Behavioral Characteristics Rated by District Education Officers (DEOs) for Effective Principalship

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate, by means of quantitative research methods, District Education Officers (DEOs) perceptions regarding the behavioral characteristics of effective secondary schhol principals. The major findings were based on the results of the eight interviews conducted with DEOs. In an effort to determine the findings, the research worked with the data, organizing it, breaking it down question by question, interview by interview, then synthesizing it searching for patterns of responses. It was noted that DEOs value common aspects of the principal's role differently and to avoid degrees. If the principalship is about leadership and effective leadership is defined differently by different people, then what an effective principal does may be viewed differently.

Key Words: Perception, District Education Officer (DEO), Effectivity, Principal, Leadership, Behavioral Characteristics.

INTRODUCTION

"Over the past thirty years, researchers have built a compelling body of evidence that links successful schools and effective principals" (Branch, Hanushek, & Rivkin, 2013). Effective school researchers hold that a key element of an effective school is an effective principal. Portin, Schneider, DeArmond, & Gundlach (2003) states, "The principal has to be the person the instructional personnel look to for the instructional leadership in the system". With the same perception, almost 45 years before Weber (1971) listed "strong leadership from the principal" as a characteristic of "successful" schools. Keller (1998) states:

Research in this area strongly suggests that they (principals) make a big difference in shaping the education that goes on in a school. If a school is going to be successful academically, it needs someone whose potential can't be summed up on a scoreboard.

According to the instructional leadership argument, the generalist- managerial role of the principal must give way to one oriented toward curriculum and instruction. Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom (2004) believes that the separatist viewpoint of instructional leadership and middle management is misdirected and as characterized, produces a false dichotomy between the concepts of educational management and instructional leadership.

Principals are aware of much of the research concerning what it means to be effective and understand the importance of their job. The concern has always been where to spend their time, knowing they need to be efficient managers and effective instructional leaders. Merely understanding the problem has not helped the principal cope with the challenge.

Wallace Foundation (2013) states that "The research has not always brought about changes in the way principals do their jobs. Many principals know what to say about leading a school, though they may not know how to actually do it. In fact, researchers have repeatedly noted a mismatch between what principals profess and what they practice. Simply stated, the principals know what they are supposed to be doing, but the observation of their behaviors appears to be out of alignment with what they know. Help understand the differences between the management and leadership of a school, an examination of the relative importance of the various tasks of the principal's job must be done. Since the superintendent is responsible for the evaluation of the principal, there must be agreement between the superintendent and the principal regarding leadership and management. Principals often do what event is they think they are supposed to do in the eyes of their superintendent."

The issue is really to know what is expected of the person identified as the principal. Can they effectively blend the role of building manager and instructional leader, and in their efforts, be acknowledged for both by their immediate supervisor, the superintendent? Will the successful blend of their responsibilities, both management and leadership, enable them to be described as effective?

In the preface to Instructional Leadership; How Principals Make a Difference. Smith and Andrews (1989) begin with the following statement which describes the importance of principal and superintendent agreement in reference to the role of the principal:

> The most important obligation is to build a structure of relationships within schools so that all children learn. To fulfill this obligation, the most important function of educational leadership is to create good schools. By creating good schools, we mean principals and superintendents use their professional knowledge and skills to foster conditions where all children can grow to their full potential. (p. vii)

To aid in the understanding of their accountability, principals need to know how superintendents describe an effective principal. Yukl (1998) believes that there is no simple answer to the question of how to evaluate leadership effectiveness. The decision or determination of effectiveness lies with the person's perception of what is effective. For example in business, top management may prefer different criteria than other employees, customers, or shareholders. To cope with the problems of incompatible criteria, delayed effects, and the preferences of different stake holders, it is usually best to include a variety of criteria in research on leadership effectiveness and to examine the impact of the leader on each criterion over an extended period of time.

The principal's leadership behavior has been a subject of discussion since the early 1960s. Smith and Andrews (1989) cite the work of role theorists (Kahn & Rosenthal, 1964; Pfeffer & Salancik, 1975) suggest that:

> The principal's leadership behavior is shaped by the perceptions of how other people (the superintendent, other principals, teachers, students and parents) want the leader to behave. The principal's perception of role requirements is influenced by prescriptions such as job description1 day-to-day requests, and orders and directions from the superintendent. (p.6)

Literature supports the need for leadership. Defining effective leadership is difficult, whether it is instructional, transformational, or transactional, leadership needs to be present and visible. Trying to decide what type of leadership has been as difficult as trying to define it. "Despite thousands of empirical studies yielding hundreds of definitions of leadership there is still no consensus about it. We still don't know conclusively what distinguishes leaders from non-leaders and strong leaders from weak ones" (Bennis & Nanus, 1985).

