

Original Paper

The School Improvement and the Role of Principal on Enhancing Student Learning Outcomes

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Abstract

This article reviews literature related to school principals and their role in improving student learning outcomes, by presenting and providing many information and evidence provided by academic research related to the principals and their role in student achievement. The article emphasizes that the managers are able to play a positive role in improving students' achievement and results. Although the academic materials indicate indirect influence of managers on student achievement, this indirect influence is important and necessary and contributes greatly to the development of the students and to raising their achievements.

Keywords

school, principal, student outcomes

JEL Classification: I21

1. Introduction

1.1 Hypotheses

The article hypotheses can be summarized as follows:

- 1- The literature indicates that school principal's practices influence teacher job motivation.
- 2- The literature indicates that school principal's practices influence student achievement indirectly.

1.2 Objectives

This article will examine the role of school principals to enhance the quality of teaching and student performance. And it provides intellectual direction and aims at bringing about change through policies and standard operating procedures.

And the article aims at contributing to the existing scholarly debate on the question of whether

principals' practices and processes matter in the performance and outcomes of schools.

More specifically, the article objectives are:

- 1- To contribute to knowledge in the field of school leadership.
- 2- Examine the mechanism through which school principals practices influence student learning and achievement relying on educational literature.

1.3 Procedure

The research will review an important number of theoretical materials that deals with the principals of the school in improving the achievement of students. It also deals with how the principals can affect student achievement by motivating the teachers. In order to achieve the objectives of the article, a literature discussion of important procedures concerns principals' effect on student achievement and on teacher motivation is discussed.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 The Role of the Principals on Enhancing Student Learning Outcomes

The school principals cover many different missions including leadership, teacher evaluation, student discipline, and also student outcome, which reflect the achievements of the students. For that it is a very important mission and its one of the most important goals of the educational process.

For understanding the relationship between School Principals' practices and student learning outcomes, it is vitally important to develop the performance of schools to improve the academic achievement and students' academic success. This article presents and provides many of the information and evidence provided by academic research related to the principals and their role in student achievement.

The school improvement literature makes links between the leadership of the principal, the motivation of teachers and the quality of teaching and learning (Day et al., 2000). The findings of Witziers et al. (2003) indicated no or weak effects, explained by the fact that, at the time, there were few if any studies of indirect effects of leadership on student outcomes. Therefore, there is a need to analyze the relationship between leadership and student achievement and engagement, and in particular the paths through which such transformation impacts on student outcomes.

It's worth mentioning that for many decades, global studies have been undertaken on school leadership and recently, its changing role that compatible with the 21st century needs. In a time of accountability, so much is expected from school leaders including success in all fields of responsibility. This is more and more challenging for them. School leadership demands the principal to become experts at working through these competing obligations (O'Sullivan & Burnham, 2011).

The school improvement literature also makes links between the leadership of the principal and the students outcomes. Robinson, Hohepa and Lloyd (2009) indicated that school leaders can have a significant positive effects on student learning and other important outcomes. Alsaeedi and Male (2013) confirm that school leadership leads to improved student outcomes through inspiring the school workforce to build a sense of efficacy. Also, according to Leithwood et al. (2010), leaders have the

potential to influence teachers by sponsoring meaningful professional development, encouraging their staff to network with others facing similar challenges to learn from their experiences, and structuring their schools to allow for collaborative work among staff.

Researchers (Day et al., 2000, 2009) argue that for principals to do well, they need to engage themselves in “people-centred leadership” by constantly creating, maintaining, reviewing and renewing the learning and achievement for all stakeholders. Hence, principals are required to perform as leaders and managers not only of the school but also of the entire school community. With greater autonomy, they have to confront many new challenges that they have not experienced under the bureaucratic model (Zajda, 2005).

There are many aspects of the work of principals that have changed as a result of education restructuring for the 21st century. School leaders played a daunting array of roles which required them to have the capacity to develop a strong instructional focus and possess a sophisticated understanding of organizations and organizational change (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007). Their ability to make sound resource allocation decisions that led to improved student outcomes was also a critical element of the reform plans.

Evidence from the school improvement literature also highlights that effective leaders exercise an indirect influence on a school’s capacity to improve student outcomes although this influence is not necessarily confined to principal leadership, but includes leadership at all levels. Barker (2007) termed this the “paradox of leadership” as principals’ leadership has consistently been found to have only a small impact on student outcomes and this in itself challenges conventional wisdom. He asserted that a different approach (e.g., sampling strategy) is necessary if the potential role of school leadership in bringing about improvement is to be fully understood and realized. Similarly, Searle and Tymms’ (2007) studied the impact of principals on the performance and attitudes of pupils confirmed Barker’s findings. Their study involving 1000 secondary and primary schools in the UK. They found that there were no differences in performance between schools that changed and did not change their principals. They concluded that there was no direct impact of principals on student outcomes and argued that the principals’ influence was through the departments/teachers, and that their impact is, at best, indirect.

