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Rethinking Instructional Leadership: Deconstructing Teacher Marginalization to Foster Sustainable Accounting Education Practices

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Abstract. In many postcolonial education systems, authoritarian instructional leadership models continue to dominate, reinforcing hierarchical control and undermining teacher agency. This tension between top-down leadership and the need for justice-oriented, participatory approaches is particularly evident in curriculum-intensive subjects such as accounting. This study investigated how instructional leadership practices influence teacher identity and curriculum sustainability in secondary school accounting education in Lesotho. Grounded in transformative leadership theory, the research adopted a qualitative case study design and drew on semi-structured interviews with three accounting teachers and three school principals from purposefully selected schools. Thematic analysis revealed four interrelated leadership challenges: limited strategic support, lack of collaborative structures, ineffective developmental feedback, and teacher marginalization in decision-making. These findings demonstrate how entrenched managerialism contributes to professional disempowerment and curricular stagnation. Transformative leadership theory was chosen for its critical potential to challenge entrenched power relations and

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advocate for equity, inclusion, and teacher empowerment. In the Lesotho context, where instructional leadership often reflects inherited bureaucratic norms, the framework enables a reimagining of leadership as ethically grounded and socially responsive. The study's findings underscore the need for policy reforms that decentralize decision-making, mandate subject-specific instructional support, and embed collaborative professional structures within schools. Furthermore, teacher professional development should prioritize context-sensitive, justice-driven leadership approaches that value teachers as curriculum co-constructors. By positioning teacher agency as central to educational change, this study contributes to decolonial and transformative discourses on leadership and curriculum reform in the Global South and offers actionable insights for building more inclusive and sustainable accounting education systems.

Keywords: accounting education; curriculum sustainability; deconstructing; instructional leadership; transformative leadership

1. Introduction

The educational landscape is experiencing major transformations, demanding a critical re-evaluation of leadership models that have long directed instructional practices (Skeen, 2024). In curriculum-heavy subjects such as accounting, the persistence of autocratic, top-down leadership has been increasingly examined for its role in marginalizing teacher agency and weakening teacher professional identity. This marginalization hinders pedagogical innovation and challenges the development of sustainable, contextually responsive teaching methodologies. In Lesotho, such challenges are experienced at all times. Recent studies highlight a noticeable disconnect between curriculum reforms and their practical implementation, largely due to shortcomings in leadership vision and support (Tankiso-Mphunyane, 2023).

Current research underlines the vital role of instructional leadership in shaping teacher obligation, motivation, and systemic change. Kareem et al. (2023) highlighted that transformational leadership nurtures collaboration and empowers educators, enhancing student results and institutional loyalty. However, within Lesotho's accounting education sector, the adjustment and impact of such models remain underexamined, creating a knowledge gap this study seeks to address. The implementation of integrated curricula in Lesotho has been delayed by minimum training, resistance to change, and limited material support (Mphatsoane, 2020; Tankiso-Mphunyane, 2023).

These conditions are worsened by a reliance on inflexible, top-down leadership structures that fail to empower teachers or adapt to the demands of curriculum innovation. While the localization of the accounting curriculum was envisioned to enhance relevance, educators have expressed fears over inadequate preparation and poor resourcing, further complicating classroom implementation (Abedi, 2024).

This condition points to the pressing need for leadership approaches that are inclusive, reflective, and substantiated in professional collaboration. Groenewald et al. (2024) argued that global instructional leadership literature continues to be dominated by Eurocentric models that abandon the socio-political and cultural contexts of schools in the Global South. In Lesotho, school leaders often implement strict policies from above without meaningful discussion with teachers, resulting in disjointed implementation and disempowered teachers (Dyer & McMahon, 2022). The marginalization of teachers not only weakens morale but reduces the adaptability of the accounting curriculum to learners' diverse needs, threatening its sustainability. As Leek (2025) argued, authentic educational transformation must be driven from the grassroots, where teachers are respected as professionals and involved as co-constructors of curriculum knowledge.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Education's ongoing emphasis on accountability and measurable performance has contributed to a compliance culture. According to Kong and Wang (2024), this results in mechanistic teaching that prioritizes examination outcomes at the expense of deep conceptual learning. Internationally, similar concerns persist. Wilkinson (2021) cautioned that performativity discourses reduce teaching to quantifiable outputs, marginalizing its reflective and relational dimensions. In response, this study interrogated instructional leadership not as a managerial function but as a transformative practice capable of restoring teacher agency and fostering contextually grounded, sustainable accounting education in Lesotho. Specifically, it examined how leadership practices affect teacher identity and agency, and how these dynamics influence curriculum sustainability. The research was guided by two central questions:

