

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES IN IMPROVING PRINCIPALS' PERFORMANCES IN PUBLIC PRIMARY SCHOOLS OF TIGRAY REGIONAL STATE, ETHIOPIA

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to investigate how leadership development strategies enhance principals' performance in public primary schools of Tigray Regional State. The study utilized mixed methods sequential explanatory research design. The primary data sources were teachers, school leaders, cluster supervisors, teacher development program and curriculum development and implementation performers, and coordinators. On the other hand, secondary sources such as plans and reports were reviewed. Samples were selected using simple random, stratified and purposive sampling techniques. Data were collected through a questionnaire, an interview and document analysis. Thematic analysis was used to analyze qualitative data, and quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and independent samples t-test. The findings of the study revealed that, the current leadership development has moderately impacted principals' efficacy. The study highlighted lack of comprehensive training needs analysis; absence of technical support; the missing link between principal's needs and contents of the training; and lack of awareness on the side of stakeholders as hindering factors negatively impacting the effectiveness of LD strategies and leading to resource inefficiency and participant dissatisfaction. Therefore, it is recommended that the Regional Education Bureau and the Woreda Education Offices should conduct training needs analysis on principal's training, targeting at identifying the nature of the previous trainings; experience of the training participants, the skill gaps, and training needs; to make the training programs need based and attract interested participants.

Keyword : Leadership; Leadership development; Principal; Performance

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1. INTRODUCTION

School leadership has become a priority agenda globally, and it is accepted that effective school principals play a key role and have the responsibility to lead and improve teaching and teaching effectiveness. For example, Sarah (2015) listed planning, financing and accountability, documentation, reporting and supervision as the main management functions of principals. Litchfield (2003), cited in Egwu (2015), has identified guiding curriculum and instruction and follow up of classroom teaching and learning processes as among other duties of the school principal. However, depending on the school contexts in which they work, principals face very different sets of challenges. According to Atieno (2019), in reference to principals in Kenya, respondents identified a dearth of training funds, staff shortages, heavy principal workloads, and an overloaded curriculum as the primary four obstacles they encountered in instructional supervision. In the view of Dongo and Mahlangu (2022) referring to South Africa, late coming of learners; teacher absenteeism; unexpected visits; lengthy morning briefings; and announcements through the intercom

that were not made in a timely manner were the challenges encountered by school principals. Ismael, Getnet and Reda (2021) stated that instructional leaders in Sudan's public secondary schools in North Kordufan State's Shekan Locality (Elobeid City) encountered a number of difficulties because of a lack of resources and inadequate training. Similarly, in Ethiopia, school principals were challenged by several personal and institutional factors . According to Mengistu , Menfese , Nigussie and Getahun (2019), the findings of the study indicated school principals' involvement with stakeholders was limited, and teachers, students, and parents played a minimal role in the planning and execution of SIP. Dereje , Wondewsen and Debebe (2020) revealed that the top challenges of school leadership that received higher mean scores were mainly related to the qualifications of school principals' qualifications, lack of training, experiences and competencies. Anteneh and Zerihun (2019) asserted that the absence of a school-wide vision and mission, the administrative burden, and the lack of support from upper management were the main factors affecting the efficacy of instructional leaders.

In order to solve the challenges faced by school principals and strive for continuous improvement, several researchers in the area emphasized the need to develop the principals' capacity in schools by ensuring and expanding leadership development opportunities. Given this reality, in the view of Hrivnak , Reichard and Riggio (2009), from an organizational perspective, the desire to promote an organization's leadership efficacy in terms of quality, quantity, or both could be the reason for the implementation of the Leadership Development Program (LDP). With regard to the advantages of LDP, Herman and Kurt, as cited in Abner, Morrison, Perry and Valdez (2019), claimed individually that LD has a positive impact on job accomplishment, self-confidence, and overall well-being. MoE (2009) highlighted that, governments across the globe, regardless of their development status, introduce laws related to Continuous Professional Development (CPD) and associate it with career advancement and evaluation. For example, the study by Kwan (2011) revealed that in Hong Kong, the policy on CPD for School Excellence was adopted in 2002. The study conducted by Pant (2023) in Nepal and the neighboring countries School Leadership Development Program (SLDP) as an initiative was launched in Bangladesh in 2017, Bhutan in 2014, and Nepal in 2008. Like many other countries, in Ethiopia, as it is indicated in MoE (1994) the Education and Training Policy (ETP); MoE (2010); and MoE (2015) due attention was given to the PD of school leaders. Accordingly, in recent years, to enhance and upgrade school leader's qualifications, the government has made a great effort in the areas of educational leadership development programs such as CPD; Educational Planning and Management (EdPM); Post Graduate Diploma in School Leadership (PGDSL); School Leadership (ScL); Educational Leadership and Management (EdLM) and various short term trainings for school principals. In relation to the outcomes of LDP, in research conducted by Hilton, Hilton, Dole and Goos (2015), it was found that leaders acquire fresh insights and understanding by engaging in workshops with teachers during the PD process. According to Pant (2023), the SLDP programs in Nepal, India, and Bangladesh confirmed that school leaders were equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively run schools and enhance a culture of collaboration and continuous improvement. The study conducted by Agirdag and Muijs (2023) asserted that the High Performance Schools program has had a positive impact on general achievements, and schools that were involved in the program demonstrated more progress than the comparative schools.