Many experts in the field of education define leadership differently or identify it by style though Keller (1998) notes Elmore's contention that, "A principal's approach or style matters far less than the central project of helping teachers".

In a classic work, Sergiovanni (1987) identified successful school leadership as activities that are directed toward the improvement of teaching and learning for students. The principal assumes an active role in this enhancement, but also acts as an enabler of others to function more effectively.

When researchers examined good schools they did not look for heroes, but they did observe that good schools usually have good principals. In response to this research, policy makers looked for strong leadership, a term that quickly gave way among educators to "instructional leader" and, more recently, facilitator. Through all of this, the tough question remained as to how do effective principals who are considered effective do it? If principals play an important part in school improvement and student achievement, what are their secrets and what axe the limits to their powers? (Keller, 1998).

The principal is the key person in the building who can truly make a difference in what takes place in the school (Branch, Hanushek, & Rivkin, 2012). The importance of his or her role cannot be overstated and the need for him/her to be both an effective leader, as well as an efficient manager is a balance many find difficult to strike (Goldring, Porter, Murphy, Elliott, & Cravens, 2007). To make matters more confusing, principals are often rewarded more for running an efficient, well-managed building rather than for attempting to be initiators of change which is designed to positively impact teaching and learning (Horng, Kalogrides, & Loeb, 2010). Studies have presented research on leadership styles, traits, and behaviors that are regarded as the characteristics of effective principals. The problem that arises is the challenge to understand the research and to make connections amongst the different leadership and management behaviors considered to be effective and their application to one's current principal assignment. The purpose of this study was to investigate, District Education Officer (DEO) perceptions of the behavioral characteristics of effective secondary school principals.

Using a quantitative design, the following research questions were investigated:

1. What are the perceptions of superintendents' regarding the behavioral characteristics of effective secondary school principals?

2. To what extent are the reported perceptions of superintendents' regarding the behavioral characteristics of effective secondary school principals congruent with the research?

METHODOLOGY
Research Sample
DEOs were selected as the participants of study, because they are responsible for the formal observation and evaluation process in reference to a principal's performance. The perception of behavioral characteristics of an effective principal undoubtedly plays a role in the superintendent's evaluation of the performance of principals.

Research Procedures

Eight DEOs of schools located in the Karachi region were sent letters inviting them to participate in the study. An enclosed reply form and a stamped, self-addressed envelope for each DEO were also enclosed, so they could indicate whether or not they would participate in the study.

Development of Interview Instrument
The interview instrument for this study was developed as a product of the literature search in the areas of organizational management behaviors and the instructional leadership behaviors associated with being a school

principal. During the search specific note was made of the behaviors in each area. Areas investigated included the principal's ability to demonstrate a vision and formulate a mission in regard to that vision. The necessity for a strong knowledge base in curriculum and supervision of instruction was noted, as well as the ability to monitor and evaluate program success based on test data. It is acknowledged that principals play a role in determining the climate in a school and the ability to manage many administrative tasks.

For this study, each citation of instructional leadership behavior and organizational management behavior of a school principal was cited. At the completion of the literature search, a matrix of the identified instructional leadership and organizational management behaviors was constructed to provide a graphic representation of the literature review. The questions for the interview were derived from the matrix with the purpose of revealing the DEOs' perceptions regarding the behavioral characteristics of effective secondary school principals. The questions, along with the DEOs' responses, provided a rich database for comparison with the literature in order to determine what behavioral characteristics would be considered as effective when exhibited by the secondary school principal. The questionnaire comprised of the following areas:

Area 1: DEO's background information

Area 2: Self-perceptions of leadership

Area 3: The reliable indicators of effective school principals

Area 4: The principal's role in regard to change culture and climate

Area 5: The principal's role in regard to change

Area 6: The principal's role in regard to goal setting

Area 7: The principal's role in regard to staff development

Area 8: The principal's role in regard to curriculum, instruction and assessment.

Area 9: DEO's advice to senior committee

Area 10: Behavioral characteristics of effective school principals

The final area served as a recap of the entire interview and provided the DEOs with one last opportunity to comment on their perception of the behavioral characteristics of effective school principals.

Treatment of Data

Transcripts of the tape-recorded interviews provided the data for this study. Patterns of responses were examined for each question. Each interviewee was assigned a code ensuring an accurate record could be maintained and anonymity would be guaranteed as well. In addition, a Chi-square statistical analysis was utilized to determine whether or not the observed frequencies of the interviewee responses were a "good fit" to the expected frequencies.

