Instructional Leadership of Principals on Students' Achievement in Public Schools in Nepal

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to find out the impact of principals' instructional leadership on students' achievement. School head teachers act as a leader and also a manager that determines students' achievements both directly and indirectly. Instructional leadership can significantly influence the quality of teaching and learning in the schools and consequently students' achievement, by improving the working conditions of the schools Literature shows that transformational leadership and instructional leadership determine the preferred styles of school improvement. This study shows that effective school leadership is the authority to lead the school. There is a growing understanding that leadership is surrounded in various organizational contexts within school communities, not centrally vested in a person or an office. The real challenge facing most schools is no longer how to improve but, more importantly, how to sustain improvement. Sustainability will depend upon the school's internal capacity to maintain and support developmental work and sustaining improvement requires the leadership capability of the many rather than the few.

Keywords: *Instructional leadership, students' achievement, transformation leadership, collaborative culture*

Introduction

School leadership becomes of great interest in international education as it is increasingly recognized as having a key role in improving student outcomes (Day, Gu & Sammons, 2016). Relevant literature (Dhuey & Smith, 2014; Heck & Hallinger, 2014) has demonstrated the influence of teacher quality on student achievement. Researchers interest (e.g., Shatzer, Caldarella, Hallam & Brown, 2014) in school a leadership stems from the belief that principal's leadership style can make a substantial difference to the quality of teaching and learning in their schools, and consequently student achievement, by improving the working conditions of their teachers, and the environment of their school. Additionally, Hallinger's (2010) review of empirical research on school leadership inferred that leaders can have indirect or mediated positive effects on student achievement by building a collaborative organizational learning culture and helping to develop the leadership capacities of staff and community. These stakeholders such as parents

and teachers can then assist with the creation of a positive school climate that promotes teaching and learning, and consequently student's achievement.

Instructional leadership and transformational leadership are the most regularly cited theories in education-related literature (Robinson, Lloyd & Rowe, 2008). Researchers have endorsed both of these theories as appropriate models of leadership for school principals (Shatzer, Caldarella, Hallam & Brown, 2014). Although there is some overlap between these theories, there are also distinct differences. These situations could confuse school leaders looking for the best model to improve the achievement of their students. This paper examines the benefits of both instructional and transformational leadership styles for contributing to student outcomes.

According to Fullan (2001), a school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by facilitating the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a vision of learning that is shared and supported by the school community'. This statement at the time clearly placed a weight on the shoulders of all school leaders. As school leaders, principals are regarded as the key to implementing effective policies and achieving external accountability objectives (Walker & Qian, 2018). Therefore, school principals' leadership has received considerable international interest because it is an influential variable in understanding school effectiveness (Lai, Wang & Shen, 2017). The main issue that drives scholars to address this question is that the goal of reducing the determined disparities among different schools can be achieved by changing school principals (Robinson, Lloyd & Rowe, 2008). By providing more systematic training for principals, their leadership can be strengthened so that the overall quality of school education can be improved (Tang, Lu & Hallinger, 2014).

Instructional leadership refers to the principal's direct engagement with teaching and learning processes (Hallinger & Murphy, 2015), transformational and transactional leadership emphasizes the leader's role in inspiring others to achieve a collective vision of change and in motivating members to develop their capabilities (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000), teacher leadership refers to educators other than principals being responsible for student learning (Lambert, 2002), and collaborative leadership refers to leadership that includes school administrators, teachers, parents, and others in improving the organizational attributes of schools (Hallinger & Heck, 2010).

There is a long-standing interest in the question of whether instructional leadership influences school effectiveness, which is usually evaluated by student academic achievement (Robinson, Lloyd & Rowe, 2008). Previous studies demonstrate that instructional leadership has the strongest empirical impact on student learning outcomes among all types of leadership (Hallinger, Wang, Chen & Liare, 2015). However, a literature review discovered an important knowledge gap in findings on the effectiveness of instructional leadership. As some researchers have noted, cultural differences lead to different roles of principals and different ways that leadership is perceived by principals (Zhao, 2018).