1. In what ways do instructional leadership practices enable or constrain teacher agency in accounting education?
2. How do these leadership practices influence sustainable curriculum delivery in Lesotho's schools?

This inquiry contributes to both scholarly and policy-oriented debates. It proposes locally resonant strategies for leadership reform that promote teacher inclusion and responsive curriculum development. The next section outlines the theoretical framework, followed by a review of relevant literature, a detailed methodology, the presentation and discussion of findings, and a conclusion that highlights implications for leadership policy and sustainable practice in accounting education in Lesotho.

2. Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in transformative leadership theory, a critical and justice-oriented framework that challenges the persistent dominance of hierarchical managerial models in education. Popularized by Shields (2010), the theory is anchored in values of equity, inclusion, ethical responsibility, and social justice. It asserts that leadership should not be reduced to the improvement of performance indicators or the enforcement of compliance but must instead address structural

inequities and foster relationships that support deep and sustainable transformation (Esquierdo-Leal & Houmanfar, 2021).

Transformative leadership emerged in response to the global discomfort with neoliberal leadership models that treat schools as market-driven entities and teachers as implementers of externally mandated goals—models often at odds with the contextual complexities of education in the Global South (Ramango & Naicker, 2022). The theory draws upon Paulo Freire's (1970) emancipatory pedagogy, positioning education as a liberatory act and leadership as a relational, ethical, and participatory process (Larson & Murtadha, 2002). Unlike managerialist instructional leadership, which privileges control and performance, transformative leadership intentionally places marginalized voices such as those of teachers at the center of educational change (Sharma & Adeoye, 2024).

In the Lesotho context, where this study is positioned, transformative leadership theory is not only appropriate but essential. Here, bureaucratic managerialism, strict curriculum structures, and high-stakes accountability regimes marginalize teachers' voices in curriculum design and implementation (Abedi, 2024; Tankiso-Mphunyane, 2023). These challenges are not merely logistical; they are deeply political, reflecting historical power irregularities that continue to shape who holds authority and whose knowledge is legitimized within schooling spaces (Pietersen et al., 2023). For example, in recent curriculum reforms, accounting teachers were largely excluded from the development process, despite their contextual knowledge and professional insights. This reflects broader patterns of teacher disempowerment that this study sought to interrogate.

Transformative leadership theory was therefore applied in this study not as a detached ideal but as a solid lens for examining the relational and structural dynamics at play in secondary school leadership in Lesotho. As Torres (2022) asserted, effective leadership must begin with an awareness of cultural, historical, and institutional power relations. In this case, it must actively dismantle implements that silence teachers and hinder curriculum innovation. The theory reframes instructional leadership as a co-intentional, recursive process, requiring leaders to cultivate shared purpose and engage teachers in dialogue, rather than treating them as submissive executors of policy (Shields & Hesbol, 2020).

Practically, the application of this theory reveals both hurdles and opportunities in the field. On the one hand, principals often enact policy obligations without room for adjustment or teacher input—illustrated in this study by accounting teachers' reports of receiving new curriculum directives without consultation. On the other hand, some school leaders in this study demonstrated the potential of transformative leadership by facilitating collaborative subject meetings and offering space for reflective feedback. These practices, though rare, point to evolving possibilities for leadership reform grounded in relational trust, moral commitment, and professional agency.