Benefits of Leadership Development

School principals need to grow and learn throughout their careers to meet the changing and growing needs of students and schools. Having this in mind, Isik (2000) stated that the training program had a significant impact on principal behaviors when compared to principals who never attended training. Goldring, Preston and Huff (2010) revealed that PD for school leaders is essential since they are responsible for guiding teachers and students towards enhanced levels of performance and learning. Khan and Khan (2014) empirically observed that CPD allows principals to regularly address emerging issues and handle the challenges in their daily managerial and leadership tasks.

Challenges of Leadership Development

Leadership development is challenged by several personal, institutional and public-related factors. In this case, many studies that investigate the implementation of LDP in business organizations in general and school principals in particular across the globe show major weaknesses. Nasreen and Odhiambo (2014), in their study entitled CPD of school principals: Current practice in Pakistan, found that principals were not satisfied with the content of the training programs. Na, Perrera, Purushothaman and Sumintono (2016) asserted that participant principals and training providers recognized the lack of competent trainers as a limitation on the PD of school principals. The study by Mercer (2019) revealed that the key reasons for the

failure of LDP included management not participating, lengthy duration, high expenses and a lack of competency-based process. In Ethiopia, the challenges may not be different from the global experience. According to Tadesse , Adula , Gemechis , Teklu , and Dereje (2019), in the South West and West clusters of Keffa , Jimma , Gambela , and IlluAbabora , it was discovered that LD is fragmented and lacks consistency. The findings of Ashebir , Ziyn , Garkebo and Feyera (2021) study revealed that the implementation of School Leadership Development (SLD) has problems, especially in nomination, appointment, and placement for development and after development. Esayas and Getachew (2018) revealed that needs assessment was not undertaken to determine the needs of primary school principals and supervisors.

Purpose of the Study

Several studies have been conducted on LD globally, but few exist in Ethiopia in general and Tigray region in particular. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to assess how LD strategies contributed to improving the performance of principals in public primary schools of Tigray Regional State. In this regard, the study attempted to fill the gap in knowledge by investigating the outcome of LD in improving the managerial and instructional improvement performances of principals. The study was designed to search for reliable answers to the following basic questions based on the above presented practical and research gaps.

1. To what extent do leadership developments improve principals' management performance in public primary schools of Tigray Regional State?
2. To what extent do leadership developments improve principals' instructional improvement performance in public primary schools of Tigray Regional State?

2. RESEARCH METHOD

By considering the theoretical perspective of pragmatic approach, the procedures followed to conduct the study, mixed methods sequential explanatory research design was assumed to be appropriate for this study where priority was given to quantitative data collection followed by qualitative data. In this study, in order to obtain sample information from respondents, data collection tools such as questionnaires, interviews, and document analysis were employed. This study was conducted in public primary schools of Tigray regional state. The samples were selected using the multi-stage sampling technique. Accordingly, zones, Woredas , clusters, schools and school leaders were selected using simple random sampling (lottery system) technique. Teachers were selected using stratified random sampling techniques. Cluster supervisors, Woreda and Regional Education Bureau curriculum, and TDP coordinators and performers were taken as a sample using the purposive sampling technique. Accordingly, 414 teachers, school leaders, cluster supervisors, Woreda curriculum and TDP coordinators, Regional Education Bureau curriculum development, and TDP performers were selected for the study purposes. The quantitative data were analyzed by using descriptive statistics (mean score and standard deviations) to measure and compare the opinions of respondent groups (teachers and school leaders). Inferential statistics (Independent samples t-test) was the other statistical tool used to check the existence of significant differences among the groups of respondents and calculated using SPSS version 24.0. Data collected through interviews and document reviews were analyzed in line with the themes created to analyze the quantitative data.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research question 1: To what extent do leadership developments improve principals' management performance in public primary schools of Tigray Regional State?

