

# HOW DOES A SCHOOL LEADER'S ROLE INFLUENCE STUDENT ACHIEVEMENTS? A REVIEW OF RESEARCH FINDINGS AND BEST PRACTICES\*

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## Abstract

Currently, school systems around the globe are focusing on student achievements empowering school leaders along with curriculum and accountability frameworks. This paper focuses on a comprehensive review of literature on the role of school leadership towards improving student achievements based on research findings and best practices. It refers to numerous research projects conducted in many different school systems based on quantitative, qualitative and mixed method approaches comprising small scale medium size and mega research projects for the benefits of all types of school stakeholders on how a leader can do his or her best to improve student achievements.



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## 1 Introduction

In the contemporary world, improvements in student achievements are recognized as the foremost objective of school reforms and restructuring efforts. With this objective in mind, many different reform packages are being implemented while key focus of the reforms is more or less the same. The legislation on *No Child is Left Behind by 2020* signed into law in January 2002 in the USA is one of the most prominent and visible action taken by any government towards achieving this goal. In the meantime, many scholars have acknowledged that the role of school leadership is the most significant in enhancing school performance and student achievements (Hallinger and Heck, 1998; Walker and Stott, 2000; Fisher and Frey, 2002; Mulford, 2003; Cotton, 2003; Dinham, 2004; Kearney, 2005; Janerrette and Sherretz, 2007; Gentilucci and Muto, 2007, Gamage, 2009a). It has been found that effective leaders develop school climates and cultures that help motivate both the students and teachers leading to the creation of better teaching and learning environments which are more conducive to higher levels of student achievements. Besides, in most school systems, school principal is required by the systemic authorities to improve student learning and is held accountable for it by building commitments in developing a shared vision for motivating and energizing the teachers and students (Gamage, 1993, 1996b, 2006b; Ross and Gray, 2006; Mulford, 2003). In this paper, the authors propose to explore the literature to examine whether there is sufficient evidence to sustain this claim.

## 2 What Does the Literature Reveal?

It has been reported that the leadership behaviour of a principal and his/her role as an instructional leader has a significant impact on creating more effective schools leading to higher levels of student achievements (Quinn, 2002; Cotton, 2003; Gold, et al., 2003; Gamage, 2006b; Gentilucci & Muto, 2007). Cotton (2003) has asserted that the following types of behaviours by a principal have a significant impact on student achievements:

- The establishment of a clear focus on student learning by having a vision, clear learning goals, and high expectations for learning for all students
- Interactions and cordial relationships with relevant stakeholders with communication and interaction, emotional and interpersonal support, visibility and accessibility, and parent/community participation;
- Developing a school culture conducive to teaching and learning through shared leadership and decision-making, collaboration, risk taking leading to continuous improvements;
- Providing instructional leadership through discussions of instructional issues, observing classroom teaching and giving feedback, supporting teacher autonomy and protecting instructional time; and
- Being accountable for affecting and supporting continuous improvements through monitoring progress and using student progress data for program improvements (Adapted from Cotton, 2003: 2-3).

Moreover, extensive studies demonstrate that particular leadership styles of school leaders could have positive impacts on teaching and learning environments and processes leading to improvements in student performance and academic achievements (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Day, 2004; Harris, 2004; Hale & Rollins, 2006; Gurr, Drysdale & Mulford, 2006; Robertson & Miller, 2007; Guskey, 2007; Gentilucci & Muto, 2007). Thus, it is clear that the school leadership provided and/or shared by a school administrator is one of the key factors in enhancing school performances and student achievements. The school leaders, in this context are “those persons, occupying various roles in the school, who work with others to provide direction and exert influence on persons and things in order to achieve the school goals” (Leithwood and Riehl, 2003: 9). This definition implies the importance of school principal’s role, in collaboration with other stakeholders, in improving student performances and achievements. On the basis of two studies of successful school leadership in the UK, involving parents, pupils, teachers, governors, senior managers, and head teachers, Harris (2004) asserts that successful leadership in schools have resulted in higher levels of both student attainment and achievements, emphasizing the importance of distributed leadership. He also points out that findings from the studies have identified the limitation of a singular leadership approach in securing school improvements.

### 3 The Role of School Leadership for Effective School Improvement

Cotton (2003) asserts that two related lines of research have demonstrated the influence of school leaders in school improvement. The first line of inquiry is what is known as school effectiveness research which identified the characteristics of effective schools that influence the high-achieving schools. The second line of research is what is focused primarily on the principal's role as an instructional leader. In this context, the roles of principals in developing instructional programs have mainly contributed to create more high-achieving schools. Now, let us focus on the first line of inquiry which primarily emphasized on the features of effective schools movement, leading to school improvement.