Moreover, the theory provides a critique of leading improvement narratives across the Global South that privilege efficiency, standardization, and global

competitiveness, which are narratives that have led to narrowly defined metrics of success and a disregard for pedagogical relevance and teacher well-being (Sharma & Adeoye, 2024). In contrast, transformative leadership maintains that instructional leadership must be culturally responsive, politically aware, and contextually situated. It provides a roadmap for regaining teacher identity, rebuilding curriculum ownership, and restoring autonomy in educational practice.

Importantly, this theoretical framework aligns with broader decolonial requirements to rethink the purposes of education. Dei and Adhami (2022) argued that leadership in postcolonial contexts must disturb hereditary structures and advance indigenous knowledge and professional agency. In this light, transformative leadership is not only a conceptual tool but also a moral and political strategy. It invites educators and leaders to reimagine leadership as collective, liberatory, and ethically grounded. For this study, the framework enabled a nuanced interrogation of how secondary accounting teachers in Lesotho experience leadership, how they navigate the disjuncture between policy and practice, and how they imagine more inclusive curriculum futures. It provided the basis to advocate for leadership that not only includes but centers teachers as co-leaders capable of shaping educational practice in ways that are contextually meaningful and socially just.

3. Literature Review

This review interrogates the dominant discourses and paradigms surrounding instructional leadership, teacher marginalization, teacher identity, and curriculum sustainability, particularly in postcolonial and Global South contexts. The review begins by shining light on theoretical developments, then critiques core challenges, and finally, applies these insights to the empirical realities in Lesotho.

3.1 Instructional Leadership: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives

Instructional leadership has traditionally been associated with the principal's role in managing the curriculum, supervising instruction, and fostering academic excellence (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). While foundational to school improvement efforts, this model has been criticized for its overly managerial and hierarchical orientation. Bush (2020) later acknowledged that instructional leadership needed to evolve to reflect the complexity and contextual diversity of contemporary education systems.

More recently, instructional leadership has been reconceptualized to include distributed and participatory elements, highlighting the importance of collaborative leadership and teacher agency (Nadeem, 2024; Shal et al., 2024). However, as Makore et al. (2022) argued, much of the literature remains rooted in Eurocentric assumptions that do not adequately reflect the socio-cultural realities of schools in the Global South. In sub-Saharan Africa, for instance, school leadership still mirrors colonial patterns of authority, where principals act as enforcers of compliance rather than instructional partners (Witness et al., 2023). In Lesotho, instructional leadership often reproduces bureaucratic control,

marginalizing teachers' voices in the name of standardization and accountability (Tankiso-Mphunyane, 2023). These challenges point to a misalignment between theoretical aspirations of participatory leadership and the lived experiences of teachers in resource-constrained settings.

3.2 The Politics of Teacher Marginalization

Teacher marginalization is not merely an administrative misunderstanding; it is a structural and political situation shaped by power dynamics within the school and the broader education system. Dyer and McMahon (2022) emphasized that in many postcolonial education systems, teachers are treated as policy implementers rather than knowledge producers. Samier (2021) stated that this locating leads to disempowerment, decreased morale, and a lack of ownership over curriculum decisions.

In accounting education, which requires both content expertise and pedagogical skill, such marginalization is particularly unfavorable (Mphatsoane, 2020). Mincu (2022) indicated that leadership practices prioritizing standardized assessments and bureaucratic efficiency often ignore the interpersonal and reflective aspects of teaching. This performative culture reduces teachers to technicians rather than professionals. Literature from Southern Africa further illustrates this concern. Chikoko et al. (2018), who conducted a study on school leadership in South Africa, observed that stiff accountability systems rendered teachers voiceless in curriculum adaptation.

In Lesotho, where accounting teachers frequently lack access to resources and professional development, top-down leadership intensifies their sense of isolation and inadequacy (Makhasane, 2024). These findings emphasize the need for leadership approaches that not only recognize teacher expertise but intentionally dismantle structures that alienate them.

