

A Study of Principal's role in School Effectiveness

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Abstract: -This presents paper and interprets data gathered to investigate the general question 'What can school principals do to foster school effectiveness?' More particularly, it probes Moradabad Secondary school teachers' opinions about what principals could or should do to increase the effectiveness of their schools. It also analyses differences associated with demographic variables. In general, it was found that participants thought principals could improve a school's effectiveness most by developing an open climate and making sure that appropriate resources are available for instruction. There were many parallels between the findings and extant understandings recorded in the literature. One notable exception emerged in the participants' attitudes regarding the role of the community.

Key Words: Principal, Administrator, Organisational, Effectiveness.

Introduction: Organizational effectiveness receives considerable attention in the theoretical and research literature about school management. Generally, the information addresses two fundamental objectives: to compare the educational results of various schools and to identify the factors that characterise more effective schools. In the final analysis, the end objective is to understand how schools can maximise students' progress. In this way: What is of interest to most planners is the identification of factors or variables that enhance learning in all schools, irrespective of the background of the children that attend them. School effectiveness, though, can be a confusing topic. A major reason is that there are ambiguities in the associated theory and research. One difficulty is that effectiveness has been defined in many ways. Here we provide only an indication of the variation. At the most general level, Mortimore, Sammons and Thomas (1994) posit that a school is effective when its students perform better given the opportunities and the education they receive. In addition to high student academic achievements, this profile of the effective school includes attainments in school and classroom leadership; giving voice to students; integration of curriculum, teaching and learning; the design of programmes and pathways for students; and collaboration of home, school and community.

This variability in the way effectiveness is defined means that one has to be careful when interpreting and using information about school effectiveness.

The research data we report and analyse in this article were gathered to cast light on the general question 'What can school principals do to foster school effectiveness?' More particularly, the research investigated how principals in Greece could or should increase the effectiveness of their schools, for little is known about organisational climate and school effectiveness in Moradabad schools. This secondary analysis of the data is designed to provide base line information that may be useful to researchers, educators and policy-makers at both the national, state and local levels, as they work to improve the Indian education system. Also, it may provide useful guidance for similar investigations in other areas of Moradabad that could contribute to broader insights into cultivating school effectiveness and, possibly, how school climate and culture relate to school effectiveness. Finally, it provides useful information about a tool for identifying conditions that contribute to school effectiveness.

The Nature of the School Climate: The climate of an organisation, first of all, arises from the relatively stable conditions that characterise an organisation (Schein 1985; Sergiovanni & Starratt 2002; Rafferty 2003; Hoy & Miskel 2008). It has often been likened to the personality of an organisation (Halpin 1967; Hoy & Miskel 2008). Second, climate does not refer to tangible phenomena in the objective world - it refers instead to how all the members of a school - administrators, teachers, students and other stakeholders - perceive the school (Schneider, Wheeler and Cox 1992; Ekvall and Ryhammar 1999; Rafferty 2003; Lunenburg & Ornstein 2004; Hoy & Miskel 2008). Third, organisational climate is multidimensional; that is, it is the product of interactions among several classes of internal characteristics. For example, Tagiuri (1968) and Owens (2004) contend that four clusters of factors contribute to organisational climate: ecological factors, milieu factors, social system/organisational factors and cultural factors.

Principals' Activities that are Associated with School Effectiveness:- In the literature considerable attention has been devoted to teachers' roles in the improvement of school effectiveness but it also includes a large body of information about the roles that principals play. Much of this pertains to the skills and knowledge that principals require for supporting and improving education, though often the distinction between skills and knowledge is not maintained sufficiently.

According to Koontz and O' Donnell (cited in Saitis 2000), leadership involves the art and the process of influencing individuals so that they collaborate willingly to achieve common objectives. It entails four basic abilities: to respond to how individuals are motivated in different situations by different factors, to inspire and guide the members of the organisation, to create a suitable climate, and to articulate and support clear objectives. On the other hand, Reynolds and Teddlie (2000) maintain that five elements characterise an effective leader: stability, commitment to involving others, being instructive, providing frequent and personal control, and recruiting and replacing suitable personnel.

