

Impact of Principals' Leadership Style on Teachers' Professional Development

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Abstract:

This study investigates the impact of Principals' leadership styles on teachers' professional development. A survey research design was employed for this study. A sample of 16 principals and 80 teachers was selected from Valikamam Education zone and data was collected from the sample through questionnaires. Simple descriptive statistical techniques were used to analyze the data. The findings showed that most principals practiced democratic leadership style in most instances and teachers have identified that their participation in professional development programmes mostly supported by democratic leaders and least by autocratic leaders. Further they perceived that democratic leadership style of their principals has positive impact on their professional development.

Keywords: Principals, Leadership styles, Teachers, Professional development.

Introduction:

In the modern world teachers have to play numerous roles to successfully face the demands placed upon them by the society. To equip the teaching body with the skills and competencies needed for its new roles, it is necessary to have both quality initial teacher education and a coherent process of continuous professional development and keep the teachers up to date with the skills required in a knowledge based society. Successful professional development experiences have a noticeable impact on teachers work in and out of the classroom as well as on the teachers' beliefs and behaviour. According to Pearson(2008) effective professional development will prepare educators to understand and appreciate all students, create safe, orderly and

supportive learning environment. Therefore, in the modern knowledge explosion era teacher professional development is critically important to school improvement focused on enhanced student learning outcomes. Although many factors influence the professional development of teachers, school principal is in a unique position to influence the overall quality of it. Considerable part of the previous research has focused on teachers' professional development and the factors which affect their formation. However little is known about the impact of Principals' leadership styles on the professional development of teachers. The central point of this study is to explore teachers' views about the impact of their principals' leadership style on their professional development. In particular this study

tries to examine the leadership styles practiced by the principals and their influence on teachers' professional development.

Background of the study:

In Sri Lanka as in most of the developing countries teachers are the key source of knowledge, skills, wisdom, appropriate orientation, inspiration and models for the students. As a consequence the teacher is central in facilitating the process that lead to meaningful education and pupils learning are affected by teacher quality. Teacher professional development provides opportunities for teachers to explore new roles, develop instructional techniques, refine their practices and broaden themselves both as educators and as individuals.

The teaching force in Sri Lankan schools is made up of three main categories namely, graduate teachers, trained teachers and teachers from national colleges of education. Graduates from the national universities are directly appointed to teachers' service without any professional training. Above 35% of teachers in Sri Lanka are recruited as untrained graduates and they should be provided with appropriate professional development activities to enhance their professional skills. When they practice as teachers they follow a post graduate diploma in education programme to obtain a basic professional qualification. In Sri Lanka this professional diploma is offered by five institutions including four national

universities. Graduate teachers follow this programme at any one of these institutions to obtain required professional qualification. However choice and completion of this programme is influenced by many factors such as family, school, economy, age etc. As the instructional leader Principal plays a key role on the professional development of his/her teachers. Therefore there is a pressing need for empirical evidence on the impact of principals' leadership style on teachers' professional development and the relationship between principals' leadership style and teacher renewal and enhancement of professional knowledge and skills. The present study is designed to address this need by investigating teachers' perceptions on principals' leadership style on their professional development.

Literature Review:

The Literature review presents some views on Teachers' professional development, Principals' leadership styles and relationship between principals' leadership styles and Teachers' professional development.

Professional development in a broad sense refers to the development of a person in his or her professional role. Professional development consists of all natural learning experiences and those conscious and planned activities which are intended to be of direct or indirect benefit to the individual, group or school. It is the process by which, alone and with others teachers review,

renew and extend their commitment as change agents to the moral purpose of teaching and by which they acquire and develop critically the knowledge, skills and emotional intelligence essential to good professional thinking, planning and practice with children, young people and colleagues through each phase of their teaching career.(Day,1999). Day's definition is more holistic in the way that professional development covers all kinds of learning experiences both planned and unplanned from individuals to institution level to achieve the core aim of education.

As the instructional leader principal plays the key role in the professional development of his/her teachers. Dillan&Peterson emphasized this idea and stated that school head is the key player or backbone of a person to enhance the professional skills of teachers. Rowland & Adams also clearly state this idea. They suggested that the head teacher should be committed to develop teachers. Further they add she/he has to be a model, his/her teaching should be exemplary and provide clinical supervision to teachers. (cited in Komba&Nkumbi). Considering all these aspects, the present study tries to investigate the impact of principals' leadership style on teachers' professional development.

Vast amount of literature is available on the professional development of teachers and a number of studies have been done on the leadership styles of principals. A study conducted by

Adegbesan(2013), investigates the impact of principals' leadership style on teachers' morale in terms of commitment and productivity in secondary schools. However this study doesn't try to look at the professional role of teachers. So the researcher feels there is a gap in this aspect and should be studied. In another study Elzahiri(2013), examines the impact of principals' leadership style on teachers' motivation. Finding of this study illustrates that the effective leadership approaches will increase the job satisfaction and motivation of teachers. According to the available literature no studies were conducted to examine the relationship between principals' leadership styles and teachers' professional development in the Sri Lankan context. Therefore it is still worthwhile to throw light on this area. So it is the aim of the current study to explore the impact of principals' leadership style on teachers' professional development so as to enrich the local literature on the relationship between principals' leadership style and teachers' professional development with reference to teachers in the Sri Lankan context.

Objectives:

This study was carried out to achieve the following objectives:

- To examine the leadership styles practiced by the school principals

- To investigate how teachers identified the existing leadership style of their principals
- To identify teachers' perceptions on the principals leadership style in relation to their professional development
- To draw suggestions for principals to improve the quality of their leadership style

Methodology:

Survey research design was adopted for this study. The study focuses on the leadership style adopted by the principals and how it affects the professional development of teachers. The population of this study included the principals and teachers of government schools in Valikamam Education zone. Sample was selected using stratified random sampling technique. Sixteen schools were included in the sample which represents four types of schools namely 1AB, 1C, Type II and Type III. Questionnaires and interviews were used as the instruments for data collection. Simple descriptive statistical techniques were used to analyze the data and are presented using percentages and graphs. Qualitative data obtained through the open ended questions and interview were coded, categorized and analyzed into themes.

Findings and discussion:

The study focused on three leadership styles practiced by the principals and

their impact on teachers' professional development.

Leadership styles practiced by the principals:

The findings of the study revealed that most of the principals in the sample generally practiced democratic leadership styles. In addition they also practiced autocratic and laissez-faire leadership styles in some instances. Even though 80% of principals perceive themselves as democratic leaders, 50% of them believe that they had to be autocratic in some instances and 45% claim that they practiced laissez-faire at certain instances.

Teachers' perception on the impact of principals' leadership styles in relation to their professional development:

Teachers have identified that their participation in professional development programmes is mostly supported by democratic leaders and least by autocratic leaders. 75% of the teachers expect their principals to practice more passive and democratic leadership styles towards their professional development. They perceived that democratic leadership style has positive impact on their professional development.

Conclusions:

The study was undertaken to find out the impact of school principals leadership style on teachers' professional development. Sixteen schools in Valikamam education zone

were chosen for this study. Based on the findings, the following conclusions were drawn:

- The leadership style adopted by most of the principals is democratic.
- Principals' leadership style has a positive impact on teachers' professional development.

Suggestions:

Based on the findings, it has been discovered that teachers' participation in professional development activities is directly influenced by the leadership styles of principals.

1. Principals should promote and encourage teachers' professional growth rather than bureaucratic strategies.
2. A government policy should be made to ensure that all principals undergo an induction course on leadership and management.
3. The teacher education institutions should take actions to get the Principals' involvement in teachers' professional development programmes.

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