The *Coleman Report* of 1966 demonstrated how the school had little or no effect on student achievements, concluding that family background was the key factor influencing the student achievements (Coleman, 1966; Austin, 1979; Cuban 1984). Following this report, many researchers in the 1970s and early 1980s intensively conducted similar studies and reacted sharply to the report (Edmonds, 1979, Walberg & Scott, 1979; Austin, 1979; Cuban, 1984). Consequently, a number of studies have been conducted to develop effective schools towards the achievement of better student outcomes (Purkey & Smith, 1983; Gamage, 1996a, 1998b; Werf, Creemers & Guldmond, 2001; Houtveen, Grift & Creemers, 2004), as well as to identify the relationship between school effectiveness and school improvement (Clark, Lotto & Astuto, 1984; Houtveen, Grift & Creemers, 2004; Luyten & Witziers, 2005, Leithwood, Jantzi & Hopkins, 2006).

In contrast to Coleman's Report, Edmonds (1979: 20) argued that school leadership behaviour is critical in determining the quality of education. Further, on the basis of his research on instructionally effective schools in Detroit and a review of previous studies involving effective schools in New York, California, and Michigan, he has concluded that school factors have predominantly contributed towards the creation of instructionally effective schools. These factors are: (1) strong administrative leadership; (2) high levels of expectations in student achievements; (3) an orderly but not oppressive school climate; (4) a focus on pupil acquisition of basic school skills; (5) conducive atmosphere to the instructional process; (6) means of student progress monitoring; and (7) resources that can be focused on the fundamental learning objectives of the school. In line with these findings, Austin (1979) suggests that an effective school which can promote student outcomes need to provide a climate that stimulates ideas and facilitates the exchange of ideas with colleagues.

For the purposes of seeking the perceptions of school communities on factors which mostly help the schools to be effective, Townsend (1997) conducted a comparative study between Australian and American schools. The study employed an empirical survey involving a total of 1000 respondents, 427 from Victoria, Australia and 573 from the United States. The respondents comprised of 12% principals, 34.9% teachers, 31.8% parents, and 21.3% students. Based on the data analysis, Townsend (1997) concludes that an effective school is primarily characterized by good leadership and staff, good policies and a safe and/or supportive atmosphere in which staff, parents, and students are encouraged to work as teams towards common goals. Purkey and Smith (1985) have identified school leadership as one of the major factors in improving academic performance. They clarify that this factor emphasizes strong leadership from administrators, teachers, or integrated teams are important in initiating and maintaining the improvement processes.

By using the data obtained from school effectiveness research within the Flemish technical secondary education, De Maeyer, Rymenans, Van Petegem, Bergh and Rijlaarsdam, (2007) conclude that school leadership has an indirect effect, through school climate, on student achievements. In this case, schools scoring high on this characteristic put a strong emphasis on their pupils' achievements, including reading proficiency. Some, recent studies have also evaluated the literature on school improvement research in the current context of school reforms (Ranson, et al., 2005; Leithwood, Jantzy & Hopkins, 2006; Sun, Creemers & Jong, 2007). For instance, case studies conducted by Sun, Creemers and Jong (2007) between 1999 and 2003 in eight European countries i.e. Belgium, Finland, The Netherlands, UK, Greece, Italy, Portugal, and Spain show that several ideas from school improvement research such as setting national goals in terms of school improvement and strong leadership in steering and empowering school improvement efforts, have been important.

In particular, on the basis of their data collection procedures using interviews, audio and video-tape recordings, Sun, Creemers and Jong (2007: 97) affirm that national goal setting in terms of student outcomes

which were reflected in the national curriculum and school text books was a key factor that influenced effective school improvement. Also, effective school improvement required strong and “empowered” school leadership. In this context, the word “empowered” means to give power and authority to the schools, particularly to the school leadership, for personnel (hiring, firing, and promoting teachers and other school staff members), time and financial management, spiritual and human resources support, and school improvement. Thus, it is clear that one of the key factors in creating school effectiveness and improvement is the role of school leadership. The school effectiveness research revealed that the role of leadership contributes to improved school performance and student achievements. However, the previous findings have limited information on the changing roles of school leaders which affect changes to school culture and in turn influence the increased student achievements. The following section examines new challenges confronted by the school principals and how these have resulted in improvements to student performance and achievements.

#### 4 Changing Role of Principals in a Restructuring Context

In the context of the changing role of the school leadership, Gamage (1990: 99) asserts that it is necessary for a principal to understand where he or she stands along the leadership continuum in leading and managing a school towards improving student achievements. For this purpose, a principal needs to have a clear understanding of the major dimensions of his or her position, including: (a) the aims and goals which his or her school is attempting to achieve; (b) the means or the resources available to achieve these goals; (c) the degree of freedom delegated to him or her by the employing authority to innovate or modify existing educational methods and procedures in order to achieve these goals; (d) the legal, traditional and personal authority vested in the role of the principal; (e) the constraints and boundaries likely to limit school-based decisions; and (f) the extent of the principal’s responsibility and accountability for funding, staffing and administration of the school.