FINDINGS

The null hypothesis states that there is no significant difference between DEO perceptions regarding behavioral characteristics of effective secondary school principals and the leading research covered in Introduction section.

Step 1: In this study, the researcher tested the null hypothesis relative to the perceptions of DEOs regarding the behavioral characteristics of effective secondary school principals. The test statistic for testing this null hypothesis is Chi-Square.

Step 2: There were two categories of responses. There were fifteen questions to be responded to. There were 14 degrees of freedom associated with the test of the null hypothesis. The researcher set level of significance at .05 with a critical valued of X^2 for 14 degrees of freedom that was identified as 6.571.

Step 3: To test the null hypothesis for this study, the researcher selected a sample of 8 DEOs from Karachi region. The affirmed response was found by multiplying the total number in the sample (8) by the respective hypothesized percentages. For superintendent responses, the expected frequency was 5.8 x 8 = 46.8. The expected frequencies for the other categories are computed similarly. The calculation of the X^2 value is 52.915.

Step 4: Since the calculated value (X^2= 52.915) exceeded the critical value of (X^2 = 6.571), the null hypothesis is rejected. This research would conclude that the differences between the expected responses and the observed responses in the fifteen categories are too great to be attributed to sampling fluctuation.

Table 1
Observed and expected Frequency Response Data

.	Q1.1		Q1.2		Ql.3		Q2		Q3	
Expected	1	5.8	1	5.8	5	5.8	8	5.8	6	5.8
Observed	7	2.2	7	2.2	3	2.2	0	2.2	2	2.2
	8		**8**	,	**8**		**8**		**8**	

	Q4.1		Q4.2		Q5.l		Q5.2		Q5.3	
Expected	5	5.8	8	5.8	6	5.8	4	5.8	4	5.8
Observed	3	2.2	0	2.2	2	2.2	4	2.2	4	2.2
	8		**8**		**8**		**8**		**8**	

	Q6		()7.1		Q7.2		Q7.3	
Expected	8	5.8	8	5.8	8	5.8	7	5.8
Observed	0	2.2	0	2.2	0	2.2	1	2.2
	8		**8**		**8**		**8**	

	Q8		Totals
Expected	8	5,8	87
Observed	0	2.2	33
	8		**120**

Note: Expected Affirmed **5.8**
Observed   **2.2**

Table 2
Calculation of X^2 for Superintendent Responses

	O	E	O-E	$(O-E)^2$	(O-E)2/E	R
Q1.1	1	5.8	-4.8	23.04	3.972	-1.99309 *
Q1.1	7	2.2	4.8	23.04	10473	3.236159 *
Ql.2	1	5.8	-4.8	23.04	3.972	-1.99309 *
Q1.2	7	2.2	4.8	23.04	10.473	3.236159 *
Q1.3	5	5.8	-0.8	0.64	0.110	-0.33218
91.3	3	2.2	0.8	0.64	0.291	0.53936
Q2	8	5.8	2.2	4.84	0.834	0.9135
Q2	0	2.2	-2.2	4.84	2.200	-1.48324
Q3	6	5.8	0.2	0.04	0.007	0.083045
Q3	2	2.2	-0.2	0.04	0.018	-0.13484
Q4.1	5	5.8	-0.8	0.64	0.110	-0.33218
Q4.1	3	2.2	0.8	0.64	0.291	0.53936
Q4.2	8	5.8	2.2	4.84	0.834	0.9135
Q42	0	2.2	-2.2	4.84	2.200	-1.48324
Q5.1	6	5.8	0.2	0.04	0.007	0.083045
Q5.1	2	2.2	-0.2	0.04	0.018	-0.13484.
Q5.2	4	5.8	-1.8	3.24	0.559	-0.74741
Q5.2	4	2.2	1.8	3.24	1.473	121356
Q5.3	4	5.8	-1.8	3.24	0.559	-0.74741
Q5.3	4	2.2	1.8	3.24	1473	1.21356
Q6	8	5.8	2.2	4.84	0.834	0.9135
Q6	0	2.2	-2.2	4.84	2.200	4.48324
Q7.1	8	5.8	2.2	4.84	0.834	0.9135
Q7.1	0	2.2	-2.2	4.84	2.200	-1.48324
Q7.2	8	5.8	2.2	4.84	0.834	0.9135
Q7.2	0	2.2	-2.2	4.84	2.200	-148324
Q7.3	7	5.8	1.2	1.44	0.248	0498273
Q7,3	1	2.2	-12	1.44	0.655	-0.80904
Q8	8	5.8	2.2	4.84	0.834	0.9135
Q8	0	2.2	-2.2	4.84	2.200	-1.48324
	120	120	0		X^2=52.915	

Note: df=(R 2-1) (C 15-1) =14 $X^2_{cv}= 6.571$

INTERPRETATION

With the exception of 1.1 and 1.2, the results of the DEOs' perceptions regarding the behavioral characteristics of effective school principals were consistent with the leading research covered in Introduction section (noted as affirmed). The Chi-square critical value of 6.571 at the .05 level of significance was calculated with a value of $X^2 = 52.915$. Residuals for 1.1 and 1.2 (values calculated 2.00 or higher) indicate the greatest divergence from their relative expected outcomes.

