

Principals' Leadership Practice and Students Academic Achievement in the Case of General Primary Schools of Enjibara Administrative Town, Ethiopia

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Abstract

The objective of the study was generally to investigate the leadership practice with the relation to students' academic achievement in Enjibara administrative town government primary schools and to provide possible ways of improving the practices and students' outcome. Descriptive survey research design was used and data was primarily collected through questionnaire interview and document analysis from primary schools. Out of 7 government primary schools, 4 schools were selected through simple random sampling technique. From these schools 91 teachers were selected through stratified random sampling technique *and data also analyzed by using one-sample t-test by using SPSS 20 version*. The findings of the study showed that the school leadership practice reported mean was lower than expected results and as the result the students' achievements was above average and nearest to the expected mean. Consequently, to improve the school leadership practice and students' achievement the major recommendations forwarded which were; woreda education officials, cluster supervisors and all stakeholders should consider a special leadership and management programs to be exercised to build the capacity of school principals towards managing and leading school activities. All levels of education offices should consider in improving the capacity of the school principals and on building positive working atmosphere to enhance students' achievement. The training policy of principals should consider improving the principal leadership quality which contribute for increased students' achievement.

Keywords: Principals' leadership practice, students' academic achievement, general primary schools

Introduction

The concept and the definition of leadership has been a topic of debate among scholars for many years. However, defining leadership is complex because it allows multitude stakeholders interconnection which was exercised in many types of institution and climate (Stewart, 2006).

Hoy and Miskel (2008) define leadership as a social system in which group of members or members of a group or organization affects the interpretation of wider environment phenomenon, the goals or desired outcomes, organization of work activities, groups motivation and abilities, positive relation and shared orientation. In general, leadership is defined as the system of influencing followers to wards and accept about what activities to be done and the way how to do it and the process of motivating members and group efforts to attain shared objectives.

As Aggrwal (1998) noted that, educational organizations are the most important formal institutions which play major role in shaping the ideas, behaviors and attitudes of learners

Current educational change places vital importance of successful leadership and management of schools. The cases for this stand are that an orderly school climate, which is effective and well managed, facilitates the precondition for highest learner outcomes. (Hopkins, 2000).

In light of the above ideas and literatures the researcher also believes that the school leadership would be responsible to provide the atmosphere of optimism where peaceful teaching learning processes occur and high students' achievement was recorded.

Transformational school leaders are symbolized as having three core goals: (1) helping staff members build and maintain a cooperative, professional school culture; (2) promoting teacher development; and (3) helping the school stakeholders solve problems together more effectively (Leithwood, 1992a).

Littrell, Billingsley, and Cross (1994) found that:

The school leaders' support influenced the feelings that teachers have about themselves and their work. Further teachers, who characterized their principals as supportive found work more rewarding, enjoyed a productive, motivating work environment; demonstrated lower attrition rates and experienced less job-related stress and burnout. This in turn affected how successful their students were.

Leithwood (1992b) reported that school leaders must focus on using motivating power to bring changes in their institutions. This is a form of power that is accomplished through using the strengths inherent in the people of the organization in a collaborative nature, not by making demands and ruling over them. The collaborative relationship and success that comes from transformational leadership empowers those who participate in it. There is expectation, wish, optimism, and positive feeling in a kind of management that facilitates the system of

change, the revisiting of the institution toward higher shared goals, and a reconstruct of the commitment toward effectiveness for students and other school community.

Similarly, the 'Blue Print' for School Improvement Program (MoE, 1999 E.C: 25-26) and the Directive for School Management, Community Participation and Finance-Amharic version (MoE, 1994 E.C:30-34) suggest that "educational managers should play the significant leadership and supervisory roles in order to ensure schools have the necessary input and are engaged in goal oriented and processes focused on positive outcomes".

The focus on future leadership has implication for principal ship in that leading and directing school should aim at ensuring school effectiveness and relevance to an era of globalization. The Blue print by MoE (1999 E.C) also suggests that principals should be visionary and play major roles in ensuring sustainable education sector development. The current education and training policy (ETP) has adopted different implementation strategies. For instance the ESDP IV (MoE, 2010) suggests that "a special leadership and management program has been initiated to build the capacity of school principals and supervisors towards planning and managing school activities." With the introduction of ESDPs, programs like leadership and administration has been introduced with due attention to general education quality improvement programs (MoE, 2008).