Dempster and Logan (1998: 81-82) conducted a study on the expectations of school leadership in 12 schools in the Australian state of Queensland with empirical surveys involving 584 students, 272 parents and teachers as well as focus group discussions with other stakeholders. The study found the increasing use of student performance testing as a means for comparing school effectiveness with requirements to report annually to their communities against the goals in their development plans. Moore, George and Halpin (2002: 175) assert that in terms of the Education Act of 1988 with devolution of power and authority over finance and resources to schools has led to profound changes in the functions and roles of principals who are now required to act as a managing director, school leader, marketer, and an agent between the school and its customers. Thus, the principals are required to be accountable to the government and the school community while meeting the needs and expectations of students, teachers, and parents.

The scholars such as Moore, George and Halpin (2002), Gamage, (2009b; 2006a; 1990) and Catano and Stronge (2007) too have reported that trends based on decentralization and devolution have dramatically affected the roles of school principals. The principal’s role especially in the areas of school leadership, management, entrepreneurialism in resource acquisition and accountability has undergone significant changes. Similarly, Catano and Stronge (2007: 394) believe that the political pressure of high accountability requires principals to improve instruction and student achievements while maintaining facilities, supervising student conduct and managing budgets. Based on a study by Creissen and Ellison (1998); Caldwell (2004) reports some of the changing dimensions within the professional practices of principals in Britain. These dimensions require the principals to:

- a) Obtain competitive tenders for cleaning and canteen facilities;
- b) Be responsible for hiring, firing, promotion and dismissal of staff;
- c) Select, recruit, retain and discipline the students;
- d) Bid for resources from external funding agencies;
- e) Install and operate information systems to measure and report on performances;
- f) Organize school inspections by privatized teams in terms of the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) framework;

- g) Buying training and consultancy services to support staff training and development; and
- h) Conform to national curriculum, national testing, teacher appraisal (evaluation), site-based financial decision-making, hiring and firing staff, and per-pupil funding and parental choice linked to accountability at the school level for results (Adapted from Caldwell, 2004: 2).

In response to the changing role of principals, Caldwell (2004) believes that training and professional development of the principals are significant in contributing to the quality of schooling. Gamage (2006a: 32) points out that the foremost challenge that a principal faces is to understand the changing contexts and improve his/her interpersonal and communication skills with the understanding that s/he is no longer the authority figure but is in a partnership with other stakeholders. Unlike in the past s/he would not be in a position to issue instructions and expect the staff and students to obey. The altered role of the principal requires him or her to articulate his or her views for a shared vision while expressing the views on policy issues to convince the other members of the partnership in arriving at decisions before instructions could be issued in the capacity of the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the school.

Walker and Stott (2000) affirm that the reform initiatives in conformity with prescribed standards have been judged largely as unsuccessful in improving student performance. Those externally imposed prescriptions have created stress-related problems such as feelings of failure, depression, and even explosions of anger on the part of principals and teachers due to increased workloads and lack or inadequacy of resources. However, they believe that performance enhancement through devolution of power and authority through school-based management (SBM) along with resources allocation has been successful in achieving student progress and quality education. Gamage (1996a) and Duhou (1999) assert that Victorian SBM model represents one of the most comprehensive strategies at school decentralization for achieving improved student performance attempted anywhere in the world. Gamage, Sipple and Partridge (1996: 10) report that the Victorian SBM policies have had a positive influence on the teaching and learning environments. Caldwell (2005) has reported that in the Indonesian context, devolution through SBM policies have resulted in dramatic improvements in student achievements notably in the rates of attendance and in test results.

## 5 How did Instructional Leadership Lead to Student Achievements?

The importance of instructional leadership in creating student success and achievements has been supported by many studies (Hallinger and Murphy, 1986; Harchar and Hyle, 1996; Blasé and Blasé, 2000; Quinn, 2002; Fisher and Frey, 2002; Cotton, 2003; Waters, Marzano & McNulty, 2004; Marsh and LeFever, 2004; Fulmer, 2006; Catano and Stronge, 2007; Janerette and Sherretz, 2007; Gentilucci and Muto, 2007). The following section focuses on the findings and the approaches adopted in these studies.

## 6 Research Findings from Meta-Analysis Studies

A meta-analysis study exploring the relationship between school principal and student achievements was conducted by Cotton (2003). He reviewed 81 reports, consisting of 49 studies at primary level, 23 at secondary level, five combinations of reviews and studies and four textbook analyses and research-based guidelines on the principals' behaviours. The sample reports were predominantly from the US Low socio-economic status (SES) schools, involving: students, teachers, principals, school council members, community members, and superintendents. Based on these studies, Cotton (2003) concludes that principals who were knowledgeable and actively involved with their school's instructional programs had higher numbers of high achieving students than those who managed only the non-instructional aspects of their schools. In particular, the role of high-performing school principals as instructional leaders focused on several elements, including focus was on ongoing pursuit of high levels of student learning.

