

Principal Instructional Leadership: A Key for School Improvement

Sabeena P.S¹, Dr. N. Muthaiah²

¹Research Scholar, Sri Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya College of Education, Coimbatore

²Principal, Sri Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya College of Education, Coimbatore

Abstract: *Teacher leadership is the process by which teachers, individually or collectively, influence their colleagues, principals, and other members of the school community to improve teaching and learning practices with the goal of increased student learning and achievement. Instructional leadership focuses on the core responsibility of a school, namely teaching and learning, by defining the school vision, mission and goals, managing the instructional program and promoting the school climate. Principal plays an important role in achieving the educational goal and promoting school improvement. The present paper highlights various dimensions of principal instructional leadership in the light of researches, roles and responsibilities and ways to foster instructional leadership of principal. The paper also highlights the instructional leadership of principal as a key for school improvement.*

Keywords: Teacher Leadership, Instructional Leadership

1. Introduction

Educational leadership is an area which provide opportunities to guide others through teaching, training, research and services. It focuses on pedagogy, epistemology and human development. Numerous educational leadership theories and perspectives have been emerged and explored, such as: (a) instructional leadership; (b) transactional leadership; (c) transformational leadership; (d) distributed leadership; and (e) teacher leadership. Instructional leadership involves setting clear goals, managing curriculum, monitoring lesson plans, allocating resources and evaluating teachers regularly to promote student learning and growth. Burns (1978) introduced two types of leadership: transactional leadership, in which leaders focus on the relationship between the leader and follower, and transformational leadership, in which leaders focus on the beliefs, needs, and values of their followers. The concept of transformational leadership was initially introduced by James V. Downton, and later developed by James Mac Gregor Burns. Spillance (2001) introduced the concept distributed leadership. Distributed leadership is a conceptual and analytical approach to understanding how the work of leadership takes place among the people and in context of a complex organization. Teacher leadership is the process by which teachers, individually or collectively, formally influence their colleagues, principals, and other members of the school community to improve teaching and learning practices with the goal of increased student learning and achievement. Teacher leaders contribute to important decisions and actively initiate advances in school policy and practice. They may lead projects or reforms or serve to advance the instructional practices of their peers. By clearly and regularly communicating with and engaging fellow teachers in dialogue about improving teaching and learning, teacher leaders build a school culture of trust, which leads to improvement in instructional practice and ultimately positively affects student achievement (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Researches show that the instructional leadership and distributed leadership of teachers and school heads play an

important role in the students' achievement and school progress.

2. Instructional Leadership

The Instructional leadership model emerged in the early 1980s in the research on effective schools. In contrast to the earlier models, this model focused on the manner in which leadership improved educational outcomes (Steward, 2006). Instructional leadership is an educational leadership that focuses on the core responsibility of a school, namely teaching and learning, by defining the school vision, mission and goals, managing the instructional program and promoting the school climate (Hoy & Miskel, 2008). Instructional leaders go beyond the traditional role of school administrators and spend a lot time focusing on developing knowledge and implementation of the curriculum, as well as instruction and assessment (Jita, 2010). While examining instructional leadership of Principal, Morphy (1990) identified four dimensions of instructional leaders: (1) developing mission and goals (2) managing the educational production function (3) promoting an academic learning climate and (4) developing a supportive work environment. Weber (1996) identified five essential domains of instructional leadership: defining the school's mission, managing curriculum and instruction, promoting a positive learning climate, observing and improving instruction, and assessing the instructional program. In a study on perception of principals regarding instructional leadership, Haim & Chen (2016) examined three dimensions of instructional leadership: (1) improvement of school curriculum, (2) development of professional learning communities, and (3) interpretation of performance data. Nguyen, Ng & Yap (2017) categorized the instructional leadership roles of principals into four key themes--vision development and implementation, physical and organizational structure, professional development, and leading and managing instruction. In general, instructional leaders have an active participating role in the student's achievement and school leadership.

3. Principal as an instructional leader

As an instructional leader, principal has to perform various duties which includes:

- Setting the mission, vision, goals and objectives of the school
- Creating an environment within the school that is conducive to teaching and learning
- Implementing the school curriculum and being accountable for higher learning outcomes
- Developing the school education program and school improvement plan
- Offering educational programs, projects and services which provide equitable opportunity for all learners in the community
- Introducing new innovative methods of instruction to achieve higher learning outcomes
- Administering and managing all personnel, physical and fiscal resources of the school
- Recommending the staffing complement of the school based on its needs
- Encouraging staff development
- Establishing school and community network and encouraging the active participation of teachers organizations, non-academic personnel of public schools, and parents-teachers-community associations

In order to perform these duties effectively, the principal must possess certain skills to carry out the tasks of an instructional leader: interpersonal skills, planning skills, instructional observation skills and research and evaluation skills (Lashway, 2002).