As cited above by different scholars and writers, the researcher also believes that successful school principals are major responsible bodies to create positive school culture and enhance student's achievement in their schools. The importance of leadership in any organization has critical value for the success and failure of the organization.

As Chandan (1987) noted that, "if there is a main factor that differentiates between effective and non effective institutions, it can be taken as dynamic and successful leadership". In other speaking, the vital causes of unsuccessful for organizations including schools would be unsuccessful particularly, the type and quality of school principal working at the school level is essential as schools are the scene of exercising educational activities.

In this respect Macbeath et.al (cited in Bush.T. 2003 p.65) argued that school principals inevitably get themselves facing many problems, uncertainties and ambiguities in their education practices. Similarly, in the case of Ethiopia different literatures show the presence of inappropriate leadership exercise. For instance, MOE (2005 E.C) indicated that, there is lack of visionary, change and result oriented leadership. In ESDP III Program action plan it was indicated that, there are significant gap in supervision, management and implementation capacity especially at the level of primary schools.

World Bank (2005) noted that, different document on the education system in Ethiopia indicate many challenges school encountered are linked to leadership and management. These problems including inadequate preparation and training people, poor supervision by principals and lack of commitment on the part of heads and teachers.

2. Theoretical Frame work

2.1 The Basics of Successful School Leadership

"More of the success of educational leaders in building high performance organizations (organizations which make significantly greater than- expected contributions to student learning) depends on how these leaders interact with the larger community context in which they find themselves" (Leithwood, 1999 p. 23.) This idea show that these leaders plan and work for higher results and achievements by leading successfully their organization or schools.

The research results from educational and non-educational organizations show to three broad categories of effectiveness of leadership practices which are largely independent of such context and situations. (Leithwood 1999 p. 23.)

Leithwood's (1996) categories are "setting directions," developing people" and "redesigning the organization." Within each of these similar categories of practice are numerous, more specific competencies, orientations and considerations; for example, most of the 21 specific leadership practices linked to student learning in Waters et.al (2003) review fit within these categories.

In this case different specific leadership practices directly or indirectly linked to students' academic achievement and the core process of education that is teaching learning process and increasing the students out come.

These categories of leadership practices closely reflect a transformational approach to leadership which Bass (1991) "claims has proven to be useful in many different cultural and organizational contexts." This transformational approach has proven useful for educational organizations (as demonstrated in studies by Geijsel et.al 2003; Leithwood and Jantzi, 2002; Southworth, 1998; and Mullin and Keedy, 1998) and, specifically, for the success of some large-scale reform efforts in schools (such as Day et al., 2000).

According to Leithwood et al (1999):

Three broad categories of leadership practices, including a total of eight more specific dimensions of practice, are encompassed in this model. Included in the category Setting Directions are the dimensions

building school vision, developing specific goals and priorities, and holding high performance expectations. In the category Developing People are the dimensions providing intellectual stimulation, offering individualized support, and modeling desirable professional practices and values. The third category, redesigning the Organization, includes the dimensions developing a collaborative school culture, creating structures to foster participation in school decisions, and creating productive community relationships. Each dimension is made up of multiple, more specific, practices which encourage contingent responses on the part of leaders depending on the contexts of their work. Justification for each of these categories, dimensions, and specific practices is provided elsewhere.

As cited above by different scholars and as the researcher believes that, basics of successful school leadership of three categories which hold eight dimensions are necessary to bring changes in schools. Much of the success of district and school leaders in building high performance organizations (organizations which make significantly greater than- expected contributions to student learning) depends on how well these leaders interact with the larger social and organizational context in which they find themselves.