3.3 Teacher Identity and Professional Agency

Teacher identity is central to educational transformation. It includes beliefs, values, experiences, and a sense of professional purpose. Shi et al. (2025) suggested that educational change becomes meaningful and sustainable when it brings into line with and supports teachers' professional identities. Although teacher identity is frequently overlooked in leadership and reform efforts, Jiang and Zhang (2021) cautioned that failing to consider teacher identity results in shallow reforms that lack contextual significance. Transformative leadership, as articulated by Shields (2018), places teacher identity at the core of leadership practices.

It advocates for relational accountability, ethical dialogue, and the redistribution of leadership power (Carrington et al., 2024). This is key for building curriculum practices that are resilient, inclusive, and grounded in local realities. In the Lesotho context, recognizing teacher identity means valuing teachers' lived experiences and contextual knowledge as foundational to curriculum design and delivery. In an article by Yu (2024), it is mentioned that in most sub-Saharan African regions there is inadequate institutional support for professional identity development, with leadership training programs failing to address context-

specific challenges. This suggests that while literature may support teacher empowerment, its operationalization within schools remains limited without structural reform.

3.4 Curriculum Sustainability and Leadership

As stated by Hays and Reinders (2020), sustainable curriculum practices are those that are flexible, inclusive, and responsive to changing societal needs. Dei and Adhami (2022) argued that sustainability in education must be both pedagogical and political, requiring leadership that can steer complexity and embrace diversity. Instructional leadership plays a vital role in enabling or constraining such sustainability. In accounting education, curriculum sustainability goes beyond technical skills. It must reflect learners' socio-economic truths and support national development goals. Practical examples include teaching informal business finance, tax literacy, and ethical accounting practices.

According to Shields and Hesbol (2020), transformative leadership promotes the kind of critical reflection and relational trust necessary for sustainable curriculum innovation. However, as noted by Makore et al. (2022), many school leaders in Africa continue to operate within colonial-era paradigms that prioritize compliance over creativity. In Lesotho, similar issues emerge. Curriculum sustainability is hampered by misalignment between national reform policies and actual teaching conditions. Teachers report difficulties integrating local economic contexts into accounting instruction due to limited curriculum flexibility and top-down instructions. This suggests that for sustainability to be achieved, leadership must change from a directive to a facilitative mode, where teacher insight is vital to curriculum design.

3.5 Transformative Leadership as a Framework for Change

Transformative leadership provides a compelling framework for addressing the marginalization of teachers and fostering curriculum sustainability. It emphasizes equity, justice, and collaboration. It positions leadership as an ethical and political act aimed at disrupting systemic inequities (Shields & Hesbol, 2020). Ngcobo and Tikly (2010) argued that in postcolonial contexts, transformative leadership must also be culturally responsive and decolonial in orientation. This includes challenging inherited norms about who leads, whose knowledge matters, and how decisions are made. For Lesotho, where accounting teachers are frequently excluded from leadership conversations, transformative leadership offers a pathway for repositioning teachers as co-leaders in educational reform.

Nevertheless, while the global literature affirms the value of transformative leadership, there remains a notable gap in empirical studies that explore its application in Southern African educational settings, especially within curriculum-heavy disciplines such as accounting. This study addresses that gap by exploring how transformative leadership can reshape teacher identity and curriculum agency in Lesotho's secondary schools. By grounding the study in local empirical realities, this research connects broader theoretical insights with the everyday experiences of teachers in Lesotho. It develops the literature by proposing context-specific strategies for reform and offers practical support to leadership policy and practice in the Global South.

4. Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research design positioned within the interpretivist paradigm, which emphasizes the subjective experiences, implications, and contextual realities of participants. This paradigm was suitable for investigating how instructional leadership practices shape teacher identity and curriculum sustainability in the accounting education sector in Lesotho. A multiple case study approach was used to investigate three different secondary schools across Lesotho. These schools were purposively selected based on their geographic location, represented by one urban, one peri-urban, and one rural setting. This selection enabled a thorough exploration of how instructional leadership is enacted in different socio-educational environments.

