Instructional Leadership Behavior among Principals of Two Schools in Lalitpur, Nepal

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Abstract

Instructional leadership is the position in any educational institute that can utilize individual skills and knowledge to ensure the academic performance of students with necessary support for all teachers, students, and school staff. There are various components and dimensions of instructional leadership, such as planning, curriculum design and development, training delivery and professional development, evaluation and monitoring of teachers, and assessment of students. The purpose of the study is to explore the perceptions of school principals about instructional leadership and narrate their experiences. The research adopted a qualitative research method in which principals of renowned schools of Lalitpur district of Nepal were interviewed as the participants. The study shows that principals of high-performing schools possess certain qualities as instructional leaders. Since the study was conducted with limited participants, it can be further taken to larger extent to explore additional details and dimension about instructional leadership.

Introduction

Instructional leadership, in general, is taken as the management of curriculum and instructions by a principal in a school. The idea of instructional leadership emerged as a result of research connected with the successful school development of 1980s (Gumus et al., 2018), that revealed principal's role as the key component of successful schools' behaviour. The instructional leadership notion has lately been expanded to encompass more distributed approaches, such as transformational leadership, distributed leadership, and shared leadership, that emphasize distributed and shared empowerment among employees in the schools.

Wieczorek and Manard (2018) claimed that school principals are usually connected with instructional leadership since they are in-charge of curriculum, funding, and scheduling as well as the progress of each student in their schools. Such leaders often

work to enable teachers to become leaders, sharing the vision and mission of the school and serving as role models for learners. As a principal is the guideline, change agent, role model, director of educational institution, and manager of human resources at every school, they clearly have more impact on the behaviour and academic outcomes of children than other coworkers and employees (Bhujel, 2021).The school principals carry the torch for their institution's ethics and behaviors. Each school tries to build its unique learning environment. As a result, the contact between the principal and the teacher promotes the creation of a learning environment and the maintenance of quality in school performance.

As a scholar of educational leadership and a teacher for over two decades, I also experienced that the principals possess key responsibilities in making schools successful. Every successful school has the principal of dynamic behaviours. School leaders have a crucial role in establishing direction, fostering a positive school culture, and supporting and boosting staff motivation and dedication (Day & Sammons, 2013; Dinsdale, 2017). These qualities in school leadership enables schools cope with difficult situations and continue growing and becoming successful. However, in Nepal's context, I felt that the principals are administrators rather than instructional leaders. In the same regard, Kafle (2013) also claimed that rather than practicing instructional leadership , principals in Nepal are confined to the narrow functions of day-to-day administration. Concerning

instructors' professional growth, except for a few teachers whom I worked with, most of them think that their leaders do not support them sufficiently. Actually, teachers need leading support while performing their work (Bayler et al., 2017). Principals are in the position to foster higher collaboration among teachers and such relationship mostly leads to improvement in teachers' instructional practices, and those practices enhance students learning (Leithwood, 2005). But, in the context of Nepal, I feel, instructional leadership in school is not happening as anticipated. It seems that principals and leaders are not that qualified for carrying instructional leadership in their institution. Most of the leaders whom I worked with are neither from the management and educational nor from the leadership background. Consequently, they may be lacking knowledge about instructional practices to be carried out in the schools. The concept of research on instructional behaviour of principals in successful schools therefore came from my instance and experience as a teacher and teacher leader in various institutions. There seemed many problems existing in those schools due to the inexperience- and no relevant educational background of the principals. This research helped me understand and explore the instructional behaviour of two successful schools in Lalitpur district of Nepal. The behaviour of the principals explored here can be implemented to the other schools which are trying to upgrade themselves as successful schools.

The purpose of the study was to explore the concept of instructional leadership behaviour of school principals in the schools of Nepal. The research was conducted with a research question: How do principals of successful schools share their experiences as instructional leaders.

There are various dimensions of instructional leadership like planning, curriculum design, training delivery and professional development, monitoring and supervision, students' assessment and evaluation, resource allocation, and understanding and response to the larger societal context. Among them, my focus is only on perception on instructional leadership, curriculum design, teachers' professional development .

Methodology

The purpose of my qualitative study was to understand and explore various elements of instructional leadership of principals in Lalitpur district of Nepal. This study adopted an interpretative study method where Lalitpur district was selected as the site of my study. The principals of successful schools possess diverse knowledge of such systems and provide us with a different form of information that helps us generate our new concept of instructional leadership (Rigby, 2014). Hence, I conducted in-depth interviews with two school principals of Lalitpur which were selected purposively based on the relationship of the researcher to the participants. The paper's quality standards were maintained by honouring the 'responsible practice of research' (Dhakal, 2016). Unethical procedures were avoided in this study with the highest regard for honesty and sincerity in the research investigation. Themes were meticulously developed through the sharing of information and review in relation to the findings.