Waters, Marzano and McNulty (2004) conducted another meta-analytic study on leadership practices that are highly correlated with student achievements. The study came to be known as Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL) and investigated whether the focus on the quality of leadership had a significant relationship to student achievements and also sought which specific leadership responsibilities

and practices had the greatest impact on student achievements. For this purpose, they reviewed more than 5,000 studies of which only 70 had been published; to identify the effects of leadership on student achievements. The published studies demonstrated standardized, objective and quantitative measures of student achievements, including the state norm-referenced tests, on the basis of teachers' opinions and/or ratings on principal's leadership quality. In total, the 70 studies involved a sample size of 2,894 schools with 14,000 teachers, and more than 1.1 million students. Based on these studies; Waters, Marzano and McNulty (2004) found two key elements that could have positive or negative impact on student achievements. The first factor is whether the principals properly identified the correct focus for schools and classroom improvement efforts that were most likely to have a positive impact on improving student achievements. These included curriculum development, challenging goals and effective feedback, parents and community involvement, a safe and orderly environment, and collegiality and professionalism. At the teacher level, the changes had to address the creation of effective instructional strategies, classroom management, and classroom curriculum designs. At student level, they entailed a positive home environment and motivation in supporting student learning.

However, the second factor that creates successful achievements of students is whether or not school principals properly understand the magnitude or order of changes, along with leading and adjusting their leadership practices accordingly. For example, the changes in terms of new classroom instruction practices and curricular programs could be viewed as the first priority by principals and teachers. However, the same practices and programs are considered as the second priority by policy makers and parents, while the implementation of standards and accountability measures are considered as the first priorities. So, if leaders fail to understand or acknowledge that some changes are second-order for some stakeholders, they may struggle to get support for the successful implementation of these changes. Consequently, their initiatives may fail to improve student achievements.

Apart from establishing a vision and setting goals, effective principals place high emphasis on achieving high levels of student learning and provide resources towards the efforts to improve the achievements and general well-being of the students. In practice, these principals constantly encourage teachers and students to attain higher levels of academic achievements; adopt collaborative planning processes, problem solving and decision-making focus on school improvements while ensuring that all school development programs are geared to make all students learn. Other elements emphasized by the principals in high-achieving schools were: discussion of instructional issues including curriculum and instruction; classroom observations and feedback to teachers; support of teacher autonomy; and risk taking; provision of professional development opportunities together with resources; protecting instructional time; monitoring student progress and sharing findings; using the student progress data for program improvements; and recognition and celebration of student and staff achievements. In this context, Cotton (2003) affirms that these instructional leadership practices of the principals have contributed to high levels of student achievements.

## 7 Quantitative Studies

Ross and Gray (2006) conducted a study on how transformational leadership behaviours contribute to increased student achievements by building teachers' professional commitment and beliefs on their collective capacity through raising the values of members, motivating them to go beyond self-interest to embrace organizational goals. They assert that transformational leadership influences teachers' professional commitment to school's vision, professional community, school norms of collegiality, collaboration, joint work and also a commitment to community partnerships. Teachers who are more committed to organizational values and its members are more likely to adopt instructional practices encouraged by the organization, assist colleagues, and work harder to achieve organizational goals, contributing to higher levels of student achievements if the school goals are focused on academic achievements. In this study, Ross and Gray (2006) involved all elementary teachers in two Ontario districts in Canada with a total of 3042 teachers from 205 schools. Data obtained from a Likert 1-6 scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree; found that teachers' beliefs in their capacity and their professional commitment mediated the impact of principals on student achievements. Thus, the results suggest that the principals who adopt transformational leadership style have a

positive impact on teacher beliefs in collective capacity and commitment to organizational values.

## 8 Findings from Qualitative Studies

Harchar and Hyle (1996) investigated instructional leadership strategies and their relationship with achieving high standards by students in Midwestern, USA. For this purpose, grounded theory with a choice of open-ended interviews was employed. The study involved new school administrators, veteran administrators with experience of five years or more, and administrators who had taken up central office positions. These administrators have promoted and demonstrated close and friendly relationships with teachers and students; sharing a keen interest in student achievements; and actively participating in professional organizations. Harchar and Hyle (1996: 26) have concluded that excellent instructional leaders are very important and they are a vital part of effective schools in bringing schools up to high standards of student achievement as expected and demanded by most educators and communities. Accordingly, instructional leaders need to lead the teachers, students, and the community for creating excellent schools by collaboratively establishing visions, developing trust, earning respect for all in school communities.