The study involved six participants, three accounting teachers and three school principals from three different secondary schools. The decision to work with six participants was grounded in the qualitative nature of the research, which prioritizes in depth coverage. In line with the interpretivist paradigm, the aim was not to generalize findings but to gain nuanced, context-specific understandings of curriculum practices and leadership experiences. Purposive sampling was used to select individuals who were directly involved in instructional leadership or the application of the accounting curriculum. This method was effective for accessing “information-rich” participants (Rajoo, 2012; Reimann et al., 2016), whose roles and experiences located them to offer deep insights into teacher marginalization, curriculum practice, and leadership relations.

Data was generated through semi-structured interviews, which encouraged reflective discussion while providing flexibility to probe evolving themes. Interview questions for teachers were guided by the work of York-Barr and Duke (2004) and Poekert et al. (2016), focusing on leadership roles, professional agency, and engagement in curriculum development. Principal interviews depicted Dinham’s (2005) leadership domains, including school vision, teaching and learning culture, and teacher participation in curriculum processes.

All interviews were conducted in person, lasted between 30 and 45 minutes, and were audio-recorded with informed consent. Interviews were transcribed with verbatim, and participants were offered the chance to review their transcripts for accuracy and credibility. To improve the trustworthiness of the analysis, a second coder independently reviewed a sample of transcripts, and coding discrepancies were discussed and resolved collaboratively. This intercoder verification process supported analytical thoroughness and reduced researcher bias.

A combination of deductive and inductive thematic analysis was used, following Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six-phase process. This approach was chosen for its systematic yet flexible structure, which supports interpretive qualitative research. The process includes familiarization with data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. Deductively, the analysis focused on three key categories: (1) teacher leadership activities, (2) leadership impact, and (3) enabling or constraining conditions. Inductively, emerging themes were allowed to surface from

participants' narratives, highlighting their lived experiences, leadership dynamics, and perceptions of sustainable curriculum practice. The dual approach allowed for organised engagement with existing theoretical constructions, while remaining open to participant-driven insights that might not have been foreseen.

The study was informed by transformative leadership theory, which calls for inclusive, justice-oriented, and context-sensitive leadership practices. This theoretical lens steered the analysis toward identifying power dynamics, marginalization patterns, and opportunities for collaborative curriculum transformation. To ensure trustworthiness, two researchers independently coded the data and engaged in iterative discussion until agreement was reached. All ethical protocols were followed, including voluntary participation, informed consent, confidentiality, and secure storing of research data. Table 1 presents an overview of the participants.

Table 1: Description of participants

Participant code	School location	Role	Years of experience	Involvement in curriculum decisions	Leadership responsibility
P1	Urban	Principal	15+	Oversees curriculum implementation and strategy	Leads school development
T1	Urban	Accounting teacher	10	Participates in departmental planning	Limited formal leadership
P2	Peri-urban	Principal	12	Coordinates curriculum and teacher development	Moderate decision-making autonomy
T2	Peri-urban	Accounting teacher	8	Provides input on lesson planning and assessment	Informal instructional support
P3	Rural	Principal	20+	Responsible for resource allocation and curriculum oversight	Strategic leadership role
T3	Rural	Accounting teacher	6	Involved in classroom-level curriculum decisions	Emerging leadership potential

5. Presentation and Discussion of Findings

This section presents and discusses the findings resulting from data collected through interviews with principals and teachers from three Lesotho secondary schools, framed by the research questions of the study. The presentation combines both empirical data and theoretical analysis. The discussion is anchored in transformative leadership theory, which emphasizes inclusion, social justice, collaboration, and systemic change (Shields & Hesbol, 2020). Each theme was developed as a direct response to the research questions and substantiated by

voices from the field (principals and teachers) using pseudonyms (P1, T1, P2, T2, P3, T3).

