

The Impact of Leadership on Student Learning

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Abstract

This study aims at shedding light on the impact of leadership on student learning. To start with, there has to be a definition of the concept “leadership” which may be considered a complex one. Leadership has two functions; the first is “giving directions” and the second is “having influence”. But this definition is too narrow for the concept “leadership” which entails a large responsibility for those who are in charge for conducting things. But when it comes to leadership in a teaching institute, things totally change whereby the responsibility is doubled. Therefore, leadership in teaching works towards both improving learning and teaching at the same time. High quality leaders may achieve this impact on the teaching/learning process through establishing clear directions for everyone to follow, providing teachers with training that will enhance their teaching techniques as well as finding suitable conditions in order to help both teaching and learning.

Keywords: Impact, Leadership, Learning, Teaching.

1. Introduction

The main aim in the teaching process is to improve both teaching and learning. Some try to improve teaching and learning through changing curricula, seeking cooperative learning, to name just a few. All the measures taken depend highly on the motivations of leadership. Therefore, effective leadership is considered of utmost importance for the success of the learning process.

In the literature, there are adjectives used to describe leadership. Such adjectives are “participative,” “democratic,” “transformational,” “moral,” “strategic” and the like. The afore-mentioned descriptions work towards two important objectives that will improve the institution’s effectiveness: the first is setting directions and the second is influencing personnel to move in those directions in order to excel in whatever they do.

The most important types of leadership that are described in the literature are as follows:

- 1.1 Instructional leadership which is concerned about improving teaching skills inside the classroom.
- 1.2 Transformational leadership which works towards broader changes to improve learning.
- 1.3 Participative leadership which is concerned about the priorities that should be made and to be pursued.

Successful leadership depends highly on personnel working in the education organization. For example, leaders depend on teachers in the organization who work in conjunction with the other administrative colleagues in order to reach the intended goal. In some educational institutions, there might be an external support from other organizations in the community to enhance an effective leadership.

There is what is called “distributed leadership” which can be used interchangeably with “participative leadership” that requires the collaboration of many in order to achieve the intended target. According to Gronn(2002), promising efforts have recently begun to extend the concept of distributed leadership beyond its commonsense uses and provide evidence about its nature and effects. Such efforts are to be exerted at all levels in the organization such as encouraging people to think of their work from a different perspective. The main responsibility of a leader in the organization is to build a shared vision for improving the learning / teaching process.

2. The Force behind a Successful Leadership

There are many practices that may be undertaken in order to reach a successful leadership. What applies to educational organizations also applies to other organizations of different fields.

The main core of a successful leadership lies in achieving the following practices as follows:

2.1 Setting Goals

People in the organization should have shared understandings about the organization and its goals. In this case, people will be motivated to apply such goals in their work and help them have a sense of identity in their work. Promoting effective communication within the organization may also help in improving shared purposes of the organization.

2.2 Personnel Development

The development of the people working in an organization through clear organizational goals contributes positively to members' work-related motivation. Also, motivation helps in the capacities employees need in order to move towards their goals. Leadership practices affect positively the performance of employees through offering intellectual stimulation, providing support and appropriate models of good practices and beliefs which are important to the organization.

2.3 Organization Development

The success of student learning depends highly on the motivations of teachers and administrators. On the other hand, good conditions in the organization will positively affect the performance of the teachers. Successful leaders develop their organizations in such a way in order to strengthen as well as modify organizational structures in order to facilitate the work of teachers and administrators.

3. *The Effects of Leadership on Students' Learning*

The question that may arise here about the effects of leadership on students' learning is that "how can successful leadership which is practiced at a distance from students influence students' learning?" Leaders play a significant role in identifying as well as supporting learning. Leadership works on shaping the teaching institution such as setting goals and structure, instructions to be followed, the number of students in each section, the forms of pedagogy among others. Needless to say, that these factors are responsible for the learning of students which are pre-set by leaders as part of their job.

3.1 Evidence on the effects of leadership on students

There are different kinds of research that have been conducted on the effects of leadership on students. The first evidence is the qualitative case study which has been conducted in teaching institution settings (Gezi, 1990).

The second evidence is the large-scale quantitative studies which have been reviewed by Hallinger and Heck (1996a, 1996b, 1998).

The third type of evidence is similar to the second type in the sense that it is also large-scale and quantitative in nature. The difference is that instead of examining the overall leadership effects, the focus is put on the specific leadership practices. This kind of evidence can be seen in the work of Waters, Marzano and McNulty (2003).

