

Practices and Challenges of Instructional Leadership in Government Secondary Schools of Shebedino Woreda Sidama Zone, Snnpr, Ethiopia

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate instructional leadership practices and challenges in government secondary schools of the shebedino woreda, Sidama, Ethiopia. In order to meet the objectives of the study descriptive survey research design was employed. The study reviewed the related literature on leadership aspects, dimensions of instructional leadership, teaching- learning roles of instructional leadership, and attempts were also made to identify factors that affect the effectiveness of instructional leadership. The research method employed in the study was both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Accordingly, a questionnaires were prepared to be filled by teachers, principals, vice principals, and department heads for the quantitative part. For the qualitative, individual interviews, focus group discussion and document analysis were administered. Using availability sampling techniques four secondary schools in study woreda were addressed by this study. The researcher incorporated 77% of the sample populations as respondents. 44 instructional leaders in the schools, 82 teachers, 4 woreda education office and section heads, 54 students' representatives and 2 woreda supervisors were primary sources of data. The quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation, and independent t-test while content analysis approach was used to analyze qualitative data. Likewise, data gathered through interview, focus group discussion and document analysis were considered to complement the questionnaires in narrative form. The findings of the study revealed that principals show low practiced in their instructional leadership role due to work overload, lack of training in educational leadership and management, shortage of resource, lack of commitment and lack of support from concerning body. Finally, based on the findings conclusions, recommendations were made on capacity building and empowering of principals to do their work effectively on instructional leadership rather than administration work, in turn, encouraging participatory approach of leadership. Furthermore, Sidama zone education department with woreda education office is responsible to give directives, supports and guidelines in the cases that whenever shortcomings and gaps were observed, provide adequate budget and arrange workshops, seminars, short and long term training in collaboration with different stakeholders and the schools should organize public relations to create school-community links. Further study in the area advisable.

Keywords: Practice, Challenges, Instructional Leadership

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Introduction

Leadership is an influential process in supporting others to work enthusiastically at the aim of shared goals or objectives and it is frequently seen as an aspect of management, with real leaders often characterized as charismatic individuals with visionary and the ability to motivate and stimulate others. Instructional leaders in this study context are defined as school personnel who are responsible for instructional leadership of supervision of teaching and learning performance and lead over all activities of instruction within the school.

The School institutions which mainly carried out teaching learning activities consists people: community, students, teachers and support staff and administrators. Although all these people have their own objectives to attain by being in school, the school principals are key actors in education playing crucial roles to implement educational sector development.

Instructional leadership practice is the application of knowledge to effect change in teaching and learning process. Mulford (2006) stated as a principal is one who provides individual support to appreciate the work of the staff, taking their opinion into consideration, promoting the atmosphere of trust. The principal is setting a structure that encourages the staff to take part in decision making by distributing leadership and supporting autonomy. The leader has to work toward consensus to be arrived at by the staff and communicate it to both students and staff members that will give a strong sense of focus of the school. Murphy (1990) Schools with successful and effective leaderships are generally characterized by the way they setting vision and defining the school mission, managing curriculum and instruction, supervising and evaluating instruction, allocating resources, providing professional skill development, and creating conducive and healthy school environment.

As supposed by Cruz (1995), effective principals should communicate with parents, teachers and students and be team builders by building coalitions between these stakeholders. Furthermore, effective principals are

well aware that there is a turbulent environment and they should address the needs of the outside groups that are too plentiful. Besides, effective principals should possess certain skills in conflict management, active listening, problem solving and consensus building. Instructional leaders are often faced with a number of roadblocks: incompetence in educational leadership, lack of incentive for teachers, problems related with teachers promotions, lack of administrative skills and commitment of those assigned as school leaders, shortage of educational materials, or finance are among problems frequently cited as factors that hinder effective performance of instructional leaders (MoE, 2005).

In today's context, the roles of educational leaders are primarily characterized as coping with changes and complexities. Davis et al (1983). Accordingly, the educational leaders need professional skills and are expected to be competent in various dimensions. They need to be educational visionaries, instructional and curriculum leaders, assessment experts, disciplinarian, community builders, public relation and communication aspects, budget analysts, facility managers, special program administrators as well as guardians of various legal, contractual, and policy makers and initiatives.