5.1 Limited Strategic Support for Sustainable Curriculum Practices

A major finding from the study is that there is minimal strategic and tactical support from principals to foster sustainable curriculum practices in accounting. Sustainable curriculum practices require a long-term vision, ongoing investment in teacher development, and alignment between instructional goals and managerial actions. The absence of these elements reflects a disconnect between managerial leadership and classroom realities.

“As principals, we are overwhelmed with many responsibilities; we focus on general school management, but specific support to accounting is very rare.” (P2)

“I plan and teach based on what I think will work. There is no clear curriculum guidance or subject-specific support from school management. (T1)

“There’s no time set aside to talk about the accounting curriculum – unless we raise it ourselves.” (T3)

The above statements show that curriculum management lacks a strategic orientation tailored to subject-specific needs, particularly in accounting. This lack of subject-specific support reflects a deficit in moral leadership, one of the tenets of transformative leadership, which demands that leaders act with purpose to correct systemic neglect. When leadership is generic and reactive, rather than strategic and transformative, subjects such as accounting are neglected, leading to inconsistencies in teaching quality and learner performance. Sharma and Adeoye (2024) indicated that transformative leadership must go beyond routine managerial tasks to address systemic inequalities and create equitable learning environments.

In this case, failing to prioritize accounting reflects a missed opportunity to elevate under-supported subjects. Transformative leadership assumes that leaders will act with moral purpose and foresight to bring equity and coherence to educational practice. The data indicates a lack of such intentionality. In light of the findings, there is a pressing need for school leaders to integrate subject-specific strategies into their broader curriculum planning and monitoring frameworks. This is crucial for creating an environment where all subjects, including accounting, are given equitable attention and support.

5.2 Lack of Collaborative Leadership Structures

Another key issue that emerged is the lack of effective collaboration among curriculum stakeholders, particularly between principals and accounting teachers. Collaboration is critical for achieving sustainable curriculum practices because it fosters inclusivity, mutual accountability, and collective ownership of goals.

"We hardly sit down to discuss accounting teaching issues with my teachers. It's more of each one knowing what to do and doing it their own way." (P1)

"I only meet with the principal during general staff meetings, not specifically to discuss subject-related issues like accounting." (T2)

"As an accounting teacher, I feel like we are left to swim alone. We are expected to deliver results, but support is not structured." (T3)

It seems like there is a lack of formal or informal platforms for shared leadership and engagement in curriculum matters. Without collaboration, professional learning communities cannot thrive. Innovation, peer support, and reflective practice are all undermined. However, according to Schiuma et al. (2024), collaboration and shared decision-making are foundational to transformative leadership. Leaders must facilitate inclusive spaces where dialogue leads to action. The absence of collaboration contradicts the inclusive, participatory ethos of transformative leadership, which values shared leadership and community engagement. The above indicates that leaders must invest in building collaborative structures that empower teachers as co-constructors of curriculum practices. Subject committees, co-teaching models, and peer review systems could significantly enhance curriculum sustainability.

5.3 Ineffective Monitoring and Feedback Mechanisms

Another critical theme is the absence of consistent, formative monitoring and feedback mechanisms for accounting teachers. Monitoring is essential not just for accountability but also for teacher growth.

"I do class visits once in a while, but honestly, there's no systematic way of giving teachers feedback that helps them grow." (P2)

"We rarely receive feedback on how we teach accounting. You can go a whole term without anyone checking in." (T2)

"Supervision feels like a routine exercise. It's not meant to support improvement in teaching methods or subject content." (T3)

The statements reveal a leadership practice that lacks a developmental focus and fails to prioritize instructional quality. In an educational setting where there is no constructive feedback, teachers miss out on opportunities to refine their practice, and learners may not benefit from improved instructional approaches. This is supported by Wiczorek et al. (2022), as they emphasized the importance of formative supervision in fostering teacher growth.