Robinson (2007) in her meta-analysis of 26 studies examined the direct/indirect links between leadership and student outcomes. She pointed out that the contribution of leadership research should be to identify the leadership dimensions that have relatively more or less impact on students and explain how and why these practices work. Robinson identified five leadership dimensions on student outcomes with effect sizes ranging from small through moderately large, to large effects; the latter were associated with leadership dimensions of promoting and participating in teacher learning and development. This confirms that there can be a substantial leadership effect on student outcomes – when leaders focus on improving teacher professional development and ultimately teaching quality. Her findings re-affirmed what has been found by most researchers; namely, where student learning outcomes are concerned, school leadership has the potential to make a significant difference – however,

it all depends on what leaders do and focus on in their schools.

Also, much literature confirms that successful school leadership matters in affecting student outcomes, and the effects are mostly indirect. Although there is a large body of research on how particular leadership behaviours can impact teaching and learning processes (Guskey, 2007; Mulford, 2006) had posited factors such as instructional leadership, transformational leadership and distributed leadership as key elements of organizational effectiveness. Researchers have been examining the extent to which each leadership affects student outcomes (Dimmock & Walker, 2000; Hallinger & Heck, 2009; Robinson et al., 2008; Spillane, 2009; Muijs et al., 2010).

“School leadership is expected to provide motivation as well as build capacities of school teachers” (Alam et al., 2009). Successful principals build a trusting school environment by appreciating the teachers. They work hard to make the teachers motivated. When the teachers are motivated they do their jobs the best and they teach the students with so much enthusiasm. They take more responsibilities for the student achievement; with more enthusiasm teachers do their best to achieve the school’s goals (Tatlah et al., 2014). The teachers can have a comfortable relationship with the principals who encourage, motivate and satisfy them (Adoegun & Olisaemeka, 2011). When the teachers feel comfortable with the principals, they consult them concerns the ways to improve student achievement and share them with ideas and think of more ideas to contribute to the schools and to the student achievement. Leaders must know the things that can make the employees do their best in fulfilling their work. This way the workers will be willing to do their best. Being able to learn the needs of each employee is one of the most important achievements that the leaders need to do. This attributes to better and higher success of the organization (George & Jones, 2008). Keller (2006; as cited by Anyim, Chidi, & Badejo, 2012) suggested that, when the leader supports the teachers, makes them express themselves and expects the best from them, they give him their best and vice versa. This can help to improve the student achievement.

School leadership and students are linked indirectly. The link between them is mediated by the teachers. The more the teachers are motivated and satisfied, the more they can influence the student achievement. That is why one thing that the principals need to work on in order to improve student achievement is to better motivate the teachers (Saravia-Shore, 2008).

3. Discussion

A result of the literature affirms the influence of principals on student outcomes. And the literature above linked between the school principal’s practices and student achievement. It also connected between teacher motivation and the leadership practices. According to the literature, the principals are not in direct contact with the students. The teachers however are in direct contact with the students. The principals can improve student outcomes by motivating the teachers and making them more willing to put more effort in the students. Educational literature confirms that managers are able to play a positive role in improving students’ achievement and results. Although the academic research indicates indirect

influence by managers on student achievement, this indirect influence is important and necessary and contributes greatly to the development of students and raising their results.

According to the literature, school leadership leads to improved student outcomes through inspiring the school workforce to build a sense of efficacy (Alsaedi & Male, 2013). Leaders influence student achievement via teachers (Alam et al., 2009; Adoegun & Olisaemeka, 2011; Tatlah et al., 2014; George & Jones, 2008; Anyim, Chidi, & Badejo, 2012; Alsaedi & Male, 2013). Principals can improve student outcome by engaging themselves in “people-centered leadership” by constantly creating, maintaining, reviewing and renewing the learning and achievement for all stakeholders (Day et al, 2000, 2009). They can do so by confronting many new challenges (Zajda, 2005). Some researchers such as Searle and Tymms’ (2007) and Robinson (2007) argued that there is no direct influence of the principals on student achievement. They argue that the principals’ influence was through the departments/teachers, and that their impact is, at best, indirect. Some researchers argues that the style of leadership has an influence on student achievement. They claimed that the leadership style, such as, the instructional leadership, transformational leadership and distributed leadership are key elements of organizational effectiveness.

4. Conclusions and Implications of the Research

The major conclusion we can get out of this research is that the principals’ efforts related to student’s outcomes isn’t useless. It can give a positive results related to the achievement of students and their learning, especially if the principals focus on promoting and participating in teacher learning and development. Also principals, who take practical steps in improving teacher job motivation and develop a group of procedures, can influence the classroom environment in positive ways and can affect the student outcome in their schools. This can be reflected on student achievement and their outcomes.

5. Recommendations for Future Research

Future research is recommended. A large-scale field study involving a large number of schools is required. The purpose of these studies is to examine the link between the behaviors and policies of the principals and the academic student’s outcomes. The purpose of these studies is to get more reliable data to know the most important practices and policies pursued by the principals, which contribute to the high student achievement.

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