The overall objective of this study is to explore the impact of principals' instructional leadership on students' achievement in schools. Achievement is not easy to define or measure. It is argued that achievement can be impacted by many internal and external factors such as student health,

work ethic, and unwillingly we admit, socio-economic status is out of the control of the school system (McGuigan & Hoy, 2006). This last variable is important in any analysis of achievement since the influence of parents and students is significantly related to student achievement. This result may reflect the well-known effects of students on achievement (Seashore Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom & Anderson, 2010).

Literature Review

Principals' instructional leadership has historically been considered a personal characteristic ((Hallinger, Wang, Chen & Liare, 2015). Currently, it is widely accepted that instructional leadership comprises behaviour, action, and practice (Mulford 2008). The core role of principals as instructional leaders is to provide support for instruction, including supervising and evaluating teachers' teaching, properly planning teacher professional development courses (King, 2002), and managing teaching strategies (Hallinger & Murphy 2012). It has been suggested that leadership is comprised of three dimensions: the heart, the head, and the hand; the heart of leadership pertains to what the person believes, values, dreams about and, is committed to; it is the person's personal vision (Sergiovanni, 2005). Leadership requires action and strategies that originate from our personal vision, experience, and reflective abilities. The school principal is accountable for the operations and management of the building, which adds a dimension to the overall burden of leadership; he or she is primarily responsible for the success of all students. Shared leadership and instructional leadership are important variables, but they are indirectly related to student achievement.

Moreover, Robinson, Lloyd and Rowe (2008) suggested a five-dimensional framework for instructional leadership: a) establishing goals and expectations; b) strategic resourcing; c) planning, coordinating, and evaluating teaching and the curriculum; d) promoting and participating in teacher learning and development; and v) ensuring an orderly and supportive environment. Hallinger, Wang, Chen & Liare (2015) proposed a widely used conceptual framework called the PIMRS (principal, instructional, management, rating and scale) with three dimensions: defining the school mission, managing the instructional program and developing a positive school learning climate. Principals with high-level instructional leadership tend to direct their attention towards the academic aspects of their schools, such as setting academic goals, developing curricula, assessing the effectiveness of teachers' instructional practices, and providing opportunities for instructional improvement (Hallinger, 2011).

Instructional leadership focuses on the academic progress of students. These include the value of creating clear educational goals, planning the curriculum, and evaluating the quality of teachers and their teaching. This model infers that a principals' efforts should be concentrated on the promotion of better outcomes for students, and the importance of improving the quality of classroom teaching and learning (Hallinger, Wang, Chen & Liare, 2015). More specifically, Hallinger (2003) conceptualized instructional leadership as involving three key goals: i) defining the school's goals, ii) supervising the delivery of the curriculum, and iii) encouraging a positive school learning environment.

Research on instructional leadership has concluded that instructional leadership can influence student achievement, primarily through improvement to teachers' work conditions and school culture. These studies have concluded that it can have a more noticeable effect on student achievement than transformational leadership, primarily because it places more an emphasis on the quality of teachers and their teaching.

Transformational leadership focuses on establishing school culture and vision to enhance the quality of school teaching and learning, develop people, and improve the organization (Shatzer, Caldarella, Hallam & Brown, 2014). Transformation schools principals identify and share school vision, lead and inspire others by example, create a culture of learning, and encourage staff members to undertake professional development. Transformational leadership theory focuses on four key areas: a) inspirational motivation, b) individualized consideration c) idealized influence (charisma) and d) intellectual stimulation. A greater emphasis on people has been shown to positively influence the school environment, teachers' attitude and satisfaction (Bogler, 2005; Griffith, 2004).