Another perspective was advanced by Everard & Morris (1999). They maintained, first of all, that the effectiveness of a school depends on the principal collaborating with the teaching staff to achieve a common and explicit vision, a timetable that is faithful to the official programme of study, and frequent evaluations of students' progress with a view to improving the programme of study and students' achievements. Second, they said that the principal of an effective school has a specific administrative plan of action, is reliable, creates a climate of respect, has the ability to set clear objectives and to realise them, demonstrates flexibility, and undertakes initiatives. Furthermore, she or he shows confidence, manages the school finances efficiently and effectively, counsels students and imposes discipline, has the ability to influence the members of school community and to lead them to positive results, builds a collection of robust information, and collaborates with students, parents, all school personnel and people in other institutions.

Characteristics of the Principal: The system for the administration of education in Moradabad is highly centralised, and a school's principal is low in the bureaucratic hierarchy of administration. However, this does make the principal simultaneously a key gatekeeper and a vital communication channel to the other levels of the hierarchy. Notwithstanding the potential influence that could flow from this, in both the primary and secondary sectors, few responsibilities are devolved to managers and leaders at the local or the school level. Thus in Moradabad

schools the Principal's discretion in administrative matters is severely constrained. There are many laws and regulations about the organization and administration of school that describe and prescribe precisely how schools are to be operated, leaving very few decisions in the hands of the principal. Indeed, the Indian education system is the epitome of systems that do not allow the distribution of administrative power and authority to the lower levels; power is limited to the upper administrative levels.

On the one hand the literature suggests quite clearly that principals can influence school effectiveness - albeit indirectly - by way of the school climates they develop. On the other hand, there is some ambiguity concerning the particular activities that are associated with greater school effectiveness. One question that warrants investigation, then, is 'What can principals' best do to promote school effectiveness?' Furthermore, since principals' influence on effectiveness is mediated by school climate - which is a function of school members' perceptions - this question could be addressed with audits of teachers' perceptions and conclusions.

Research Design

Objectives and Research Questions: The data presented here come from a study to investigate the opinions of secondary school teachers concerning the contribution of the school principal to the effectiveness of the school. Two questions guided the investigation:

- I. Which duties and initiatives of the principal do the teachers perceive to be important in the improvement of the school's effectiveness?
- II. Do teachers' opinions regarding the Principal's role in improving school effectiveness vary in relation to gender, experience, type of school and the level of education?

Population and Sample:- The teachers surveyed constituted a convenience sample of 109. Accordingly, the findings of the survey cannot be generalised.

Research Method: Data were collected in a school prefecture in Moradabad District. The questionnaire used was constructed and pilot-tested specifically for the study. The questions were derived from the literature about the principals' roles in the improvement of school effectiveness. In the first part of the questionnaire were questions about the demographics of the respondent. In the second part, the items probed the respondent's perceptions of the contributions that the school Principal made to the school's effectiveness.

Principal's Activities that Promote School Effectiveness: In the means and standard deviations for the questionnaire items are presented. For now we want to limit the discussion to the means and standard deviations, which are arranged in descending size of the means.

The shading of rows will be taken up later, in the discussion section of this paper. First, the teachers saw all of the activities referenced in the questionnaire as quite important to very important, the lowest mean being 3.95. Second, as the standard deviations show, the greatest differences in the teachers' opinions were associated with items 18, 22 and 19, which referenced the activities that these teachers also considered least important to the improvement of school effectiveness. These teachers were least in agreement about the utility of promoting variety in the methods to evaluate students' achievements, or involving community members in the governance of the school. Third, it seems the participants thought that the school principal could improve the school's effectiveness most by working to develop a good school climate and then making sure that appropriate resources are available for instruction. The level for improving school effectiveness - assuring resources for quality teaching, Assigning teachers to appropriate duties, ensuring a good supply of teaching resources, clarifying curricular requirements and constructing a supportive timetable.

