh & Chua, 2015) indicating that subject leaders make a great contribution to the general instructional leadership of the whole school. For that reason, any progress in instructional leadership at the level of subject departments impacts on the reputation of the school. Furthermore, respondents perceive instructional leadership as a useful tool to address the problem of learning and teaching diversity in the school. On the other hand, instructional leadership is perceived as significant to facilitating the implementation of changes to the curriculum.

In the study we investigated which component(s) of the perspectives were more powerful in influencing subject leaders' competencies. The purpose was to establish whether there was a constant relationship between different sub-variables of the perspectives and whether they contributed to the same degree to the subject leaders' competencies. A correlation analysis revealed a positive relation between perspectives in instructional leadership and perceived competence. The results also show that not all sub-variables of the perspectives contribute to competence in instructional leadership, but that the beliefs contribute negatively towards competence, while the knowledge and perceptions contribute positively. Evidently, the competence of the subject leaders can be determined more reliably by both knowledge and perceptions. This suggests that, when trying to positively influence perceived competence in instructional leadership, knowledge and perceptions should be considered foremost.

The results from the regression analysis also confirm that subject leaders' perceptions about instructional leadership contribute the most to perceived competence, compared to subject leaders' knowledge of instructional leadership. With this study we thus established that perceptions have more power to influence subject leaders' perceived competence of instructional leadership. This is in line with another study (De Lima, 2008), which indicates that perceptions hold the power to determine the contextualisation of instructional leadership in subject departments. Furthermore, it is recommended that perceptions be considered more than knowledge as an influencer of competence in instructional leadership.

Implications
We present several recommendations for instructional leadership in South African primary schools. Although the concept of instructional leadership has been associated with senior managers for a very long time, the results of this study offer evidence that all stakeholders at schools contribute to the general instructional leadership of the school, and subject leaders have sufficient knowledge to execute their instructional leadership roles in their subject departments. Therefore, we firstly recommend that subject leaders be given a chance to apply their knowledge in practice and lead their subject departments as they see fit for improved learning and teaching. This does not necessarily mean that senior managers would have no say or not give advice, but they would show trust in subject leaders while holding them accountable for their responsibilities.

Secondly, subject leaders form part of the school management team, and they are engaged in managing and leading subject departments. It is thus recommended that they are fully included in the programmes related to instructional leadership to improve the quality of instructional leadership in schools, including when the senior managers are not there. This prepares them to become expert senior managers in future. Consequently, we recommend a comprehensive intervention designed to support subject leaders on instructional leadership to promote a more distributed practice. In addition, interventions may focus on subject leaders' knowledge and perceptions about instructional leadership as they directly impact upon their competence.

Conclusion
Instructional leadership has a significant potential to influence teaching practice and learning outcomes, and its usefulness within the subject departments depends on the subject leaders' perspectives. The concept of instructional leadership has, for a very long time, been associated with senior managers alone, thus it will take time for subject leaders to assume the full responsibility of instructional leadership that should be assigned to them.

We have identified perspectives influencing the role of subject leaders in executing instructional leadership and correlated them with their perceived competence. The outcomes confirm that the competency of subject leaders in instructional leadership can be influenced by certain perspectives. However, not all the components of a subject leader's perspectives have a direct influence on their competence. Perceptions were found to play a major role in determining competence in instructional leadership relative to knowledge of instructional leadership. Perceptions can, therefore, serve as an area of focus to improve the competence of subject leaders on instructional leadership.

Authors' Contributions
The first author wrote the manuscript, collected data from the primary school subject leaders and analysed data with the support of second and third authors. The second and third authors prepared the

manuscript, while all authors reviewed the final manuscript.

Notes

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