2.1 .1.Setting Directions

As Leithwood (1999) stated that setting direction is leaders' ability to build a vision, develop specific goals and priorities and convey high performance expectations. A main aspect of leadership is motivating a team to develop group awareness about the institution and its activities and objectives that can bring a sense of purpose or vision (Hallinger and Heck, 2002). The most fundamental theoretical explanations for the importance of leaders' direction- setting practices are "goal-based theories of human motivation" (Bandura, 1986)

According to such theory, individuals are reinforced by goals which they find, individually acceptable, as well as challenging but achievable. Having such goals helps people make sense of their work and enables them to find a sense of identity for themselves within their work context. Similarly, Stolp (1994) stated that successful school leaders must be able to create a vision which others will follow or facilitate a collaborative creation of a vision. As for the adoption of a school vision is a means to create fundamental sense of purpose and guide the activities of school over a number of years.

Vision Identification: the degree to which the principal identifies new opportunities for the organization and develops, articulates, and inspires others with a vision of the future (Jantzi & Leithwood, 1996).

In this issue Hallinger (2003), stated that "goal setting can be done by the principal or through a collaborative process which encourages organizational members to be more invested in the goals set by the school". School leaders can help followers to accomplish school goals by setting high expectations because high expectations help to motivate teachers to work towards goal attainment by comparing current performance to future success. (Leithwood, 1996)

Generally, as Hallinger & Heck (2002) setting directions refers to initiating a vision for the school's future and helping a group to develop shared understandings about the organization and its activities and goals that support sense of purpose and vision.

Goal Acceptance: the degree to which the principal promotes cooperation among organizational members and assists them in working together toward common goals (Jantzi & Leithwood, 1996).

High Performance Expectations: the degree to which the principal establishes expectations for excellence, quality, and high performance on the part of the organization's members (Jantzi & Leithwood, 1996).

2.1.2. Developing People

Organizational improvement comes from the improvement of the people who are members of the organization (Leithwood et al, 1999) Developing people refers to positively influencing the motivation and capacities of one's colleagues by modeling, offering intellectual stimulation, and providing individual support (Leithwood & Jantzi 2006)

As (Leithwood et.al, 1999) Developing people include:

Providing intellectual stimulation, offering individualized support and modeling desirable professional practices and values. People and the organization and organizational improvement come from the improvement of the people who are members of the organization and an overarching effect on the school culture.

Intellectual stimulation through professional development leads to collaboration and the promotion of collective action to reach school goals (Brown, 1993)

Intellectual Stimulation: the degree to which the principal challenges organizational members to reexamine some of the assumptions about their work and rethink how it can be performed (Jantzi & Leithwood, 1996).

Individualized Support: the degree to which the principal demonstrates respect for organizational members and concern about their personal feelings and needs (Jantzi & Leithwood, 1996). "Individualized support can be provided in a variety of ways including giving personal attention to teachers (Bass, 1990), assisting individuals when they are struggling personally or professionally (Bass, 1990), and showing concern about staff members' needs and feelings" (Jantzi & Leithwood, 1996; Leithwood et al., 1999).

Modeling: the degree to which the principal sets an example for the organizational members to follow

consistent with the values the principal espouses (Jantzi & Leithwood, 1996). Modeling behavior allows the principal to set an example for the staff by demonstrating how one should act in order to facilitate the accomplishment of the school vision and goals (Jantzi & Leithwood, 1996; Lucas & Valentine, 2002).

The ability to engage in practices that help develop people depends, in part, on leaders' knowledge of the "technical core" of schooling – what is required to improve the quality of teaching and learning – often invoked by the term instructional leadership. But this ability also is part of what is now being referred to as leaders' emotional intelligence (Goleman et.al 2002). Recent evidence suggests that emotional intelligence displayed, for example, through a leader's personal attention to an employee and through the utilization of the employee's capacities, "increases the employee's enthusiasm and optimism, reduces frustration, and transmits a sense of mission and indirectly increases performance" (McCull-Kennedy and Anderson, 2002). More specific leadership practices that significantly and positively help develop people include offering intellectual stimulation, providing individualized support and providing an appropriate model.

2.1.3. Redesigning the Organization

As also Leithwood (1996) state that this category has two important ideas that have high positive effects in creating conducive learning environment. These are strengthening school culture and building collaborative structures. Effective principals build collaborative relationship with families and communities. In this regard, Leithwood et.al (2006) stated that " school leadership must be connected the school to the community because what is happening outside of the school impacts the performance of students and connecting the wider environment which allows the school to use new ideas from the community".