Findings of the Study:

In the present study 43 percent of the participants were men and 57 percent were women. 32 percent of all these teachers were aged 31-40 years, while another 33 percent were 41-50 years old. Fewer participants were in the under-30 and 51 age-groups, 18 percent and 19 percent respectively. Thus, senior teachers (41+ years) constituted 52 percent of the sample. As to teaching experience, a large number majority of the participants had between 1 and 15 years of experience in which 28 percent had 1-5 years of experience, 32 percent had 6-10 years under their belts, 20 percent had 11-15 years of experience, and 6 percent had 16-20 years. A small proportion of these teachers had 21-25 years 8 percent. At the upper end of the experience continuum were a small number (11, 10 percent) who had over 25 years of experience. 40 percent of the participants worked in Secondary schools and 32 percent worked in senior secondary schools. As to highest academic qualification attained, 66 percent of the teachers had a bachelor's degree, 11 percent had a second degree, while 19 percent had a post graduate degree. Just under 4 percent of the teachers had a doctorate. Before leaving the sample's demographics, we will comment on the experience data. The distribution of experience was decidedly skewed towards the low end of the scale. Fully 60 percent of the teachers in the sample were relatively low on experience: 28 percent with 1-5 years of experience, 32 percent with 6-10 years. In contrast, of the teachers towards the other end of the experience continuum, a relatively small 18 percent had more than 20 years of experience.

Conclusion: Now to a consideration of how the results of the study relate to extant understandings about the roles of school principals in school effectiveness. We will centre the discussion on the findings in general, school leadership, the management of school culture and climate, and demographics-related differences in teachers' opinions about principal activities that promote school effectiveness. In many ways the findings parallel the results of other research that looked into educators' perceptions concerning the improvement of school effectiveness. By way of illustration we present the essence of only one such investigation, a study of five effective schools in England (Kimber 2003). In those schools leadership was focused on maximising learning, in both vision and actual practices and activities. In those schools leaders supported justified risk-taking by teachers, responded to individual needs and emphasised collaboration. In those schools the staff felt that the principal heard them, appreciated them and developed positive interpersonal relations with humour and timely praise. And, finally, in those schools the principal used a variety of leadership strategies, including distribution of responsibilities and leadership roles, and facilitating professional growth activities. These factors parallel those considered important by the teachers in the findings reported here.

First, as noted above, the teachers saw all of the activities referenced in the questionnaire as quite important to very important, the lowest mean - a fraction below the transition between the 'quite important' and 'very important' sectors on the questionnaire's response scale. We think this may be a proxy indicator of a belief that a school's principal plays a significant role in determining a school's effectiveness.

Second, although the teachers assigned the highest level of importance to good management of decision-making, they rated the use of a participative approach to decision-making lower in importance. One has to wonder whether this is an indication of support for a directive style of leadership and/or simply a reflection of habituation to the centralized system of governance of schooling in Moradabad.

Third, if the teachers' responses are indicative of their ideals, the data suggest a preference for the school's director to take a transformational approach to leadership. This possibility is grounded in the high importance that the respondents attached to the Principal having a strong vision for the school and promoting it among teachers, showing confidence in teachers, emphasising the importance of engaging regularly in professional development, working to build good

interpersonal relations with and among staff, and maintaining open communications with teachers. When a director enacts this kind of leadership, the behaviours are perhaps not as important as the principles they reflect and communicate to others. In this, they constitute transformational leadership. The result of this is that teachers perform beyond expectations and help make their schools more effective.

Fourth, patterns in the data seem to indicate that the participating teachers saw the factors referenced in the questionnaire as relating to three issues: inclusion, climate for teaching and learning, and quality control. This involves giving everyone the opportunity to participate in decision making. It also involves the creation of an environment characterised by structures that support and promote active participation by teachers, students and parents. The factors in this class are mentioned frequently in the literature on school effectiveness. There is a clear consensus among researchers that a school is more likely to be considered productive and effective when the individuals who are involved with it school community, teachers, students and parents are given proactive roles rather than being relegated to just reacting to initiatives by third parties. The integrating factor, these authors posit, is good alignment of the objectives and values that drive the behaviours of teachers, parents and students.

A recent review of theory and literature related to school effectiveness indicated that earlier works reflect the belief that there is a direct relationship between the administrative activities and skills of school principals and school effectiveness. The research findings we discuss in this paper support current understandings. Through a number of questionnaire items, the participating teachers expressed the opinion that the activities of a school's principal are important in the creation of a positive climate and, in turn, the improvement of school effectiveness. Specifically, they attributed the highest levels of importance to: managing decision-making and problem-solving well, creating an atmosphere of collaboration and trust among students and teachers, believing strongly in the importance of developing a climate of collaboration, professional behaviour and open communication among teachers and between teachers and the administration, and nurturing a good school climate.

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