Instructional Leadership: An Understanding

One of the major themes that appeared from the data analysis was different dimensions of instructional leadership. One of the participants, in an informal talk, told that she had no such idea about instructional leadership, but she knew more about various types of other leadership styles, such as democratic, transformational and transactional. The other participant was well aware about the instructional leadership, and he could define and talk about its various dimensions, too. The former participant mentioned that she has been undertaking various roles besides instructional leadership. She said;

"*Principal is taken as the focal person in the school system. As a principal, I need to look after overall activities of the school and especially as a principal, need to focus on teachers' work and students' learning. There are also financial and administrative duties to him/her. I think instructional leadership is how to instruct our subordinates, our colleagues to work together for the betterment and to achieve the goal and vision..*"

The excerpt from the interview shows that

principal is the leading person in the Nepali schools, and they have to undertake various other roles as administrators besides looking after academic attribute in the school. Jackson and Parry (2011) define leadership as a process in which leaders utilize their knowledge and skills to lead and take a group of staffs in the anticipated direction that is relevant to their organization's goals and objectives. So, in this context, the principal can be taken as a good leader but not as an instructional leader because she herself was unaware about instructional leadership. But at the same time, another participant has different view, for he was looking after more academics in his school. He claimed:

"*Instructional leadership, in my perspective, is happening in three stages in my school. First stage is the class teachers and subject teachers themselves and they are themselves the instructional leaders. They are further supported by the head of departments who supervise and provide further support to class teachers and subject teachers. And head of departments is further supported by the academic coordinator and principal.*"

From the above excerpt, it is clear that the principal is acting more as an instructional leader rather than as the chief of overall activities within the schools. Here seemed a mixed view related to the roles and responsibilities of principals in the school, but it also showed that there are many similarities in their work as instructional leaders. According to Oznacar and Osma (2016), instructional leadership has changed the traditional role of the administrative approach of the school administrator and its basic point of start is the realization of education. Furthermore, Polatcan and Cansoy (2019) believe that the school principal, as an instructional leader, is expected to promote student achievement through behaviors like sharing of mission and vision of the school with employees, taking part in the instructional project, and creating the environment conducive to learning. From this perspective, the principal, here, seems to be undertaking the role of instructional leadership. Moreover, as the school is adopting three layers of instructional leadership from grade teachers or subject teachers, head of departments, and to the academic coordinator or principal, there appeared to be the concepts of having distributed leadership role which permits a school to become an effective educational organization. The collective effort of leaders pulls all in the same direction with the guidance of same vision and mission along with values towards a common set of goals and objectives (Solly, 2018).

The former one seemed to carry out the responsibility as both an administrator and instructional leader, whereas the latter one seemed to only act as an instructional leader.

Instructional Leadership: Curriculum Design and Development

Curriculum design is one of the important elements of instructional leadership. From the collected data, it was one of the major components that emerged as one of the

themes. When the curriculum guides and assessments are prepared and readied for execution, leaders show their focus on the curriculum by providing opportunities, resources, and tools for all the teachers to understand and apply the new curriculum and assessment documents (Ruebling et al., 2004). In both, the schools' design and development of curriculum were happening. Both the schools were adopting the curriculum designed by the Curriculum Development Centre (CDC), Nepal Government with some modifications as per their situation, students learning achievements, and the feedback from teachers, parents, students, and experts. One of the participants said:

"In our school, we look after the children from age 5 to 16 years. We are very much focused on the development stages. What we believe is that as per age group, there are lots of changes and according to which we have to work. We are following government curriculum. For the preprimary section, we are following the curriculum from the Early Childhood Development Center integrated with the Finnish curriculum. Whenever we design any activities, we always focus on the development of the age group of the students."

The excerpt here claimed that they used the government curriculum and the activities needed to deliver the curriculum. They focus more on the developmental stages of different age groups of students. A school curriculum is the combination of subjects studied in a year as the learners move

through the educational system provided by the school (Cambridge University, n.d.). Hence, it can be claimed that the principal is aware of designing the curriculum at her school with necessary improvement in the curriculum from the government or others as per the need and requirements of different age groups of students in the school. At the same time, the other participant is clear about designing and developing curriculum in his school. He stated:

"In my school, we basically use the government curriculum. But, we feel none of the curriculum in itself is complete. In a sense, it needs to be challenging and it should, in a way, encompass all kinds of learners. Considering this, we have designed our own school-made curriculum. With this, what we do is we integrate school-made curriculum with the government curriculum, which we hope, suits all kind of learners, makes learning more practical, more project-based, more inquiry-based. As a result, learning itself becomes more inquisitive and more interesting with the varied learning environment to learners."

From the above points, it can be said that curriculum development in both the schools was happening through a rigorous process even though they were using the government curriculum of Nepal. Both the schools were integrating such curriculum with their curriculum which they prepared to support all kinds of learners in their schools. Curriculum planning involves the development of the course and assessment plans for different

subjects and also involves more detailed plans for learning units, individual lesson and lesson sequences (UNESCO, n.d.). The leaders were found to be more concerned about the development and design yearly and terminal curriculum plan accompanying with unit and lesson plans with various activities to be executed suitably to all types of learners in the classroom.