In Ethiopia, after downfall of since 1991 an attempt has been made to make the educational management system decentralized and professional. As clearly stated in the Education Training Policy document (1994), educational management would be decentralized specially at institutional level and schools become autonomous in their internal administration. As result, different measures were taken by the government and MoE in line with the policy. Among these measures some include the education system was decentralized, different individuals were permitted to involve in the education decision making affairs and leadership and managerial trainings were provided to those on leadership positions and others. Now a day regional education bureau and Sidama zone education department have been working based on national education policy guideline

According to information obtained from Education office, there were some attempts to involve the various professional individuals in leadership activity and practicing instructional leadership both at primary and secondary schools levels. Many principals were sent to higher education to attend their leadership trainings at in-service program. Special training was also provided to school principals and supervisors in relation to instructional leadership in combination with Zone education department experts while introducing general education quality improvement program (GEQIP) and its implementation. However, the changes observed and the student achievement results obtained in schools were very low.

Although there might be various reasons for this low achievement of students, the instructional leadership practices as one major problem. The problem of effectively implementing instructional leadership was still one of the crucial challenges in the schools according to the woreda education office. Hence, the purpose of this study, is to investigate the practices and challenges of instructional leadership in secondary government schools of Shebedino woreda, then tried to recommend the ways to overcome the problem.

Depending upon this, the study will answer the following research questions:

- 1) What are current practices of instructional leadership in government secondary schools?
- 2) To what extent are the school leaders performing the role of instructional leadership effectively?
- 3) What are the major challenges that faced the instructional leadership to achieving objectives in the schools?

Significance of the Study

The results of this study would help to create awareness for secondary schools instructional leaders by revealing what sort of instructional leadership competences and skills do they lack while they were leading their schools and how should they fill these gaps in order to bring changes in their respective secondary schools. It also provides valuable information to the schools about how do they practice instructional leadership roles and may enable them to take corrective actions for the major challenges they faced. It May serve as information source for educational officials and policy makers at different levels of the education hierarchy to identify the gap existed in relation to the instructional leadership and address the problems. Finally may use as a reference material for those who want to carry out in-depth research in the area.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Design of the Study

For this study descriptive survey design was used; since it attempts to secure information as currently exists. Best and Kahn (2003:14) have argued that this design is concerned with conditions or relationships that exist, opinions that are held, process that are going on, effects that are evident or trends that are developing. The intention of the study is to be assessing the existing situation and to describe opinions that are held on by participants of the study and to look into school leaders problems with regard to instructional leadership practices. Thus, the design would be preferred to study the practices and problems of school leadership in depth and to give appropriate recommendations to the problem. In this study, both quantitative and qualitative approaches were used. Using mixed research method could neutralize or cancel the biases of any single method,

and it is used as a means for seeking convergence and integrating qualitative and quantitative data (Creswell, 2009:14). Information that cannot be obtained through quantitative method can be effective in obtaining such information by qualitative method. And confirmed findings from different data sources through triangulated data instruments and consequently drawn valid general conclusions

Sample size and Sampling Techniques

The school principals, vice principals, students, education office and section heads, and supervisors were considered as the sampling population since their closeness to school and school principals. To determine the sample size of principals, vice principals, supervisors, department heads, education office and section heads and students representatives the researcher used non probability available and purposive sampling. To decide sample size of teachers, simple random sampling technique was implemented in order to cover large representatives. Instruments for Data Collection

In order to obtain ample information from respondents and the schools environment, both types of data are gathered by using appropriate data collection tools. The questionnaires developed and administered to the groups of respondents (school principals, vice principals and teachers) included both close ended and open ended items. Semi structured interview questions were used to collect data so as to get pertinent information from woreda education office and section heads, as well as supervisors. Focus group discussion (FGD) guided by semi-structured questions was designed to seek in-depth information on the implementation from Student Councils of the schools. Consequently, documents like training manual, meeting Minutes and reports were reviewed.

Validity and Reliability

After the questionnaires were filled and returned, the reliability and validity of items were measured by using Crobach's alpha method by the help of SPSS version 20. Accordingly using Chronbach alpha, reliability of the questionnaire designed to be filled by teachers and department heads has got a reliability coefficient of 0.83. According to Cohen, et.al (2008) this shows that the questionnaire designed for teachers has got reliability. The result obtained was a very good indication of the internal consistency of items. To be assuring the face validity, senior colleagues and advisors were invited to provide their comment. Hence, some improvements were made on few items. Then questionnaire was corrected, refined and made ready for final study by improving three items.

