PRINCIPALS' INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP PRACTICES AND   THEIR ASSOCIATION WITH SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT IN PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS OF SNNPR, ETHIOPIA

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ABSTRACT

The prime and foremost activity of school principals is the management of instruction. Particularly, if their target is to bring about improved learning environment, it is mandatory for them to prioritize the instructional side of their job. Because different studies indicated that effective schools had principals whose measure focus was on instruction. This study assesses the relationship of principals' instructional leadership practices with school improvement in government secondary schools of two selected zones of Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples' Regional state (SNNPR), Ethiopia. Descriptive survey research method was employed to attain the objectives of the study. The sources of data were senior teachers and preparatory students (11th and 12th grade).Questionnaire was used to gather data from these sources. To analyze the data, statistical tools such as mean, standard deviation, correlation coefficient and One-way ANOVA tests were applied. The findings of the study revealed that there were better practices by principals in the area of school improvement compared to instructional leadership. Schools, which were found to be relatively low in their instructional leadership practices, also exhibited minimum results in school improvement, while those which were rated top in their instructional leadership practices were also rated to be high in their school improvement endeavours. Put differently, there was strong positive correlation between the instructional leadership practices of principals and school improvement in the sampled secondary schools.

Keywords: Instructional leadership, school improvement, senior teachers, SNNPR

INTRODUCTION

It is no doubt that the leadership role of a school principal has impact on the improvement of any school directly or indirectly. One of the major causes of variations among schools could be the type of leadership school principals exercise. In a school where the principal is risk

taker, change oriented and instruction focused by prioritizing team leadership, it is not surprise to witness improvement.

Conversely, in schools where the principals are slackers or managing to keep their status quo and do not bother to bring about something better, it is unlikely to witness change and innovation. It is mostly common to hear people saying, "Schools seem their leaders". Hence, the better leadership style one exercises, the   better he/she attains school improvement plans compared to others. The University of Hong Kong (2006) writes that effective leadership is generally regarded as a central component of securing and sustaining school improvement. The primary objective of schools is the provision of quality instruction and attainment of better student result, which can in turn leads to school improvement.

This study deals with the association of principals' instructional leadership practices with school improvement in public secondary schools of SNNPR, Ethiopia. Is there a relationship between the instructional leadership practices of principals and school improvement? Stated differently, did those schools who exhibit better improvement than others had instruction-oriented leaders. Conversely, did schools which exhibit minimum improvement have leaders/principals who less-emphasized instruction? The study attempts to address these and related issues.

Research Questions

1. What was the degree of emphasis given to instructional leadership compared to school improvement?

2. Is there any association between the instructional leadership practices of principals and school improvement?

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The following are objectives of the study

1. To assess the degree of emphasis given to instructional leadership compared to school   improvement

2. To examine the association between the instructional leadership practices of principals and school improvement

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

In this study, descriptive survey method was employed with the assumption that it could help to gather the opinion of teachers and students on the matters related to community involvement and principals' role as an instructional leader.   Descriptive survey method is also more convenient in gathering opinion of people on a particular issue. The data for this study are quantitative data obtained through questionnaires from senior teachers (having 9 or more years of teaching experience) and preparatory (11th and 12th grade) students.

Instruments

Multiplicities of data gathering instruments were used to maximize the worth of the data used in the study. Questionnaires were designed to solicit the quantitative data from teachers and students. They were prepared, commented by experts, pilot-tested, and distributed to the subjects of the study. The questionnaires included Likert-scale items measuring the

instructional leadership roles of principals and school improvement practices. Before field-testing them with samples of respondents, the instruments were reviewed by a panel of researchers to strengthen their validity. These individuals have rich experience and knowledge of the topic being studied. Thorndike (1997) says, "Content validity requires a set of reviewers who have knowledge of the subject matter".