Instructional and transformational leadership differ in several key ways. Instructional leadership uses a top down approach where leaders are the predominant decision-makers (Hallinger, 2003). While transformational leadership offers a more distributed or bottom up approach. An example of this distinction would be instructional leaders managing and rewarding their staff as they work toward a predetermined objective, whereas transformational leaders would involve their staff in the creation of a common vision, and inspire them to achieve it more independently.

Process and Methods

This is a review-based empirical research article based on the reviews of the information from thesis, research articles, research report, journals and books. For, I reviewed thirty six documents to find the impact of principals' leadership on students' achievement at school level. The available information was described under the different themes as explained by descriptive and analytical design. The information of this study is not in quantity or numbers, but describing into words in terms of implied meanings form the documents. Cresswell (2012) has explained that qualitative research is framed in terms of words rather than numbers. This is why; the design of this study is qualitative. Moreover, the secondary data analysis is an important approach for getting information under qualitative research, as it offers high quality of data. For this, Bryman (2012) has emphasized that the use of secondary data enhances the optimum use of data in all types of social research. Out of different approaches varying from general to specific used in data analysis for qualitative research, one common thing is all of them are based on textual analysis (Pant, 2009). However, careful selection of most appropriate technique is important to come up with reliable findings. Based on these understandings, I reviewed the documents related to the topic of the study. From these reviews, I drew the themes: Principal leadership behaviors, principals' effectiveness, leadership focus on teaching and learning, building and sharing the school vision, and instructional leadership and students' achievement. The meaning of the information were explained and analyzed in descriptive ways as in qualitative design under the constructed themes of this study. Finally, I drew the conclusion from in the holistic approach for the overall impact of principals' leadership in students' achievement at the public schools in Nepal.

Result and Discussion

The qualitative research design and approaches were used in this study. Therefore, the major findings were summarized and presented using a descriptive way. This study was consistence with reviewed related literature documents, articles, and journals as given below:

Principals' Leadership Behaviors

Literature on school leadership show that the role of the principal has evolved quite considerably and includes a growing active role pertaining to instructional leadership. Ballard & Bates (2008) added: ".... the quality of a teacher in the classroom is the single most important factor in determining how well a child learns". Other supporting evidence comes from Gaziel (2007) who concluded principals do not affect the academic achievement of individual students in the same manner that teachers do; that is, through direct classroom instruction'. Having said this it seems important to examine peripheral attributes of the principal such as his/her behavior and the impact on instructional leadership.

Glasman (1984) pointed out that principals in effective schools exhibited leadership behaviors, some of which included, "....setting corresponding instructional strategies, providing orderly atmospheres, frequently evaluating student progress, coordinating instructional programs, and supporting teachers". Nettles & Herrington (2007) was able to identify seven principal behaviors that define instructional leadership. These included, "making suggestions, giving feedback, modeling effective instruction, soliciting opinions, supporting collaboration, providing professional development opportunities and giving praise for effective teaching".

Vanderhaar, Munoz and Rodosky (2006) suggested "The principal is responsible for informing teachers about new educational strategies, technologies, and other tools that promote effective instruction". Being an involved leader requires many distinct behaviors and constant and ongoing communication with teachers. Research from O'Donnell & White (2005) concluded, "Principals who strive to be instructional leaders are committed to meeting the needs of their schools by serving stakeholders and pursuing shared purposes. The key leadership piece occurs when there is a gradual release of responsibility from administration to the teachers. They added; "....findings suggest that what principals do over time might influence higher student test scores". As this shift in leadership occurs, the teachers take an even greater interest in student learning.

Principal Effectiveness

An effective principal is an active principal, active in the sense that s/he has a reading of the school's pound for school environments not only regarding the academic business but the moral tone of the school of both students and staff. This means that the principal is visible in the classrooms and within the instructional climate. Nettles & Herrington (2007) put forward some common traits that effective principals display. These traits included, a) recognizing that the focal point of business at the school centers around teaching and learning, b) communicating to all stakeholders the school's mission on a consistent basis, c) developing standards for teaching and learning that challenge students yet attainable, d) supplying clear goals and checking the progress of students toward meeting them and going into classrooms and listening to teachers, e) endorsing an atmosphere of trust and sharing, f) structuring an effective staff and g) setting

professional development as a top priority and not accepting ineffective teachers (Nettles & Herrington, 2007).