Interpersonal skills maintain trust, spur motivation, give empowerment, and enhance collegiality. Relationships are built on trust, and tasks are accomplished through motivation and empowerment wherein teachers are involved in planning, designing, and evaluating instructional programs. Empowerment leads to ownership and commitment as teachers identify problems and design strategies themselves. Collegiality promotes sharing, cooperation, and collaboration, in which both the principal and teachers talk about teaching and learning (Brewer, 2001).

Planning skills: Planning begins with clear identification of goals or a vision to work toward, as well as to induce commitment and enthusiasm.

Instructional observation skills: The aim of instructional observation (supervision) is to provide teachers with feedback to consider and reflect upon. Effective instructional leaders can help to guide classroom instruction through supervision and also play a primary role in bettering it.

Research and evaluation skills are needed to critically question the success of instructional programs, and one of the most useful of these skills is action research. (Jenkins, 2009)

4. How to foster Instructional Leadership?

The instructional leadership can be fostered through various activities while performing leadership roles such as:

- Collaborative teaming
- Learn strategies that can be used to foster continuous school improvement
- Understand how to build supportive school cultures that promote and support adult and student learning
- Develop knowledge about individual and organizational change processes
- Develop knowledge of effective staff development strategies
- Understand important sources of data about their schools and students and how to use data to guide instructional improvement efforts
- Learn public engagement strategies, including interpersonal relationship skills.

Collaborative learning teams have emerged as an effective tool for teachers to steadily and continuously improve their instruction. Evidence also suggests that a learning teams model can affect school leadership as well. Abbott & McKnight (2010) explored the impact of collaborative learning teams on leadership roles of principals and teachers in secondary schools and found that collaborative learning teams positively influenced school leadership in two ways: (1) by strengthening principals' instructional leadership, and (2) distributing leadership and instructional decision-making throughout the school. Effective teacher leaders are able to frame teacher leadership within the context of the school and they are able to value teacher as a leader who can develop the instructional program, make positive change in the school, share their expertise with others and shape the culture of the school (Zepeda, 2004). So principals and teachers can be involved in the academic and professional development programs that foster leadership skills within them there by contributing to school improvement.

5. Conclusion

School improvement occurs within the context of school and that is why it is important to understand the culture and climate of the school. An effective instructional leader can understand the culture and climate of the school very easily and work accordingly for the progress of the school. Lack of effective instructional leaders affect the school progress there by affecting the student's achievement. This shows the importance of instructional leaders in the education system.

References

- [1] Abbott, C.J. & McKnight, K. (2010). Developing Instructional Leadership through Collaborative Learning. *AASA Journal of Scholarship & Practice*, 7(2), 20-26. EJ895357.
- [2] Brewer. (2001). As cited in Jenkins, B. (2009). What it makes to be an instructional leader? *Principal*. 34-37. https://www.naesp.org/sites/default/files/J-F_p34.pdf
- [3] Burns, J.M. (1978). *Leadership*. New York: Harper & Row.

- [4] Haim, S. & Chen, S. (2016). Holistic School Leadership: Systems Thinking as an Instructional Leadership Enabler. *NASSP Bulletin*, 100 (4), 177-202.
- [5] Hoy, W. K. & Miskel, C. G. (2008). *Educational administration: Theory, research, and practice*, Ed.8. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- [6] Jenkins, B. (2009). What it makes to be an instructional leader? *Principal*. 34-37. https://www.naesp.org/sites/default/files/J-F_p34.pdf
- [7] Jita, C.L. (2008). Instructional leadership for the improvement of science and mathematics in South Africa. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*. 9, 851-854. <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1877042810023529>
- [8] Lashway, L. (2002). Developing Instructional Leaders. *ERIC Digest*. ED466023.
- [9] Murphy, J. (1990). Principal instructional leadership. *Advances in Educational Administration*, 163-200.
- [10] Nguyen, D., Ng, D. & Yap, P.S. (2017). Instructional Leadership Structure in Singapore: A Co-Existence of Hierarchy and Heterarchy. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 55(2), 147-167. EJ1134565.
- [11] Spillane, J.P. (2001). Investigating School Leadership Practice: A Distributed Perspective. *Educational Researcher*, 23-28.
- [12] Stewart, J. (2006). Transformational Leadership: An Evolving Concept Examined through the Works of Burns, Bass, Avolio, and Leithwood. *Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy*, 54(26).
- [13] Weber, J. (1996). Leading the instructional program. In Smith, S. & Piele, P. (Eds.), *School leadership*. (253-278). Clearinghouse of Educational Management. Eugene, Oregon.
- [14] York-Barr, J. & Duke, K. (2004). What Do We Know About Teacher Leadership? Findings from Two Decades of Scholarship. *Review of Educational Research*, 74(3), 255-316.
- [15] Zepeda, S.J. (2004). *Instructional Leadership for School improvement*. NY: Eye on Education.