Method of Data Analysis

Depending on the nature of the variables quantitative as well as qualitative data analysis method was employed. Descriptive and inferential statistics were employed by using SPSS-20 to analyze close ended quantitative data collected through questionnaires. Frequencies, percentages, means, standard deviation and t-test used to analyze and describe the results of the research findings. The quantitative data obtained through Likert scale in questionnaires were organized and tabulated around the sub-topics related to the research questions. On the other hand, the data which was solicited by the use of open-ended questionnaire, the interview, focus group discussion and document review were qualitatively analyzed and interpreted.

Result and discussion

Characteristics of Respondents

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents by Qualification and Work Experience

No	Item	Questionnaire respondents				Interview respondents			
		Range	T	I.L		WEO,SH			
			No	%	No	%	No	%	
1	Age	15-19	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
		20-25	9	10.9	-	-	-	-	-
		26-30	23	28	15	34	-	-	-
		31-35	29	35.3	20	45.5	-	-	-
		36-40	13	15.9	5	11.4	6	100	-
		>40	8	9.8	4	9	-	-	-
2	Qualification	Diploma	1	1.2	-	-	-	-	-
		1st degree	76	92.8	36	81.8	3	50	-
		Masters degree	5	6	8	18.2	3	50	-
3	Total work experience	<5 YEARS	14	17					
		6-10 YEARS	36	43.9	26	59			
		11-15 YEARS	12	14.6	12	27.4	2	33.3	
		16-20 YEARS	9	10.9	6	13.6	4	66.7	
		>20 YEARS	11	13.4					

T= Teachers, I.L= Instructional Leadership, WEO& SH= Woreda education office and section head

Maturity, qualification and work experience of teachers, principals, supervisors and WEOEs are the important factors to create favorable conditions for gathering data and implementing instructional leadership role. Concerning to respondents age majority of respondents were between 26-40 (63.3%). This shows that, the majority of respondents were mature enough to know what has been happening in their respective schools, hence would be able to provide pertinent and detailed information about instructional leadership practice and they could be in a better position to create effective achievement.

In terms of qualification, the majority of respondent's instructional leaders (main principals, vice principals and department heads), woreda education office heads were 1st degree holders and insignificant number hold masters degree. It may, therefore, be conclude that a considerable number of teachers and instructional leaders do not satisfy the standard set by the MoE (1998) which requires at least MA/MSC/MED degree for principals, supervisor and teachers of secondary schools. Thus, it would be possible to conclude from this the placement of individuals in a leadership position was more an appointment basis rather than based on the academic qualification.

Regarding work experience of respondents, majority of teachers, principals and WEO heads have served more than 6 years. This indicates that, participants were well experienced in the areas of instructional leader roles and practice to discuss about their school principal's practice and challenges in the school.

Stating the school vision, mission and promoting conducive learning environment

The role of instructional leaders to create a common vision for the school, communicate on the vision to all stakeholders, develop missions that are easily understood for all stakeholders was low and instructional leadership practice also lack of clear and understandable specific, short and precise mission statement and its practices there is weak side on identifying the hindrance to achieve missions and to developing a set of annual school-wide goals focused on student achievements and not effectively and efficiently practiced in the study schools.

Creating positive environment in which good working relationship was found below average, the advocate school environment conducive to student achievements was relatively not attained at required level, instructional leaders' provide low support in building collaborative cultures among teachers and they were not encouraged a culture of trust between school leaders and teaching staff and also school leaders did not establish a productive working relationship with the community.

Managing curriculum, instruction and monitoring progress

The outcome of study demonstrate that instructional leaders do not coordinate the curriculum evaluation process of the school to address problems related to the curriculum, they were not checking periodically students result in order to ensure the effective implementation of the curriculum, school leaders also did not advice teachers and department heads regarding the challenges they faced in relation to the implementation of the curriculum as required manner and inadequate encouraging and providing the necessary support to departments and teachers periodically evaluate and comment for curriculum improvement. Effective monitoring and evaluating instructional performance regularly based on annual plan and meet individually with teachers to discuss students' academic progress were unsatisfactory.