The same questionnaires were prepared for teachers and students, except that different approaches were employed. The preliminary instrument was then pilot tested by 34 teachers in an adjacent secondary school, which was excluded from the main study. Respondents were asked to rate each item based on a five-point Likert scale of 1= Strongly Disagree to 5= Strongly Agree. Reliability of the instruments was checked using Cronbach's Alpha. Accordingly, the reliability of the items yielded a coefficient of Cronbach's Alpha .93, which indicates high reliability coefficient.

Population and Sample

As far as study population is concerned, there are 12 secondary schools in the two selected zones of SNNPR. Out of these, five were selected for this study. There were population of 275 senior teachers and 365 students. The sample for the quantitative data was elicited from 231 senior teachers and 317 students in those schools. The details of the questionnaires distributed to each respondent of the five schools and their rate of returns are shortly presented in table 1.

Table 1. Questionnaires Distributed and Rate of Return

No	School	Teachers			Students		
		Questionnaire Dispatched	Rate of return	%	Questionnaire Dispatched	Rate of return	%
1	Dilla	60	49	82	94	86	92
2	Yirgachefe	35	28	80	35	32	91.4
3	Aletawondo	59	55	93	76	75	99
4	Leku	61	49	80	48	39	81.3
5	Yirgalem	60	50	83	112	85	76
	Total	**275**	**231**	**84**	**365**	**317**	**87**

Sampling Techniques

The study comprises of senior teachers and students. The investigator employed purposive sampling technique to select the two study zones, while random sampling technique was used in the selection of five schools out of 12 within the two study zones.

With regard to the selection of respondents, the five school principals were selected using availability sampling technique, while purposive-sampling technique was employed to choose senior teachers. The reason for targeting teachers with nine or above years of experience in teaching (senior teachers) is considering that this group relatively provides reliable information compared to those with less years of experiences.

Methods of Data Analysis

The analysis of data was made using descriptive statistics such as mean and standard deviation as well as the inferential statistics like Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient and One-way ANOVA. These helped to see principals' instructional leadership practices and their relationship with school improvement.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Principals' Instructional Leadership Practices

Promoting School-wide Continuous Professional Development (CPD)

Promoting teachers' professional development, according to Sheppard (1996) is the most influential instructional leadership behavior at both the elementary and high school levels. Among the role of an instructional leader is promoting school wide professional development. If the intention of the principal is to get school improvement programs implemented and if his/her target is to provide quality education for all students, one of the major and most important concerns should be promoting school-wide continuous professional development (CPD). Hence, a school principal as an instructional leader needs to motivate all individuals who are eligible to take part in CPD program and work with them.

According to the Ethiopian Ministry of Education (MoE, 2009), the aim of CPD is to improve teachers' performance in the classroom in order to raise student achievement and learning because, directly or indirectly, there is a link between students' result and teachers' performance. CPD is a career long process of improving knowledge, skills, and attitudes centered on the local context and particularly classroom practices. Therefore, attracting, retaining, and developing teachers across the professional life cycle have become policy priorities in many countries (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development/OECD, 2005).

Communicating School Goals and Vision

School principals communicate school goals or visions in many different ways. Among these are communicating goals through faculty meetings and Departmental chair meetings. They communicate them through individual meetings such as follow up conference to classroom observations. Frequent communication of school goals by instructional leaders promotes accountability, a sense of personal ownership and instructional improvements. Skillful leaders focus attention on key aspects of the school's vision and communicate the vision clearly and convincingly.

The function of communicating school goals refers to the ways the principal expresses importance of the school goals to staff, parents and students. With regard to the communication of school visions and goals, Hoy and Hoy (2003) explain that principals have to communicate clear vision on instructional excellence and continuous professional development. This is one of the instructional leadership practices at school level.

Sheppard (1996) made it clear in his study that communication of school goals by the principal has a significant positive relationship with teacher classroom innovativeness, which in turn can contribute to school improvement. He found out that, at the high school level, communication of school goals by the principal accounted for the largest amount of variance

in classroom innovativeness. The communication of school goals by the principal gives confidence to teachers to use more reflection, which may lead to teachers adjusting their instructional techniques to address different learning needs of students (Blasé & Roberts, 1994).