Further, Nettles & Herrington (2007) suggested "effective principals have a comprehensive knowledge of leadership strategies and have developed an awareness of when to use them and the community to promote increased student achievement". The three most effective leadership practices that were identified are a) situational awareness b) intellectual stimulation and c) input (Vanderhaar, Munoz & Rodosky, 2006).

Leadership Focus on Teaching and Learning

Teacher quality is a key focus of instructional leadership. If school principals focus more of their influence on improving the quality of teaching and learning in their school, then they are likely to have a far greater influence on student achievement. Principals' leadership is a critical factor in creating and maintaining an environment in which teachers could teach, students could learn, and exceptional outcomes could occur (Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, & Anderson, 2010). Indeed, transformational leadership has been criticized (Marks & Printy, 2003) for not having adequate emphasis on education.

Despite the influence of school leaders, many researchers (Mulford, 2008; Witziers, Bosker & Kruger, 2003) have concurred that the effect of school leadership could be indirect. The contributions of principals can be moderated by organizational factors such as teachers, classroom practice and school culture. These factors can substantially reduce the direct effect principals have on outcomes attainment by their students. Although multiple forces might arbitrate the influence of school leadership on the learning of their students, principals can affect the working conditions and motivations of their teachers, who do directly influence classroom practice and student learning (Pont, Nusche & Hunter, 2008). Instructional and transformational leadership models overlap on aspects including school culture and teacher experiences and therefore might both assist leaders in improving student performance through their influence over these factors. Involving staff in the development of a shared school vision might positively influence both school culture and teacher experience.

Building and Sharing the School Vision

School principals need to focus their efforts on different dimensions of leadership in order for their schools to be successful. Leithwood & Day (2007) state that of all these leadership dimensions, building vision and setting school directions is the dimension that accounts for the largest proportion of leadership effects on student outcomes. Similarly, Robinson (2007) observed that higher performing schools contained leaders who deliberately focused more of their time on communicating clear academic and learning goals. Leaders can influence both teachers and the way they work by focusing their staff on the school's academic improvement, and making achieving school goals a key focus of everyday practices and procedures. Instructional and transformational leadership models both focus on improving school culture in order to improve student outcomes, and could therefore be of assistance to school leaders looking to develop in this area. Transformational leadership might be of most use because of its greater emphasis

on using a shared vision to guide reform, and enhance the quality of teaching and learning in schools (Robinson, 2007).

The more bottom-up approach of transformational leadership allows teachers to be more involved in the creation of a common school vision, and consequently be more basically motivated to achieve it. These teachers are then more likely to display exemplary follower behaviors such as independence, engagement and positivity (Cruickshank, 2017).

Instructional Leadership and Students' Achievement
Without a doubt, the principal has an impact on student achievement. Strong instructional leadership has been widely recognized as the core factor in school development and plays a significant roles in improving school effectiveness (Allen, Grigsby & Peters, 2015) and quality (Hallinger,Wang, Chen & Liare, 2015). Witziers, Bosker, and Kruger (2003) noted that the direct impact of principals' leadership on student academic achievement was relatively small and was essentially mediated by teachers. In contrast, Marzano, Waters and McNulty (2005) revealed the opposite conclusion by reporting a substantial relationship with a mean effect of approximately 0.4. In contrast to these reviews, other researchers tend to focus on instructional leadership rather than principals' overall leadership (Robinson, Lloyd & Rowe, 2008; Pan, Nyeu & Chen, 2015). In these reviews, the indirect relationship of instructional leadership has been long-established.