Table 1. Responses on management performance of principals

No	Item	Respondents	M	SD	t-value	Df	Sig.
1	Create a healthy school environment in which students attend their lessons peacefully.	Teachers	3.19	1.168	.962	348	.337
		Leaders	3.07	1.233			
2	Provide parents with opportunities to actively participate in school decisions.	Teachers	3.01	1.178	-.368	348	.713
		Leaders	3.05	1.172			
3	Respond to the inquiries of the school population and listen to their complaints.	Teachers	3.27	1.117	.541	348	.589
		Leaders	3.20	1.181			

4	Developing skills in evaluating staff performance	Teachers	3.28	1.151	.890	348	.374
		Leaders	3.17	1.127			
5	Equip with conflict resolution skills in managing their staff effectively	Teachers	3.32	1.164	-.290	348	.772
		Leaders	3.40	1.465			

Table 1 shows the response from teachers and school leaders towards the effect of LD strategies on enhancing the managerial efficacy of school principals related to coordination, conflict resolution and decision-making, and monitoring and evaluation skills. As the results indicated, both teachers and school leaders agreed that creating a healthy school environment in which students attend their lessons peacefully (teachers: M= 3.19; SD= 1.168; school leaders: M= 3.07; SD= 1.233 t(348)= .962, p=0.337); provide parents with opportunities to actively participate in school decisions (teachers: M=3.01; SD=1.178; school leaders: M= 3.05; SD=1.172; t(350)= -.368, p=0.713); respond to inquiries of the school population and listen to their complaints (teachers : M=3.27; SD=1.117; school leaders: M= 3.20; SD=1.181; t(350)= .541, p=0.589); developing skills in evaluating staff performance (teachers: M=3.28; SD=1.151; school leaders: M= 3.17; SD=1.127; t(350)= .890, p=0.374); and equip with conflict resolution skills in managing their staff effectively (teachers : M=3.32; SD=1.164; school leaders: M= 3.40; SD=1.465; t(350)= -.290, p=0.772). This suggests a lack of statistically significant disparity between the two groups, as the p-value exceeds 0.05. Consequently, the result indicates a moderate level of achievement, which is not particularly inspiring. One can conclude that principals engaged in LD programs were not significantly benefited from the trainings they attended. Research question 2: To what extent do leadership developments improve principals' instructional improvement performance in public primary schools of Tigray Regional State?

Table 2: Responses on instructional improvement performance of principals

N	Item	Respondents	M	SD	t-value	Df	Sig.
1	Ensure that the school follows the current syllabus.	Teacher	2.99	1.249	-.236	348	.813
		Leader	3.03	1.173			
2	Assist teachers to improve curriculum according to the abilities of children.	Teacher	2.93	1.249	-1.799	348	.073
		Leader	3.17	1.221			
3	Monitor the classroom curriculum to see that it covers the schools' curricular objectives.	Teacher	3.18	1.287	.077	348	.939
		Leader	3.17	1.228			
4	Often meets with students to discuss instructional problems .	Teacher	2.79	1.253	-1.040	348	.299
		Leader	2.93	1.233			
5	Make teachers become familiar with continuous assessment as part of their daily practice.	Teacher	3.26	1.259	-.212	348	.832
		Leader	3.29	1.264			

Table 2 shows the response from teachers and school leaders towards the effect of LD strategies on enhancing the instructional improvement efficacy of school principals related to curriculum issues, student learning and methodology. As the results indicated, both teachers and school leaders agreed that ensuring the school is following the current syllabus (teachers: M= 2.99; SD= 1.249; school leaders: M= 3.03; SD= 1.173 t(348)=-.236, p=0.813); assist teachers to improve curriculum according to the abilities of children (teachers: M=2.93; SD=1.249; school leaders: M= 3.17; SD=1.249; t(350)= -1.799, p=0.73); monitor the classroom curriculum to see that it covers the schools' curricular objectives (teachers : M=3.18; SD=1.287; school leaders: M= 3.17; SD=1.228; t(350)= .077, p=0.939); often meets with students to discuss instructional problems teachers: M=2.79; SD=1.253; school leaders: M= 2.93; SD=1.233; t(350)= -1.040, p=0.299); and make teachers to be familiar with continuous assessment as part of their daily practice (teachers: M=3.26; SD=1.259; school leaders: M= 3.29; SD=1.264; t(350)= -.212, p=0.832) . This suggests a lack of statistically significant disparity between the two groups, as the p-value exceeds 0.05. Consequently, the result indicates that a moderate level of achievement, which is not particularly encouraging. One can infer that LD programs in the study area moderately impacted principals in boosting their pedagogical efficacy.