Providing Resources

Among the roles played by the school principal is the allocation of resources to the instructional activities. Those who work in schools as teachers and associate staff, school premises, furniture, books and equipment all provide some of the means by which we transform our hopes and aspirations for children's education into daily learning opportunities and experiences and, beyond that, into the longer-term outcomes of schooling (Thomas and Martin, 2003). As indicated earlier, the prime and crucial activity of a principal should be instruction or teaching and learning. Hence, school principals are expected to exercise their responsibilities for resource management by giving due attention to the instructional aspect.

Lack of resources may hamper teachers not to use different instructional strategies in their strive to bring about quality education. If this is the case, principals also phase challenges and may not achieve their objectives for school improvement.

Providing resources is viewed by teachers as effective leadership by principals (McGhee and Lew, 2007). That is to say, those principals who gave more attention to instruction in the provision of resources were viewed by teachers as strong instructional leaders. Similarly, Smith and Andrews (1989) discovered that majority of strong instructional leaders were given positive ratings as resource providers.

Supervision (evaluation) of Instruction

The supervision of instruction by the school principal is among his roles/practices as an instructional leader. As an instructional leader, he needs to follow up the day to day activities of teachers and supervision is the major instrument for this. The instructional leader's repertoire of instructional practices and classroom supervision offers teachers the needed resources to provide students with opportunities to succeed.

A study of primary school effectiveness in Burundi documents a strong and significant relationship between the frequency of teacher supervision by the school principal and student achievement: student test scores rose as the number of times the school principal visited the classroom increased (Sindhvad, 2009). Frequent teacher supervision improved the punctuality of teachers and their adherence to the curriculum, which in turn produced higher scores (Eisemon, Schwille, & Prouty 1989).

Development of a Positive School Climate

School climate is an important ingredient that relates to the productivity and well-being of staff members, parents or guardians, and students. The principal more than any other individual is responsible for the climate in the school. As an instructional leader, he is the key figure in promoting an academic learning environment within the school that is conducive to student learning. Promoting an academic learning climate, according to Murphy (1990), has to do with the behaviors of the principal that influences the norms, beliefs, and attitudes of the teachers, students, and parents. Since good teacher morale and high student achievement go hand in hand, the school principal has to make the school

environment conducive and motivate teachers on their job to indirectly promote students' achievement and bring about school improvement.

Different terms have been used to denote school climate in literature. These are climate, environment, culture, job satisfaction, morale, and ethos (Sybouts and Wendel 1994). At times, the terms mean the same or similar things; at other times, they are used to portray variations or distinct differences of people's senses and feelings about the school. So different writers use the terms differently based on their interest and experience. Keefe (1989) refers to climate as group perceptions of school characteristics.

Research indicates that schools, which were effective in their overall achievement, were found to have a better school climate. Such schools create a climate where all children could learn. In relation to this, Edmonds (1979a) stated in his research findings that schools that were effective had a climate of expectation that all children would succeed to high levels.

School Improvement and the Strive for it in Ethiopian Secondary Schools

According to the report of Plan International Headquarters (2004), 'School improvement' means making schools better places for learning. This relies on changes at both school level and within classrooms, which in turn depend on schools being committed to fulfilling the expectations of children and their parents. In other words, school improvement refers to a systematic approach that improves the quality of schools. Similarly, Barnes (2004) refers to school improvement as "The process of altering specific practices and policies in order to improve teaching and learning. In short, the main target of school improvement is an activity directed at improving teaching and learning so that better student achievement will be exhibited. The focal concern of school improvement is to enable students to achieve better results.

In Ethiopia, a School Improvement Program (SIP) was initiated on a pilot base in 2006 as part of the General Education Quality Improvement Program (GEQIP), as indicated in ESDP IV (MoE, 2011). Following the educational decentralization system in the country, high emphasis has been given to lower levels. Authority for making decisions for school improvement is devolved to the school-level which puts unprecedented pressure on school principals to be accountable for the quality of education provided by their school.