Nettles and Herrington (2007) explained, 'overall, the view that principals have a direct effect on student learning has largely been abandoned and replaced by a focus on the indirect relationships that principals create through their interactions with teachers and the educational environment'. Other research from Gaziel (2007) similarly suggested that "principals influence student learning indirectly by developing a school mission that provides an instructional focus for teachers throughout the school, and this creates a school environment that facilitates student learning". As indicated in Miller (2003), "effective leadership adds value to the impact of classroom and teacher practices and ensures that lasting change accompaniments. Identifying that there must be a partnership and shared belief between all professionals in the building with respect to student achievement is crucial as "the majority of research discusses the fact that accountability must be shared among different groups in order to be effective and reflect student learning" (Ballard & Bates, 2008).

According to Klinker (2006), democratic leadership then, at its most fundamental level, understands that a leader's power, no matter whether he or she is defined by the organizational chart as such, or exhibits the skills and strengths defined by the field, or has simply stepped up to assume a leadership position, rests with the sentiment that resides within the people. Furthermore, because of our positions, it is our job to ensure that the learning environment is conducive for both teachers to teach and students to learn. School leadership's purpose at the most fundamental level, is to keep chaos and provide a climate in which all students can learn (Klinker, 2006). Gastil (1994) suggested, "Democratic authorities do not necessarily serve as democratic leaders, and democratic leaders sometimes lack formal authority".

Klinker (2006) sees democratic leadership's priority as cultivating an environment that supports participation, sharing of ideas and the virtues of honesty, openness, flexibility, and compassion". Gastil (1994) stated how "the democratic leader.....determines *how* the members of the group will think and decide not *what* they will think and decide...." This particular concept was illustrated in the *five core leadership capacities* that included setting goals, aligning resources with priorities, promoting collaborative learning cultures, using data, and engaging in courageous conversations. These five core leadership capacities helped to guide instruction, set school and system goals and promote a school atmosphere conducive to student learning and achievement.

Conclusion

Based on my review, I believe it is clear that principals' leadership does influence student achievement directly. Teachers are school leaders because they do lead their classes, coach, and lead internal and external activities. Also, teachers need to manage discipline; set classroom expectations that are aligned with overall school expectations and most importantly teach. Teachers need to demonstrate initiative, motivation, collaboration, and a genuine concern for the success of their students. Principals are the academic leader for instructional leadership at the school level. The majority of evidence shows that principals have an indirect influence on student achievement; principals do influence the necessary framework for appropriate instructional leadership. Instructional leader may not have expert knowledge of all curriculums content, principals are able to use their talents in order to support student learning which indirectly effects student achievement. The literature suggested that in order for student achievement to increase at the school level, leaders at all levels must be able to work together in unity. The literature further identified that the principal is the key player when fostering trust among staff. In fact, effective principals display caring attitudes toward staff members, students, and parents. Effective principals expect and help teachers to design and facilitate learning experiences that inspire, interest, and actively involve students. Moreover, supportive principal behavior and faculty trust were significantly correlation in their schools and that schools with higher levels of engage teachers have higher levels of trust in colleagues. Findings of this study indicated that a crucial step for schools to improve and sustain effectiveness in the long run is the principal's diagnosis of the schools' needs and the principal's educational values combined with the application of diverse strategies.

Suggestions for Future Research

While there has been extensive research about how classroom and school conditions influence student learning, there has been less focus on how principals can positively influence those conditions, in particular, the role of school leaders in increasing teacher effectiveness, and reducing variability in effectiveness across their teachers. Researchers should focus more of their attention on this topic, particularly longitudinal studies, as school improvements can take several years to become apparent. Conversely, schools across a wide variety of contexts should also be studied in order to identify the ways and degree to which these contexts affect leadership practices. Numerous school variables can affect student learning and schools need to create synergy across these variables in order to make strong positive changes. While school leaders are individually situated to facilitate this synergy, determining the best leadership styles and strategies for different contexts should be a key priority for future research.

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