The contribution of schools to student learning most certainly depends on the motivations and capacities of teachers and administrators, acting both individually and collectively. But organizational conditions sometimes blunt or wear down educators' good intentions and actually prevent the use of effective practices. In some contexts, for example, high-stakes testing has encouraged a drill-and-practice form of instruction among teachers who are perfectly capable of developing deep understanding on the part of their students. And extrinsic financial incentives for achieving school performance targets, under some conditions, can erode teachers' intrinsic commitments to the welfare of their students.

Successful educational leaders develop their districts and schools as effective organizations that support and sustain the performance of administrators and teachers, as well as students. Specific practices typically associated with this set of basics include strengthening district and school cultures, modifying organizational structures and building collaborative processes. Such practices assume that the purpose behind the redesign of organizational cultures and structures is to facilitate the work of organizational members and that the malleability of structures should match the changing nature of the school's improvement agenda.

2.2 The principals leadership practice and Student Achievement

(Cotton, 2003; Davis et al, 2005; Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Louis et al., 2010; Quinn, 2002; Waters et.al 2003), in their widely publicized meta-analysis examining the relationship between leadership and student achievement, Waters et al. reported correlations of 21 leadership responsibilities with student achievement. The average correlation of $r = .25$ demonstrated a small but significant indirect relationship between leadership and student achievement. Davis et al (2005) found principals can influence student achievement in two primary ways: (a) through development of effective teachers, and (b) through effective organizational processes.

Newman et.al (2002) stated "we recognize the principal's leadership as a critical force in the school's capacity to educate students" (p. 264). In fact, among school related factors associated with student achievement, leadership is second only to classroom instruction while many have always considered principals to be a key to the successful operation of a school, the evidence of the relationship between principals' behaviors and student achievement.

Literature review has shown that there is a broad and universal agreement that principals' leadership practices play a pivotal role in ensuring high learner achievements (Mitchell and Castle 2005; Bush et al. 2010; Du Plessis 2013). "To sustain high levels of students achievements, school leaders need to be successful leaders and should act as instructional leaders" (Leithwood et al. 2004; Robinson et al. 2008)

Students learning and achievement are influenced by a combination of leadership strategies which jointly address school culture and staff development, and focus on enhancing the processes of teaching and learning (Day et al., 2000).

Research has determined that principal leadership can have a significant, yet indirect, impact on student outcomes (Broughton & Riley, 1991; Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rows, 2008). Finnigan and Stewart (2009) specifically studied transformational leadership and found that this specific style had an indirect influence on student achievement. Heck and Hallinger (1996) and Hallinger (2005) also noted that a principal can impact classroom instruction, but indirectly through the development of school climate rather than through direct supervision of classroom practices. Given that a principal is generally not involved in the direct delivery of instruction, the behavior of the principal, especially

when supportive, collegial, and not overly restrictive, can have a positive impact on student achievement through the impact this behavior has on school climate and thus his or her teachers (Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2011).

When the campus leader develops a strong, clear, shared vision, and focuses resources and attention on the overall improvement of the organization, the results are positive changes in student outcomes (Finnigan & Stewart, 2009). As researcher understands and different Literature review has shown that there is a broad and universal agreement that principals' leadership practices play a pivotal role in ensuring high learner achievements and principals can influence student achievement in two primary ways: through development of effective teachers, and through effective organizational processes. This means the leadership practice of the school could affect the achievement of students positively or negatively.

Method

The study adopted descriptive survey design to assess educational leadership practice and its relationship with students' academic achievements. Because this method aims to describe behaviors and to gather people's perceptions, opinions, attitudes, and beliefs about a current issue of the study

Participants

In Enjibara Administrative Town there are seven government general primary schools which hold 280 teachers and this was the population of this study.

From the general target population in Enjibara Administrative Town seven government general primary schools which hold 280 teachers, four of the schools (57%) were taken by using probability sampling technique especially simple random sampling (lottery system).

Among the total 199 teachers (sample of the study area), 91 (45.7 %) of sample teachers were selected by stratified random sampling techniques system and proportionality according to the number of each school's teachers .Because this technique is better to give equal chance for all teachers. The principals of sample schools were taken by using comprehensive sampling technique, because the number of principals was manageable and being they were leaders in schools they expected to have more information's about the issue.