Blasé and Blasé (2000) conducted a study on how the role of principal as an instructional leader promotes teaching and learning in schools, primarily aiming to determine teachers' perspectives on effective instructional leadership that impact on classroom teaching. For the purpose of gathering data, an open-ended questionnaire was used, involving 809 elementary, middle, and senior high school teachers located in the South-Eastern, Mid-Western, and North-Eastern USA. The data were coded on the basis of inductive-exploratory research guidelines and comparative analysis. The results demonstrate that effective principals encouraged the teachers to critically reflect on their learning and professional practice. During the interaction and or dialog, the principals make suggestions, give feedback and model the use of inquiry and solicit advice/opinions, and give praise to teachers. Blasé and Blasé (2000: 133-34) report that: (1) suggestions made by principals during post-observation conferences and informally at day-to-day interactions had positive effects on increased teacher motivation, satisfaction, self-esteem, efficacy, sense of security, and feeling of support; and (2) the principals' feedback on observed classroom behaviours has increased teacher reflection, innovation/creativity, instructional variety, risk-taking and better planning for instruction.

There were similar positive results from the principals who demonstrated models of teaching techniques in classrooms and during conferences and gave praise to teachers. Findings indicate that the role of principals as instructional leaders need to focus on promoting professional growth emphasizing on research and improvements in teaching and learning environments and supporting collaboration amongst educators including action research to inform instructional decision-making.

A study by Briggs and Wohlstetter (2003: 356) found that successful SBM schools have improved their instructional programs and produced higher levels of student learning. They have categorized these schools into two policy contexts. The schools in policy context 1, were characterized by, among others: (i) an active, living vision on teaching and learning which was coordinated with the district and state standards for student performance; (ii) school leadership with particular reference to shared leadership in which principals played the role of manager and facilitator of change, while teachers took responsibility around issues of teaching and learning. In contrast, principals in Policy Context 2, focused their visions primarily on curriculum and instruction, and emphasized the connection between different aspects of curriculum and instruction. However their visions did not have a clear linkage between the curriculum and instruction to student results/achievements. Moreover, the principals in policy context 1 adopted a team-based orientation, using collaborative team structures to carry out the work creating standards-driven learning environments. These teams had specific targets on the improvement on student performances as part of the collective missions. They also used the teams and improvement targets for collective problem solving on student performances. But, the principals in Policy Context 2, worked primarily as individual key players to draw other staff and the community into helping on student performance standards. Consequently, it was difficult for principals in Policy Context 2, to create schools which focus on improved student performance.

Marsh and LeFever (2004) also have conducted studies on the educational role of school leaders in two different policy contexts. In Policy Context 1, standards of student performance were common and well-

established with authority devolved to schools for restructuring in meeting these standards. In contrast, within Policy context 2, the student performance standards were just emerging while authority was not devolved to the schools. As Policy Context 1 was rarely found in the USA, participants for three of the Policy Contexts were selected from English elementary schools and the fourth from the Kentucky elementary schools, which was similar to Policy Context 1. For the Policy Context 2, the participants were selected from three other states in the USA. The main purpose of the study was twofold: (i) to understand how the new era of school reform, particularly the role of student performance standards with the devolution of authority and resources to school level, have affected the work of principals; and (ii) to determine how and when the role of school principals can be made more feasible and effective. For the collection of data, an open-ended questionnaire and a semi-structured interview schedule were designed and employed.

In reporting the findings, Marsh and LeFever (2004: 392) assert that even though in both policy contexts, the school principals had developed school visions; the focus of principals' visions in the two policy contexts was different. The principals in Policy Context 1 focused their visions primarily on student results with a strong linkage of their visions on curriculum and instruction to student achievements. It rarely existed as a vision on teaching and learning that was isolated from student achievements.

A study by Ruff and Shoho (2005) involving a novice principal and two experienced principals in three urban elementary schools at San Antonio, Texas, showed the importance of mental models of principals in constructing their roles as instructional leaders. The mental models refer to: observations, assessments, designs, and implementation, while the principals' practice styles refer to goals, factors to influence, strategies and the nature of decision-making by being reactive, proactive and consistent. Another study by Fisher and Frey (2002) at Hoover High School in San Diego reveals that the principal as an instructional leader led to increased student academic achievements while decreasing drop-out rates. In this context, the principal regularly modelled lessons in front of teachers and students and interacted with students to provide encouragement and strategies to achieve success.

Another qualitative study by Fulmer (2006) explored the role of instructional leadership and its impact on instructional behaviours of teachers, leading to improvement in student achievements. The data was collected from 25 pre-service principals on their reflections in becoming instructional leaders along with secondary data from progress and curriculum intervention reports. The findings indicated that the instructional leadership role was crucial for lasting and productive changes in schools and instructional interventions of principals did impact on the thinking and behaviours of teachers to improve student achievements. In a study at Delaware schools in the USA, Janerette and Sherretz (2007: 4) based on focus group interviews with principals; it was found that they typically served roles as school managers and instructional leaders in improving student learning. The study also found that building principals' leadership skills and competencies to be effective school leaders were crucial in affecting appropriate change mechanism for their particular school environments.