To make the school improvement program practical, the establishment of Wereda and Kebele Education and Training Boards, Parent Teacher Association (PTA), and School Improvement Committee were given consideration. According to the program action plan (ESDP IV), it is estimated that currently; about 80 percent of primary schools and 60 percent of secondary schools have developed a School Improvement Plan. The investigator of this study observed that three out of five schools under study have their own school improvement plan, though the degree of implementation varies from school to school. The best SIP practices and experiences are being scaled up to be communicated to all schools.

The Ethiopian Ministry of Education prepared a handbook for guidance on self-assessment and school improvement planning in the year 2011. Schools have been assessed based on the criteria included in this handbook. According to this handbook, the ultimate objective of the school improvement process is to improve student achievement levels by creating a positive environment for learning and by increasing the degree to which parents are involved in their

children's learning. Accordingly, Parents and local communities have been actively participating in school improvement planning and implementation.

In spite of these efforts, the implementation of school improvement program was found to be delayed in some schools due to shortage of resources. To overcome these, GEQIP launched implementing a School Grant Program by preparing School Grant Guidelines and distributing to key stakeholders (MoE, 2009). Schools were assessed based on the four school improvement domains indicated in a handbook for guidance on school self-assessment. The four school improvement domains against which Ethiopian schools are currently being assessed are learning and teaching, student environment, leadership and management, community Involvement.

RESULTS

Table 2 compares the instructional leadership roles of principals and school improvement practices side by side in the five sampled schools. To do so, teachers' and students' overall mean computational results were taken. Dilla and Yirgachefe secondary schools are at the moderate level, with regard to instructional leadership roles and school improvement, as indicated by their respective mean computational results $\overline{X} = 2.78$ and $\overline{X} = 2.76$ for instructional leadership, and $\overline{X} = 3.08$ and $\overline{X} = 3.06$ for school improvement respectively. The mean computational results of both schools were less than the overall ratings of the five schools, which were indicated by $\overline{X} = 3.25$ for instructional leadership roles and $\overline{X} = 3.43$ for school improvement.

Table 2: Overall Comparison of Instructional Leadership against School Improvement

Variable	School	N	Mean	Std. Dev	95% CI for Lower Bound	Upper Bound	F-Value	p-value
Instructional Leadership	Dilla	135	2.78	0.67	2.67	2.90	54.34	**0.00**
	Yirgachefe	60	2.76	0.53	2.63	2.90		
	Aleta wondo	130	3.39	0.68	3.27	3.51		
	Leku	88	3.27	0.73	3.12	3.43		
	Yirgalem	135	3.80	0.51	3.72	3.89		
	Total	**548**	**3.25**	**0.75**	**3.19**	**3.32**		
School Improvement	Dilla	135	3.08	0.71	2.96	3.20	36.36	**0.00**
	Yirgachefe	60	3.06	0.61	2.90	3.21		
	Aleta wondo	130	3.48	0.66	3.36	3.59		
	Leku	88	3.42	0.67	3.28	3.56		
	Yirgalem	135	3.93	0.53	3.84	4.02		
	Total	**548**	**3.43**	**0.72**	**3.38**	**3. 50**		

As displayed in table 2, the overall mean computational result of principals' instructional leadership practice was found to be medium ($\overline{X} = 3.25$), while the mean computational results of school improvement was high ($\overline{X} = 3.43$). This indicates that the sampled schools

have done more in the area of school improvement compared to that of instructional leadership. This disparity arose due to the variations observed among schools.

Aletawondo and Leku were rated to be moderate against the two variables. However, their mean computational results of instructional leadership ($\bar{X}$ = 3.39) and ($\bar{X}$ =3.27) are respectively higher than Dilla and Yirgachefe. Further, school improvement ratings at Aletawondo and Leku are by far higher than Dilla and Yirgachefe. In other words, there were disparities among schools in exercising instructional leadership and bringing about the required school improvement. Statistically, the One-way ANOVA test (p-value= 0.00< 0.05) also implies the existence of highly significant difference among the mean results of respondents in both variables.