Instrumentation

The closed ended questionnaires for school leader ship practice survey developed by Leithwood and Jantizi (1996) were adopted directly for the purpose of this study. Because these questionnaires were use full to collect data of school leadership practice survey which contains 24 items. Questionnaires for leadership practices contain 5 likert scales (Strongly Disagree 1, Disagree 2, Undecided 3, Agree 4, Strongly Agree 5) for closed ended questions which were provided for teachers to assess the status of principals' leader ship practice. To ensure validity of instruments, the questionnaires for school leader ship practice survey, a pilot study was carried out on two schools out of the sample schools (41 teachers) of in Enjibara Administrative Town government primary schools to pre-test the instrument. The value of cronbach alpha was computed to check the reliability of the instruments (leadership practice questionnaires that valued 0.982.

Interview was also used in order to get detail information from the informants about the overall present context and to assess the status of principals' leader ship practices and students academic achievements. Semi-structured interview questions were prepared by researcher by considering leadership practices which were performed by the school principals and which affect students' achievement. And other main reason to select the semi--structured interview was because it helps to find out different persons perspectives and views deeply and to triangulate the validity of the information with the questionnaire. In the case of this study also document analysis was used to assess students' academic achievements. The data was taken from the school documents (rosters) of three consecutive years (2006 E.C-2008 E.C) of grade 8 regional examination average scores from schools.

Data Analysis

Principals' School Leadership Practices

The first objective of this study was to assess the status of principals' leadership in Enjibara administrative town government primary schools. To do this, one sample t-test was computed by using SPSS 20 and the results are presented in the following table.

Table 1. The Status of Principals' Leadership Practice as Perceived by Teachers by Different Dimensions of Leadership practices in the Primary Schools of Enjibara administrative town. Test Value = 3

Leadership Dimensions	Practice	N	Mean	SD	t-test	Df	Sig
Modeling		91	2.4284	1.07647	-5.066	90	.001
Intellectual Stimulation		91	2.4103	1.16965	-4.810	90	.001
High Expectation		91	2.4872	1.16142	-4.212	90	.001
Building Collaborative Structure		91	2.3956	1.15354	-4.998	90	.001
Vision Identification		91	2.4286	1.24354	-4.384	90	.001
Goal Acceptance		91	2.5604	1.23816	-3.387	90	.001
Individual Support		91	2.3077	1.00275	-6.586	90	.001
Strength School Culture		91	2.4103	1.13755	-4.946	90	.001
Total Leadership practice		91	2.4286	1.06424	-5.122	90	.001

*P < 0.05

Students Academic Achievement

To know the students achievement and to relate with other independent variable the researcher taken three years (2006-2008 E.C) of ministry grade eight results of the students' achievement.

In the same way an effort was made to examine the status of students' academic achievement in Enjibara administrative town government primary schools. To achieve this, one sample t-test was performed and the results are presented in Table 2

Table 2. The Status of Students' Academic Achievement

Test Value = 50

Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD	t-test	Df	Sig
Academic Achievement	151	38	78	52.6556	5.71320	5.712	150	.001

Table 3. Relationship between leadership practices and students' academic achievement.

	Variables	N	Mean	SD	1	2
1	Leadership Practice	91	2.4286	1.064	1	
2	Academic achievement	151	52.666	5.71	.127	

*p < 0.05

In this case the relationship is in positive direction but extremely low and insignificant relationship was observed between leadership practice and students' academic achievement (.127).

Results and Discussion

Principals' School Leadership Practices

As total leadership practice calculated mean indicated in table 1 the results of one sample t-test showed that the calculated mean score (2.42) of leadership practice was significantly lower than the expected mean which was 3. This result implies that principals' practice of leadership practices employed at lower level.

As indicated in table 1 the results of one sample t-test showed that the reported mean score (2.42) of modeling as principals' leadership practice was significantly lower than the mean test value which was 3. This result implies that principals' practice of modeling was performed at lower level. This shows that at the study area the principals were not actors or models to others to follow and run the activities of the schools as expected and intended by community and government.

In similar way, at table 1 the results of one sample t-test showed that the calculated mean score (2.41) of intellectual stimulation as principals' leadership practice was significantly lower than the mean test value which was 3. This result implies that principals' practice of intellectual stimulation put into operation at lower level. This indicates that at the study area the principals are not active to develop intellectual stimulation among staff members and there is no opportunity for staff to learn each other.