A study by Gentilucci and Muto (2007) focused on the student perceptions on instructional leadership behaviours of principals which most positively influenced their learning and academic achievements. The two key research questions were: (1) Do students perceive that leadership behaviour of principals have a direct effect on their learning and academic achievement? (2) If yes, what specific leadership behaviours do students perceive as the most positive influences in their learning and academic achievements? The data were collected from 39 grade eight students who were randomly selected from three schools within the Central Coast of California. A Stratified sampling technique was used to select one school from each district and respondent-driven interviewing technique was employed to elicit information from the students. The findings demonstrated that instructional leaders positively influenced students' academic achievement and met the students formally and informally for discussions. They also felt that the principals who were approachable motivated the students to work harder and face challenges, and achieve high performances. Further, the principals who visited classrooms regularly for longer periods and did so interactively were perceived as more influential than those who visited less frequently for short periods and were passive. The principals who were comfortable in assuming the role of teachers by assisting individual students or groups while being administrators had a powerful effect.

In Australia a study by Gurr, Drysdale and Mulford (2006) conducted in Victoria and Tasmania on



successful principal leadership demonstrated success through achieving individual potential, student engagement, self confidence and self-direction, a sense of identity, and literacy and numeracy outcomes. The principals for the study were selected on criteria based on the reputation of the schools, the acknowledged success of the principals by peers and evidence of improved student outcomes over time. The outcomes were measured using comparative state-wide tests and examination results, school review reports, and other data such as staff and parents' opinions, student participation, engagement and satisfaction, and student attendance. Deep reflection of the participants was facilitated by open-ended questions and semi-structured interviews. They found that values and beliefs of principals and capacity building could contribute to the student outcomes. The principals' values and beliefs were grouped into three main categories: innate goodness and passion demonstrated through honesty, empathy and commitment to equity; being open and flexible believing that all can learn; and dispersed leadership and responsibility. School capacity building was focused on school culture through collegiality, collaboration, support and trust, school structure through shared decision-making, distributed leadership, and school wide professional learning, were built through good communication and a carefully managed change process.

Hale and Rollins (2006: 2) conducted a research project involving principals of Breakthrough High Schools (BTHS) in the USA to identify the strategies used in promoting student achievement. The selected schools had large numbers of students who were potentially at risk of failure, but achieved astonishing results, with upto 90% of those attaining postsecondary education. Based on interviews with stakeholders, the researchers were of the opinion that: (1) successful school leadership made important contributions to the improvement of student learning; (2) the primary sources of successful leadership in schools were principal and teachers; and (3) in addition to principals and teachers, leadership was distributed to others in the school and community. The principals spent considerable time in holding teachers accountable for student performance, while encouraging them to involve in problem-solving meetings, creating collaborative working environments, and peer reviews in order to help teachers build stronger and more trusting relationships. Besides, the principals created higher levels of student participation providing extra support for learning; and creating a strong connection with parents and community.

James, Dunning, Connolly and Elliott (2007) conducted a study on how school leadership relates to improved quality of school environments in Wales primary schools employing semi-structured interview schedules and group discussions, involving the relevant stakeholders and analyses of school policy documents, inspection reports and school development plans. They have concluded that all elements of the collaborative practices were important in enhancing school improvement and increasing student achievements. Rutherford (2002) conducted a study on the impact of collaborative working environments in enhancing student performance and achievements, involving head-teachers of six high-achieving Catholic primary schools in Birmingham. Based on the data, he concluded that the successful head-teachers promoted collegial approaches while practising positive, dynamic, and flexible leadership styles.

Allen (2007) and Robertson and Miller (2007) affirm that the partnerships in the UK and New Zealand schools have resulted in increased student achievements. Robertson and Miller (2007) demonstrate how equity has resulted from building partnerships between teachers, students, parents, and school leaders in New Zealand primary schools. They employed semi-structured interview schedules to conduct interviews with stakeholders; observations and documentary analyses in three primary schools with high ethnic diversity. The study concluded that there has been an excellent response to improve teaching and learning process by involving parents and community to help the students during teaching learning-processes. Based on interviews with stakeholders in 12 schools in the UK, Harris (2004) has concluded that distributed leadership has contributed to a sustainable improvement of schools.

## 9 Combination of Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches

A study by Hallinger & Murphy (1986: 330) based on a survey, interviews, and documentary analyses at Californian elementary schools assert that strong instructional leadership has consistently been described as a key factor in creating effective schools. However, in the low SES schools, the principals tended to take a very directive role in the selection, development, and implementation of curriculum and instructional

programs. In the high-SES effective schools, the principals tended to have a less direct control over classroom instruction, respecting the autonomy of teachers with regard to instructional decision-making. Role of principals as instructional leaders in low-SES effective schools tended to be more task-oriented (emphasizing on the part of the leader with one-way communication that focused on the completion of a given activity), while principals in the high-SES effective schools promoted a stronger relationship orientation with collegial working environments with staff by emphasizing two-way communication where leader positively reinforced the efforts of followers to engage in desired activities. The following section examines studies related to leadership styles that impacted on increased school performances, leading to better student achievements.