Monitoring should be intentional, reflective, and focused on pedagogical improvement. Transformative leaders use monitoring not as surveillance but as a means to empower teachers. The current system reflects a compliance-oriented model rather than a growth-oriented one. From the above, it becomes clear that supervision practices must be reimagined as mentorship opportunities. Principals

should implement reflective feedback models to support teacher development and enhance curriculum sustainability.

5.4 Marginalization of Accounting Teachers in Decision-Making

Many accounting teachers feel excluded from key curriculum decisions, especially around implementation and resource allocation. This exclusion leads to disengagement and reduces their ownership of the curriculum.

“Sometimes, the school receives new curriculum directives or textbooks, and we are not even consulted or briefed.” (T1)

“Accounting teachers are not involved when decisions are made about timetable structuring or scheming and record of work.” (T2)

“It’s always top-down. We get instructions and must comply. There’s no room to influence or ask questions.” (T3)

These statements reveal a centralized, top-down leadership approach that limits teacher agency. In education, teacher exclusion from curriculum decisions creates disempowerment and discourages innovation. Teachers may become passive implementers instead of active contributors. Transformative leadership is rooted in social justice and inclusiveness. Boomer (2024) advocated democratic practices that amplify the voices of all school actors. Marginalization contradicts the transformative goal of co-constructing equitable educational experiences.

Teachers must be co-leaders, not merely executors. To sustain curriculum reform, schools must decentralize decision-making and create democratic structures where teacher input is embedded in all phases of curriculum planning and execution. In light of the findings, school leadership must shift toward inclusive governance that recognizes teachers as strategic partners. This is essential for enhancing teacher morale and sustaining curriculum reform.

The findings collectively reveal a leadership landscape in which sustainable curriculum practices in accounting are hindered by limited strategic support, weak collaboration, ineffective monitoring, and the marginalization of teachers in decision-making processes. These systemic gaps reflect a misalignment with the core principles of transformative leadership theory, which emphasizes moral purpose, inclusive participation, visionary planning, and capacity building. The absence of subject-specific support demonstrates a lack of strategic foresight and equity, while the failure to foster collaborative structures and provide developmental feedback indicates a leadership approach that prioritizes administrative routines over transformative growth.

Furthermore, the exclusion of accounting teachers from key decisions challenges teacher agency and disputes the participatory culture of transformative leadership. Together, these issues highlight the urgent need for school leaders to implement a more intentional, inclusive, and equity-driven leadership style that empowers teachers as co-leaders and actively supports sustainable curriculum reform.

6. Conclusion, Limitations of the Study and Recommendations

6.1 Conclusions

This study explored how instructional leadership shapes sustainable curriculum practices in accounting classrooms within selected Lesotho secondary schools. Grounded in the principles of transformative leadership theory, which are moral purpose, inclusive participation, and visionary direction, the findings paint a difficult picture of leadership that remains tied to routine managerialism rather than forward-looking transformation. While school leaders showed awareness of their role in guiding curriculum implementation, their practices largely lacked the strategic coherence and ethical urgency that transformative leadership demands. The absence of inclusive decision-making processes, weak structures for professional collaboration, and minimum feedback mechanisms all signal an underdeveloped leadership culture that hinders efforts to sustain curriculum reforms in accounting.

What emerges clearly from the data is that sustainable curriculum practice cannot flourish in an environment where leadership is fragmented, reactive, and disconnected from the classroom realities teachers face. Sustainable change requires more than administrative oversight; it demands visionary leadership that cultivates trust, encourages innovation, and supports a culture of shared responsibility. Without this shift, the efforts to rejuvenate and sustain accounting education in Lesotho risk remaining superficial and unsystematic.

This study highlights the dire need for context-sensitive instructional leadership that recognizes teachers as co-creators of the curriculum. The implications extend beyond the accounting classroom, advising educational leaders and policymakers to adopt justice-driven, teacher-empowering approaches that promote long-term curriculum relevance and equity. By illustrating how leadership practices can either constrain or enable teacher agency, the research provides actionable insights for reimagining educational leadership as a transformative force in postcolonial contexts.