From this it was easy to understand that, the successful leadership practice in the schools are very important to instructional practices, academic achievement, students' discipline, school climate and other school activities to improve the core process of the schools. But the findings of this research shows that the leadership practices were not practiced as expected and, in the case of Ethiopia different literatures show the presence of improper leadership exercise. For instance, MOE (2005 E.C) indicated that, "there is lack of visionary, change and result oriented leader ship". World Bank (2005) noted that, different document on the education system in Ethiopia indicate many problems school faced are linked to leadership and management. These problems including inadequate preparation and training people, poor supervision by principals and lack of commitment on

the part of heads and teachers. As also researcher tried to triangulate the data's in different methods to get valuable information, the open ended interview questions which are related with school principals' practice were provided to the school principals. The interview responses show that more of school principals agreed that each dimensions of leadership practices were not performed as expected and intended due to different reasons on their schools.

To conclude, one sample t-test show the observed mean difference between the reported and expected mean values is statistically significant. Then, the obtained mean of the total Leadership practice was 2.42. Here, the reported mean value (2.42) is less than the test value (3). The result in this table shows that the computed t-value (-5.122) at 90 Df has a level of significance $p=0.001$. Since the observed level of significance is lower than the acceptable ($p=0.05$), it testifies that the observed mean difference is statistically significant. This result, therefore, implies that the participants agreed that there was no good or effective school leadership practice in the primary schools of Enjibara administrative town and the majority of the teachers agreed on their schools principals didn't practice effective schools leadership.

The Status of Students' Academic Achievement

To know the students achievement and to relate with other independent variable the researcher taken three years (2006-2008 E.C) of ministry grade eight results of the students achievement.

In the same way an effort was made to examine the status of students' academic achievement in Enjibara administrative town government primary schools. To achieve this, one sample t-test was performed and the results are presented in Table 2.

As indicated in Table 2 the results of one sample t-test showed that the observed mean score of students' academic achievement (52.6) was significantly higher than the mean test value which was 50. This result implies that students' had above average academic achievement.

To maintain high levels of learner achievements, principals need to be effective leaders and should function as instructional leaders (Leithwood et al. 2004; Robinson et al. 2008). Students learning and achievement are affected by a combination of leadership strategies which jointly address school culture and staff development, and focus on enhancing the processes of teaching and learning (Day et al., 2000).

The principals during the interview also assured that the students' academic achievements in ministry exams are serious problem even though it was above average academic achievement but needs immediate solution to reduce high academic wastage. And also some principals respond that as they are working to solve the problem of academic problems by adjusting tutorial programs out of regular academic time

Relationship between Leadership Practices and Students' Academic Achievement.

As it is indicated in the table above table 3, the correlation analysis is expressed through Pearson correlation (r).The findings revealed that, in positive direction but extremely low and insignificant relationship was observed between leadership practice and students' academic achievement (.127) in the primary schools of Enjibara administrative town. This indicated that there was positive but extremely low relationship between school leadership practices and students achievement.

Generally, the typical conclusion drawn by quantitative leadership researchers is that school leaders have small and indirect effects on student outcomes that are essentially mediated by teachers (Hallinger & Heck, 1998)

Conclusion

The principals' leader ship practice and students achievement was attempted to be seen in the study area. As the result of findings show that in relation to principals' leadership practice and students' achievement the study concluded that principals' leadership practices at Enjibara administrative town schools were not exercised at expected level and students academic achievements was almost at average or expected level. Principals' leadership practice was likely failing states which need urgent intervention and improvement. In addition, regarding the correlation of the two, as it has been seen in the finding, it can be concluded that the relationship of leadership practice and students academic achievements were extremely low and weak and that there was very low contribution or low effect of principals' leadership practices on students' academic achievement. This shows that there may be different factors which highly or significantly contribute to students' academic achievement.

Generally, the findings show that as the school leadership practices effects on students' outcome or achievement was indirect and mediated through teachers and also was extremely low and to this end Ministry of Education and other concerned bodies should give training targeting on developing leadership practices.

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