Following conclusions are drawn from the study:

1. The effective secondary school principal is an effective communicator. The effective secondary school principal is able to work with different groups (teachers, parents, students, and central office). The effective secondary school principal is able to maintain an open, honest, and effective channel of communication that facilitates the achievement of agreed upon goals.

2. The effective secondary school principal is a positive influence upon the climate of the school. The effective secondary school principal acknowledges the need to celebrate student and faculty successes.

The effective secondary school principal demonstrates a sense of enthusiasm and pride, as he/she remains visible throughout the building, aiding and supporting all under-takings that make the school a place conducive to learning.

3. The effective secondary school principal is able to promote a professional culture among faculty that motivates and inspires them to function as a community of leaders and one that sets the example for students in reference to continuous learning.

4. The effective secondary school principal is engaged in the monitoring of the stated reliable indicators of leading and managing an effective school. The indicators could be the dropout rate, number of incidents of violence, or academic achievement, but no matter what they are, the principal stays in touch with the benchmarks leading to their attainment.

5. The principal is an agent of change when the need for improvement or reform dictates it whether his/her role is that of an initiator or an implementer. The effective principal leads and understands the role of the change process and is able to implement it with the faculty.

6. The effective secondary school principal is able to articulate his or her vision through the mission of the school. The effective secondary school principal's daily interactions with teachers, parents, students, and central office personnel must align with the mission of the school.

7. The effective secondary school principal is a team player and focuses on the best way to achieve desired results with the participation of all stakeholders

8. The effective secondary school principal is knowledgeable about curriculum and instruction and is able to acquire resources and staff development opportunities as needed.

9. The effective secondary school principal is a relationship builder and applies his/her knowledge regarding the importance of establishing and maintaining quality relationships to the mission of being an effective secondary school principal.

As a result of this study, the investigator offers the following considerations for future research.

1. This study should be replicated using teachers as a response group. Most DEOs have served as principals and certainly present a different perspective in reference to what is considered being effective. This suggests a need for interviewing groups of dissimilar orientation that exist in order to validate the effective behavioral characteristics associated with the principal-ship. As a means of validating the qualifications of teachers as a viable interview group, the investigator offers the following rationale. Teachers work more closely with principals than any other group, and as such, work with a number of principals during the course of their careers. They may have worked with principals who may have been considered to be more effective than others are. Therefore, teachers would be well prepared to define the behavioral characteristics of effective secondary school principals as well as DEOs.

2. This study should be replicated using principals as the response group. Principals own perceptions of what may be considered effective may be in contrast to what the literature states. In question may also be the fact they know what to do to be an effective principal, but are unable to carry out the behaviors to do other constraints on their time and opportunity.

3. This study should be replicated comparing the principals of schools that are site-based managed and those that operate in a centralized management system. A site based managed school can offer a

dramatic change in the role of the principal in terms of their opportunity to demonstrate effective leadership behaviors.

4. This study should be replicated by interviewing DEOs in different district factor groups. A study such as this would provide critical information in determining if the perceptions of the behavioral characteristics of effective secondary school principals are district factor group driven or can be attributed to other factors. It may also be beneficial to consider the effective behavioral characteristics of the urban- based principal compared to the suburban or rural-based principals.

5. This study should be replicated limiting school size. There may be an increased need for management behaviors in a school of 600 students, as compared to a school of 300 students. The quality of supervisory practices may also be affected by the number of instructional staff to be evaluated. The number of observations a principal must conduct may impact their opportunity to function as an instructional leader in terms of time per teacher and quantity of observations that need to be completed.

6. This study should be replicated by focusing on the clear distinction between the principal's role as a manager and the principal's role as a leader. In this type of study the inferences drawn from superintendents' responses would serve as the descriptors for effective managers and effective leaders. Also, in a future study, one may want to design an interview instrument that specifically addresses the principal's role as a manager or a leader in each area of the principal-ship (i.e., staff development, dealing with change, culture building and knowledge of curriculum, instruction, and assessment).

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