The findings of this study revealed that the managerial efficacy of principals in building a conducive school environment for students to attend lessons peacefully was moderately enhanced at the mean rating of 3.19 and 3.07 for teachers and leaders, respectively. This finding goes against Isik (2000), who asserted that the principals ensure and maintain a pure and shining environment for students, with a mean value of 3.76 under the structural frame aspect. In order to test the impact of LD strategies on enhancing the managerial competence of principals in imparting the involvement of parents in school decisions, the results indicate that principals who take part in LD programs express only moderate encouragement towards prioritizing the involvement of parents. However, the finding went against Ratego (2015), 268 (89.3%), who argued that the respondents claimed that principals do not consult parents when making important decisions. The study entails that principals engaged in LD programs exhibit only moderate inspiration introducing the inquiries of the school population and listening to their complaints, with the mean value of $M = 3.27$; $SD = 1.117$ for teachers and $M = 3.20$; $SD = 1.181$ for leaders. The results indicate a moderate level of performance, which is not particularly encouraging. The discovery contradicts Abuaquel's (2015) findings, who contend that successful principals prioritize the staff's needs and alternatively address their issues, with a mean rating of 4.33. Regarding the impact of LD on enhancing the managerial efficacy of principals in developing skills in evaluating staff performance, the mean value of the opinions of the participants in the teachers group ($M = 3.28$; $SD = 1.151$) and school leaders ($M = 3.17$; $SD = 1.127$). Consequently, the result indicates a moderate level of achievement, which is not particularly inspiring. This result is contradictory with Hutton (2013), who contends that principals in secondary schools of Jamaica acquired competencies in evaluating staff performance as a result of the training programs, with a mean value of 4.12.

The findings of this study confirmed that the impact of LD strategies on enhancing the managerial efficacy of principals in equipping with conflict resolution skills to manage their staff effectively was moderate, with a mean value of $M = 3.22$ and $M = 3.40$ for teachers and leaders, respectively. One can infer that principals engaged in LD programs demonstrate only moderate motivation towards prioritizing conflict resolution skills. However, the finding was inconsistent with some of the previous studies showing significant improvement. For example, Hussin and Al Abri (2015) revealed that the training was beneficial to the principals in resolving conflicts at a mean rating of 3.52. In regard to the effect of LD in ensuring the school is following the current syllabus, the mean for the teachers group ($M = 2.99$; $SD = 1.249$) and the school leaders group ($M = 3.03$; $SD = 1.173$) was moderate. However, the findings went against the results reported by Obunga (2019) in research conducted in Kenya. In this case, the results of the study show that 8 (60%) of the principal respondents said they looked over the syllabus coverage in different classes. The findings of the present study show that principals engaged in LD were moderately motivated towards prioritizing curriculum improvement in relation to the support of teachers to improve curriculum according to the ability of children at a mean rating of $M = 2.93$ for teachers and $M = 3.17$ for school leaders. The finding explicitly fits with Onyeike and Maria (2018), who contend that principals moderately assist teachers in developing curriculum in accordance with the age ability of children at an average mean score of 2.71. In regard to the impact of LD strategies on enhancing the instructional improvement efficacy of principals supervising classroom curriculum to see whether it covers the schools' curricular objectives or not, the study reveals insightful findings.

The mean value of participant opinions within the teachers group ($M = 3.18$; $SD = 1.287$) closely aligns with that of the leaders group ($M = 3.17$ with $SD = 1.228$), yielding at (348) of .077 with a p-value of 0.939 (two-tailed). It indicates that principals engaged in LD programs exhibit only moderate motivation towards prioritizing the monitoring of classroom curriculum. The findings in this research coincide with those of the study by Onuma (2017), in which principals monitor classroom instruction to guarantee curriculum coverage at the mean score of rural = 3.01 and urban = 3.04. The findings of this study indicated that principals who took part in LD programs moderately benefited in enhancing their pedagogical performance in relation to the frequent meetings with students to discuss on instructional problems, with a mean rating of $M = 2.79$ and $M = 2.93$ for teachers and leaders, respectively. The findings concur with Onuma (2017), who asserted that principals moderately communicate with students on instructional aspects at an average mean score of 3.05. In regard to the impressions of LD strategies on boosting the instructional improvement efficacy of principals in shaping teachers to be familiar with continuous assessment as part of their daily practice, the results indicate that principals engaged in LD programs exhibit only moderate motivation towards prioritizing continuous assessment. The mean for the teachers group ($M = 3.26$; $SD = 1.259$) was higher than the leaders group ($M = 3.29$; $SD = 1.264$). This finding is in agreement with Onyeika and Maria (2018) in encouraging teachers to employ continuous assessment at an average mean value of $M = 2.83$.

4. CONCLUSION

From the findings, it can be concluded that despite the encouraging efforts that the government of Ethiopia made to enhance the capability of primary school principals, the outcomes of LD strategies in public primary schools Tigray Regional State were at a moderate status and failed to significantly enhance the management and instructional improvement performance of principals as characterized by school leaders themselves and teachers in the study. This implies that the capacity building programs offered were not impactful as per the designed objectives. As a result, principals did not significantly benefit from the trainings in boosting their job performance to lead the schools effectively. Hence, the ineffectiveness of LD strategies may lead to resource inefficiency and participant dissatisfaction.

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