Resources allocation, utilization and professional skill development

Timely allocation of human, material and financial resources for instructional process, allocated adequate resource for teaching learning improvement, mobilization of the resource from different sources for instructional improvement purpose and effective use of the resources (human, material and financial) for instructional process were not satisfactory.

The instructional leaders to perform the role of professional skill development found to be ineffectively functional, they did not give constructive suggestions to the teachers regularly as to how they can improve their teaching and to provide inadequate time for professional skill development. School leaders expected to play great role in facilitating teachers' professional skill development, however, the study reveals that instructional leaders in facilitating teachers' professional skill development was insufficient.

Building effective relationship, supporting and managing conflict

Instructional leaders' role of understand and analyze the school situations and effectively interact with school communities, make decision based on common understandings encourage teachers to support each others were found in below expectation, whereas treat school community equitably and fairly and listen to and accept teachers suggestions were found to be good level. Taking constructive criticism, setting of exemplary roles by working hard with staff were ineffectively practiced in the under study schools. As the data obtained from quantitative analysis, the supporting and guiding role of principals not exceed from table meeting consumption. Similarly conflict management roles of instructional leaders to use problem framing and solving skill effectively,

challenging and mediating resistance, confront and resolve problems in timely manner and provide a safe and supportive environment were ineffective practices.

Challenges to instructional leadership effectiveness

The study of findings revealed that lack of training on instructional leadership, lack of in-service training and teachers' development program and lack of qualified teachers in all subject area were the challenges of instructional leadership effectiveness. Similarly lack of efficient cooperation with school boards, teachers, students, woreda educational managers and school communities were the challenges that hamper instructional leadership improvement in the study area. Besides, except stationary materials for teaching-learning practices schools principals face, for lack of adequate qualified teachers, shortage of school furniture, shortage of electricity, lack of plasma, shortage of adequate instructional time, shortage of student textbook, shortage of library space and time and lack of adequate budget support with reference to lack of resource availability, work over load, lack of commitment to improve instruction and limitation to organize the school community. This in turn confronts effectiveness of instructional leaders to play their vital role to provide conducive learning environment.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Regarding to current practices of instructional leaders; to create a common vision for the school, communicate on the vision to all stakeholders, develop missions that are easily understood for all stakeholders, creating positive environment in which good working relationship exist, advocate school environment conducive to student achievements, provide support in building collaborative cultures among teachers and encourage a culture of trust between school leaders and teaching staff and establish a productive working relationship with the community were unsatisfactory. Consequently, the curriculum evaluation process, checking periodically students result in order to ensure the effective implementation of the curriculum, advice teachers and department heads regarding the challenges they faced in relation to the implementation of the curriculum as required manner and encouraging and providing the necessary support to departments and teachers periodically were ineffective.

Besides, provide adequate time for professional skill development, timely allocation of human, material and financial resources for instructional process, allocated adequate resource for teaching learning improvement, mobilization of the resource from different sources for instructional improvement purpose and effective use of the resources for instructional process were not adequate.

Likewise, giving adequate time after class visit to discuss the problems and plan improvement together, hold regular meeting with each department for the purpose of improving curriculum and instruction and encourage teachers to use different instructional methods and regular follow-up and to give feedback to teachers and improve students' academic success, understand and analyze the school situations and effectively interact with school communities, make decision based on common understandings, encourage teachers to support each others, use constructive criticism, setting of exemplary roles by working hard with staff, problem solving on timely were ineffectively practiced in schools. Instructional leaders face challenges; lack of skills and training, lack of cooperation with stakeholders for instructional improvement, lack of resource availability, work over load, lack of commitment were major challenges for instructional leaders to effectively implement instructional task under study schools.

It is advisable to school leaders to devote more time on instructional activities than non-academic tasks. They should also prepare short training opportunity for their respective schools. The education department and office heads at zonal and woreda level should provide the necessary budget and supplies adequately on time and making the transfer and deployment of teachers before the opening or after the closing of schools and need to show their professional commitment to improve the quality of school outcomes by devoting much of their time, finance and material resource for the schools with severe shortage of these items were observed. Regional Education Bureau with zone and Woreda education office need to revise the criteria used for selecting and appointing secondary school principals and serious consideration shall give for field of study and level of education. The further research is recommended to tackle the problems of instructional leadership to bring the desired changes or outcomes in the sector of education.

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