Most qualitative case studies are the ones that examine the impact of leadership in educational institutions which are in need of exceptional kind of leadership. On the other hand, large-scale quantitative studies are more reliable sources of evidence about the effects of leadership which are of utmost importance.

4. *The Basics of Successful Leadership*

The success of leaders responsible for building high performance organizations which make greater expectations to student learning depends highly on leaders' interaction with the community at large and the organization in which they find themselves in. Successful practices are the basics of good leadership. According to Hallinger and Heck (1999), they categorized leader practices as "purposes," "people" and "structures and social systems." On the other hand, Leithwood (1996) categorized leader practices as "setting directions," "developing people" and "re-designing the organization." These categories of leadership practices are considered useful in many different cultural and organizational contexts (Bass, 1997).

4.1 Setting Directions

One of the aspects of leadership is helping people to develop shared understandings about the organization and its activities and goals. Getting to know the goals will help in motivating people, such goals are challenging but achievable. Also, goals help people find sense of identity for themselves in the work they perform.

4.2 Developing People

Being motivated by the pre-set goals by the leaders is not the only condition to develop people. Such motivations are influenced by the direct interaction between leaders and employees (Lord and Maher, 1993). Leaders should have knowledge of what is required to improve the quality of teaching and learning. This kind of knowledge is referred to as the leaders' emotional intelligence. Leaders who are endowed with "emotional intelligence" are the ones who can make use of the employees' capacity and increase enthusiasm and optimism. In this case, leaders may get the best out of their employees and as a result increase their productivity.

4.3 Redesigning the Organization

It goes without saying that successful leaders are the ones who can make their organizations effective through supporting the performance of employees as well as students. This kind of practice assumes that the purpose behind organizational structure is to make the work of employees easier which may help in strengthening as well as modifying organizational structure.

5. Distributed Leadership

Leadership is not the kind of job that can be performed in isolation from the collaboration of other employees and administrators in the organization. This is what is called in management "delegation of authority" whereby the top management can delegate certain tasks to others to perform. Principals typically count on key teachers for such leadership, along with their local administrative colleagues (Hord, Steigelbauer and Hall, 1984). According to Gronn (2002), the impact of distributed leadership has become an important issue in recent research although the concept dates back almost 70 years. In simple words, leadership is not in the hands of one person, it is practiced by other members of the organization.

The concept of distributed leadership overlaps with democratic and participative leadership. To give a better definition of distributed leadership, "it is a set of practices that are enacted by people at all levels rather than a set of personal characteristics and attributes located in people at the top" (Fletcher and Kaufer, 2003).

Distributed leadership can be divided into two forms: additive and holistic according to Gronn (2002). Additive forms entail the dissemination of leadership tasks to members in the organization without explicit interaction by those members. While holistic forms of distributed leadership emphasize the interdependence of those providing leadership. Such forms produce leadership activities which stem from dynamic as well as multi-directional processes which in turn lead to learning for the individuals and their organizations.

Distributed leadership reflects the distribution of tasks in the organization. As a result, decision making is not in the hands of one leader and this will reduce the chances of errors made by one leader. In simple words, when decision making is undertaken at a horizontal level in the organization this will reduce the risk of taking wrong decisions. Also, distributed leadership gives other members in the organization the opportunity to contribute in the decision making. Resnick and Glennan (2002) emphasize the importance of mutual accountability between leaders and members in the organization. In this way, members in the organization will have a better experience concerning the organization they are working in. In addition, when there is this kind of collaboration, this will enable members and leaders in the organization learn from one another.

6. Conclusion

This study has summarized the main ideas related to effective leadership and student learning. It has been found that effective leadership plays a vital role in the teaching/learning process; therefore, widespread interest has been introduced in order to improve leadership which is a key element in the success of any teaching institution.

Also, it has been found that there are many factors that have an impact on the success of leadership such as setting goals, developing personnel and developing the organization. A successful leader may work at all levels in order to lift the teaching institution into a higher standard.

Leadership is considered one of the most difficult tasks to perform; therefore, there is what we call "distributed leadership". This kind of leadership enables leaders to delegate authority and collaborate with other members in the organization in decision making. In this case, leadership will be decentralized in the sense that leadership is not going to be in the hands of the leader only. Other members in the organization will be in charge for certain tasks which will in turn reinforce their experience in their field and shoulder part of the responsibility of the leader.

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