6.2 Limitations of the Study

Although this research offers valued insights into the interaction between instructional leadership and curriculum sustainability, it is important to acknowledge its contextual limitations. The study was restricted to a small sample of three schools, each represented by a principal and an accounting teacher. This scope, while suitable for in-depth qualitative inquiry, inherently limits the generalizability of the findings. Furthermore, all three schools were located within a specific region, which may not reflect the broader leadership dynamics present across Lesotho's different educational contexts.

Another limitation lies in the narrow disciplinary focus on accounting. While this subject was deliberately chosen due to its often-overlooked status within curriculum discourse, the experiences of leaders and teachers in other disciplines might present different challenges or innovations. Furthermore, the research relied on self-reported perspectives gathered through interviews and observations. While every effort was made to ensure data credibility, participants'

responses may have been shaped by their positional interests or interpersonal dynamics within their institutions. Nonetheless, these limitations do not weaken the significance of the study's findings. Instead, they highlight the need for caution in overextending interpretations while underscoring opportunities for broader, more comparative research.

6.3 Recommendations

In light of the study's findings, fostering sustainable curriculum practices in accounting needs multi-level strategies that are aligned with current education policies and feasible for implementation at both school and systemic levels. The following recommendations are organized in accordance with key policy actors: the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET), school leadership, and teacher professional bodies.

6.3.1 Policy-level recommendations (Ministry of Education and Training)

- **Development of subject-specific leadership guidelines:** The MoET should formulate and circulate policy guidelines for subject-specific instructional leadership. These should outline clear expectations for how principals and heads of department should support curriculum implementation in specialized subjects such as accounting.
- **Embedment of subject-based training into CPD frameworks:** Accounting-focused modules must be integrated into existing continuing professional development (CPD) frameworks for principals and teachers. This will ensure ongoing subject-specific capacity building and align with national goals of professionalization.
- **Establishment of curriculum support units at district level:** Policy should prioritize the creation or strengthening of curriculum support units within district education offices, with designated accounting subject advisors who provide monitoring, mentorship, and content support to schools.

6.3.2 School-level recommendations

- **Institutionalization of departmental collaboration structures:** Schools should formalize regular subject departmental meetings where accounting teachers collaborate with school leadership to plan, reflect on, and review instructional practices. This could be enforced via school improvement plans and monitored by district offices.
- **Integration of reflective supervision models:** Principals should adopt supervision frameworks that include structured post-observation feedback, peer review, and teacher-led lesson study sessions. These practices can be adapted from the MoET's existing quality assurance tools and repurposed for developmental – not just evaluative – use.
- **Inclusion of teachers in school-based decision-making bodies:** To promote teacher agency, schools should revise or expand the composition of existing curriculum or academic committees to include representation from each subject area, including accounting, ensuring that decisions on timetabling, resource allocation, and curriculum adjustments are inclusive.

6.3.3 Teacher-driven recommendations

- **Formation of accounting teacher networks:** Accounting teachers across schools must be encouraged to establish professional learning communities at the district level. These can be supported through WhatsApp groups, quarterly workshops, and peer-led CPD activities coordinated in partnership with district offices.
- **Documentation and sharing of best practices:** Teachers should be encouraged to document successful teaching strategies and share them through school clusters or MoET-supported platforms. These practitioner-generated resources could inform future policy and CPD planning.

Future research should expand the analytical lens beyond accounting and include multiple subject areas to explore how instructional leadership manifests across the curriculum. Comparative studies across regions and over time would offer a richer, layered understanding of sustainable curriculum practices. Importantly, learner perspectives remain a critical but underexplored dimension. Understanding how learners experience curriculum implementation and leadership practices could yield transformative insights into educational change.

7. Ethics Approval Statements

This study was approved by the University of the Free State's General/Human Research Ethics Committee (approval no: UFS-HSD2022/1644/22) on November 07, 2022.

8. Author Contributions

All authors contributed to the design and implementation of the research, the analysis of the results, and the writing of the manuscript.

9. Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declare no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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