As per the data from table 1, Dilla and Yirgachefe secondary schools were relatively rated to be low; Aletawondo and Leku were moderate, while Yirgalem secondary school was rated to be high in implementing instructional leadership and bringing about school improvement. Hence, it could be presumed that schools with more instruction-oriented principals showed better improvement compared to those whose principals gave less emphasis to instructional activities. In his study conducted in 1971 on four instructionally effective inner city schools, Weber concluded that all four effective schools had strong leadership that focused decisions around instruction. The above finding is said to be in conformity with Weber's conclusion.

To make the above idea more brief based on the data from table 2, in schools whose instructional leadership roles of principals were observed to be relatively minimal, school improvement efforts were also found to be low. Conversely, schools with higher instructional leadership practices were found to exhibit better achievement in school improvement. Those who were at the moderate level in the ratings of instructional leadership were also found to be moderate in their school improvement achievements, as seen from the rating results of the respondents.

According to the National Governors Association/NGA (2003), effective principals bring to their schools innovative individuals and innovative ideas, programs, and instructional strategies that can improve teaching while maintaining a coherent reform agenda. They also engage teachers, parents, and community members as collaborators and leaders in school improvement efforts.

Different writers have also expounded on the relationship between instructional leadership and school effectiveness/improvement. For instance, as to Findley and Findley (1992), the improvement observed in a school is directly or indirectly linked to principal's leadership roles, particularly in the area of instruction. In the words of Flath (1989), "Research on effective schools indicates that the principal is pivotal in bringing about the conditions that characterize effective schools" (p. 20). If our goal is to have effective schools, then we must look at different ways to emphasize instructional leadership, which is strongly linked to school improvement.

Table 3 presents the summary of the correlation result between instructional leadership and school improvement, as per the overall responses of the respondents (teachers and students). In order to see the link between principals' instructional leadership practices and school improvement achieved, correlation coefficient was employed, which is shortly displayed below:

Table 3. Summary of the Association of Instructional Leadership with School Improvement

Variable	Dilla	Yirga chefe	Aleta wondo	Leku	Yirga lem	Overall
Instructional Leadership	2.78	2.76	3.39	3.27	3.80	3.25
School improvement	3.08	3.06	3.48	3.42	3.93	3.43
Correlation	**0.742**	**0.700**	**0.817**	**0.828**	**0.764**	**0.827**

According to table 3, there was strong positive, correlation between the instructional leadership roles of principals and the corresponding school improvement practices / effectiveness exhibited in all the five sampled schools. The overall correlation (r=.827) also confirms the degree of strong linkage between the two (instructional leadership and school improvement). This strongly indicates that the more school principals make instruction their top agenda, the better school improvement they exhibit.

Hill (2002) suggests that, for schools to improve student outcomes, principals need to devote more time to establishing preconditions and interventions directed at improving teaching and learning, and reduce time devoted to administrative and managerial roles. This should be the major point against which an effective school leader should be evaluated. Munro (2002) recommends that principals need to be leaders in learning rather than just leaders of learning. He further suggests that principals ought to understand contemporary theories of learning, have an explicit personal theory of learning, and be able to utilize this knowledge. In short, they need to emphasize instruction if their target to bring about improvement in their schools.

CONCLUSION

The study revealed that the sampled schools have done effectively in the area of school improvement, targeting at the four school improvement domains mentioned earlier. The overall mean computational result of principals' instructional leadership practices ($\overline{X}$ = 3.25), and the mean computational results of school improvement ($\overline{X}$ = 3.43) revealed that the sampled schools have done more in the area of school improvement compared to that of instructional leadership. This disparity arose due to the variations observed among schools. Even though there are good practices of school improvement, the target schools need to exert more efforts to lessen disparities observed among them for the betterment of school improvement.

Schools, which were found to be relatively low in their instructional leadership practices, exhibited minimum result in school improvement also. Likewise, secondary schools which were rated top in instructional leadership practices were also rated to be high in their school improvement endeavors. This strongly suggests the existence of relationship between principals' instructional leadership roles/practices and school improvement.

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