An Australian study by Dinham (2004) on principal leadership for outstanding educational outcomes in junior secondary state schools in New South Wales examined two types of school-sites: (1) subject departments responsible for teaching particular subjects; and (2) teams responsible for across the school programs in Years 7-10. The study explored the role of principals in producing outstanding education outcomes in Years 7 to 10. Through triangulation of quantitative and qualitative data from 38 secondary schools across NSW, Dinham (2004: 355) concluded that principal's leadership was found to be the key factor in the achievement of outstanding educational outcomes with both subject departments where teams were responsible for across the school programs. He identified six factors of principal leadership contributing to outstanding educational outcomes: (1) external awareness and engagement; (2) a bias towards innovation and action; (3) personal qualities and relationship; (4) vision, expectations and a culture of success; (5) teacher learning, responsibility and trust; (6) student support, common purpose and collaboration; (7) the core category: focus on students, learning and teaching.

In 2006, the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) in UK commissioned PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) to undertake an independent research study on school leadership. It was carried out on a recommendation of the School Teacher's Review Body (STRB) for an independent study on the roles, responsibilities, structures and reward systems for school leaders in England and Wales. The primary aim was to provide a comprehensive independent account of the existing, emerging and potential models of school headship and the wider leadership teams which are effective in raising standards for all pupils. In achieving the objectives PwC applied both quantitative and qualitative approaches in research. The empirical survey involved 3,260 school leaders comprising of head-teachers, governors, teaching and support staff members of senior leadership teams followed by interviews and meetings in 50 schools with those groups. Seven interviews in a school and overall 50 meetings and 10 focus groups with around eight participants were also conducted. The key findings indicate that the distributed leadership has impacted on increased student achievement in these schools. The successes in achieving high student performance was affected by leadership behaviours of those who distributed responsibilities effectively throughout the organisation and had a strong strategic focus on leadership responsibilities, suggesting greater capacity building through distributed leadership impacting on pupil performance. The wider society believed that head-teachers provided good examples of leadership by implementing a series of major national initiatives leading to increasingly high levels of pupil performance.

## 10 The Influence of the Leadership Styles of Principals

Many scholars have advocated a variety of leadership styles appropriate for schools and more specifically, transformational leadership (Burns, 1978; Begley & Cousins, 1992; Gamage, Sipple, & Partridge, 1996; Ingram, 1997; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999; Gamage & Pang, 2003; Huber, 2004; Yukl, 2006); distributed leadership (Day, 2004; Woods, et al., 2004; Harris, 2005; Spillane, 2006; Duignan, 2006); ethical leadership (Burns, 1978; Starratt, 2005; Yukl, 2006; Duignan, 2006; Gamage, 2008); situational leadership (Schermerhorn, 2001; Yukl, 2006); and authentic leadership (Duignan, 2006).

Quinn (2002) conducted a study on the role of school principal as an instructional leader and its relationship to changing instructional practices in improving student performances, employing an empirical survey and observations. The survey questionnaire developed between the Seattle School district and the University of Washington with 94 Likert-type items measured schools' organizational characteristics, such as strong leadership; dedicated staff; monitoring of student progress; high expectations; positive learning climate; early identification of learning problems; curriculum continuity; multicultural education; and gender

equity. Within the sub-scales instructional leadership of principals as resource providers and instructional support while being in visible presence were included. Achieving Success through School Improvement Site Teams (ASSIST) survey was completed by one-third of the instructional faculty. They were randomly chosen from each of the 24 schools located across Missouri, USA. Observations were made based on instructional practices inventory (IPI) developed by the University of Missouri to identify the level of classroom engagement for students and teachers, including six types of teacher-student engagements scores on a 1-6 scale from total disengagement to active learning/active teaching.

Quinn (2002: 459) based on an analysis of the survey and observation data employed the Pearson-product moment correlation and found that there was a relationship between strong instructional leadership of the principal and students' success and academic achievements. He reported that instructional leadership roles of the principals in terms of providing resources, instructional support, communicating, and being in visible presence at schools were essential to provide an atmosphere in engaging the teachers corresponded with student success and academic achievements.

Indeed, the literature and current studies on transformational leadership have been strongly influenced by Burns. He (1978: 20) contrasted transformational leadership with transactional leadership which promotes personal and mutual interests between individuals and the leader in transactional leadership with that of transformational leadership which primarily seeks common purposes in uniting the group to go beyond individual interests in search of higher goals. Similarly, Yukl (2006) affirms that the essence of transformational leadership is to inspire commitments of the followers to share objectives, increase their social identification even to the extent of developing their skills and collective efficacy. Many scholars found that transformational leadership with empowerment transforming competent staff contributes to commitment, which in turn lead to extra efforts towards greater productivity, ownership, a healthier organizational climate and cultures towards greater effectiveness (Gamage, Sipple, & Partridge, 1996; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999; Gamage & Pang, 2003; Huber, 2004). Researchers also found that transformational leadership has impacted in changing the attitudes of subordinates towards school improvement and have altered their instructional behaviour (Ingram, 1997; Leithwood, Begley & Cousins, 1992).

Distributed leadership recognizes individuals in formal and informal positions to take responsibility for leadership activities by a network of interactions (Woods, et al., 2004; Harris, 2004, 2005; Spillane, 2006). Based on empirical studies, Harris (2004) found that distributed leadership has contributed to a sustainable improvement of schools in terms of achieving higher levels of both student attainment and achievements. In this context, distributed leadership was characterized by a form of collective leadership in which teachers developed expertise by working together, concluding that engaging many people in leadership activity was the core of distributed leadership in action. Day (2004) asserts that distributed leadership enhanced teacher participation and commitment while Duignan, (2006) asserts the transparency and effectiveness of team management leads to improvement of the processes, content, and outcomes of teaching and learning.

On an analysis of how educational leaders should work towards becoming ethical leaders, Starratt (2005) proposed that the principals should (1) enhance humanity towards each individual in the school; (2) provide services for their school communities in a democratic manner; (3) master curriculum material in sufficient depth; and (4) ensure that every student have an opportunity to learn.

Authentic leadership is also reported to have a core focus on improved teaching and learning. In the case of moral leadership, Yukl (2006) affirms that the great potential for misuse of power along with the declining public trust in business and public leaders have become a major reason why many scholars are interested in ethical leadership. Duignan (2006) affirms that the ultimate goal of such a leadership is to achieve quality improvements in teaching and learning. In this perspective, the authentic leaders in schools are those who pay attention to the quality and impact of teaching towards student learning with the creation of conditions within which teachers and students take considerable responsibility for the quality of their own teaching and learning.

## 11 Conclusion

It is obvious that there is no monopoly of a particular style of leadership claiming to be the perfect one leading to improved school performances and student achievements. School principals are required to be more flexible in adapting appropriate leadership styles with the creation of collaborative working environments with higher-levels of commitment, motivation, ownership, developing, trusting and healthier school cultures, facilitating higher productivity and increased student achievements. The research findings discussed above have clearly demonstrated that leadership roles of school principals have led to increased student performances and achievements both in academic and extra-curricular activities. In particular, the research on effective schools indicates the importance of strong administrative leadership, high expectations and focus on student achievements. Changes to school culture, dedicated and qualified staff, setting appropriate school goals in conformity with school and systemic expectations, monitoring students' progress with adequate resources are factors that encourage and stimulate school performances and student achievements.

Research findings on school reform initiatives reveal a number of major trends in school restructuring requiring the school leaders to confront new challenges and play new roles in order to meet the stakeholder and systemic expectations and prescribed standards. The new trends include the movement towards SBM with devolving power and authority to school levels. School leaders are required to manage the schools guided by school councils/boards with authority over and responsibility for managing financial, physical and human resources while being accountable to the systemic authorities and school communities. Consumer control is instituted through school councils/governors comprising of parents and other stakeholders with de-zoning, forcing them to market their schools to the prospective students with the improvement of facilities and student and school performances projecting a good school image. However, the empowerment of school leaders comes with many new responsibilities and challenges. These include recruiting developing and leading school staff, managing the financial and physical resources, and organizing and contracting out the provision of facilities and services required by the school. More importantly, the principals of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century schools are required to encourage, motivate and energize the teachers and students towards the creation of effective teaching and learning environments leading to continuous improvements in school and student performances (Gamage, 2009a).

As a direct consequence of these new trends, demands and challenges have both negative and positive effects on school principals. The negative impact, for instance, relate to creating stress-related problems such as feelings of failure, depression, and even explosions of anger on the part of principals and teachers (Walker and Stott, 2000). On the other hand, most school leaders enjoy their role of school leadership with newly found power and authority, recognition and the ability to guide the direction of the school and the satisfaction of achievement when the schools and students achievements are high (Gamage, 2006b; Gamage and Hansson, 2006; Gamage and Pang, 2006; Gamage and Ueyama, 2004; Su, Gamage and Mininberg, 2003). However, with appropriate professional development and inductions to confront the new challenges arising from new trends and challenges, the principals are required to be flexible in their leadership styles, behaviours and managerial practices for the purpose of continuous improvement of schools' and students' successes. In this context, school principals are required to be schools' managing directors, instructional leaders, change agents, marketers, facilitators, mediators and key decision-makers.

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