Instructional Leadership: Teachers' Professional Development and Training

Teachers' professional development and training is another important component in carrying out instructional leadership in a better way. It is considered that the teachers need to be more professional and be well aware about their subject matter and methods of delivering it. Moreover, teacher education and training can support teachers to "develop the ability in their students to analyze, pose questions, and take action on the diverse social, political, cultural, and economic contexts that influence and shape their lives" (Dhakal, 2017, p. 54). Therefore, training, and professional development programs certainly help teachers to develop them further. Here, in both cases, principals were very clear about the importance of providing such training sessions in their school. Their claims are presented here.

Participant 1

"I am emphasizing the work on perspectives of teachers' professional development, teachers' development, and teachers' knowledge is highly important for the students' development. So, in preprimary section, every teacher needs certain training from Early Childhood Education Center (ECEC) in play-way method and in primary section, we send the teachers to Rato Bangla for getting training; some teachers are doing Primary Teacher Training Program (PTTP) and doing short term courses from there. Besides that, every week, we have a day, Thursday, to plan for different sessions for teachers. Sometimes, teachers themselves develop the session and sometimes administration will provide the content and the session. Similarly, every month, there is training and we hire the trainer from outside. Our teachers also take sessions for the teachers from other schools too."

Participant 2

"In my school, teachers' professional development is happening in both ways: we broadly divide into two categories, let's say, one is pre-service training, and one is in-service training. So, pre-service training usually happens before we start the academic session where we revise the curriculum, and take some training on new pedagogies, new strategies, or learning from each other. Even the motivational sessions are held to refresh our teachers at the beginning and end of the academic session. Now, in in-service training, we provide not only training by ourselves but also take the training from different institutions like Kathmandu University School of Education, and Rato Bangla Foundation. Some trainings were provided by Nisarga Batika, British Council, and NELTA too."

From the excerpts afore mentioned, we can say that both the schools were emphasizing the professional developments of teachers and they believed that such trainings certainly enhance the quality of education and promote the students' development. It was found that in both the schools, the principals were emphasizing teachers' professional development and training for them. Instructional improvement is about staffing a school with professional teachers and providing suitable support and resources to be effective in the classroom (Horng & Loeb, 2010). They felt that if teachers are well trained, they can certainly deliver their instructions well in the classroom. They were providing lots of opportunities for teachers' professional development, and they were leading in such a way that their teachers also became able to train teachers from other schools.

In addition to these dimensions of instructional leadership, participants also talked about the scope of instructional leadership, such as assessment systems, and evaluation and monitoring of the teachers. One of the participants' remarks has already been included in the previous section of instructional leadership which clearly referred to the evaluation and monitoring of teachers through various levels of steps from peer observation of class, supervision, monitoring, and support by the heads of departments along with academic coordinator and principal himself. Furthermore, as a form of monitoring and evaluation, the heads of departments had to prepare a report on the teachers of their respective departments, provision of a self-evaluation system, provision of appraisal forms, etc. which shows that supervision of teachers in the school was happening.

Regarding the assessment, it seemed that both the schools were adopting both forms of assessment system (viz. formative and summative). It was found that in both schools, the continuous assessment system (CAS) was applied more in the junior classes- till grade three along with some formative assessments too. For three to seven, they have adopted CAS and end session examinations were credited equally. Similarly, from grade eight to ten, they were assessing through end term examination with weightage around 75 percent and 25 percent through CAS, including projects, practical, experiments, participation in different activities conducted in the classroom during the teaching-learning process.

The school principals are at the focal point in the success of schools in delivering quality education to students. Niqab et al. (2014) advocate the concept of leadership as the pivotal role in the functioning of the school. Similarly, EL-Nashar (2016) believes that school principals have a great impact on the school's effectiveness as they are considered as the steering wheels of the school. The findings showed that both the schools have shown strong instructional leadership qualities though in one condition, the principal herself was not aware of what instructional leadership actually is, but

from her expression, it was clear that she was showing some qualities of instructional leadership in her school and running the school as an instructional cum administrative leader. In the next case, the principal appeared to act as a complete instructional leader from the perspective of the dimensions taken as the study of my research. He was not only leading the institution as the instructional leader but also working to produce other leaders in the school.

The attributes and traits that make someone effective as a leader are known as leader behaviours. Leaders use their actions to direct, guide, and influence their team's work (Western Governors University, 2020). Although there are many natural features that boost leadership behaviour, there are techniques and actions that leaders can apply to improve their conduct and effectiveness. Leaders who use their actions to express a vision, encourage teams, and ensure that everyone is as productive as possible are essential to the success of any organization (Western Governors University, 2020). Leaders in the study are somehow found to be acting as instructional leaders. Their behavior and traits have helped their subordinates foster better in terms of assessment of students and value the professional development of teachers in their schools. Moreover, they are often offering the development programs in their schools and sending their teachers to various training and professional development programs.

Conclusion and Implication

The study points out that in a successful school, school heads or principals' leadership plays a vital role in the academic achievement of the students. Their role as instructional leadership has helped to enhance the effectiveness of the teaching-learning activities in those schools. Since the study was conducted only on the two renowned private schools, further research can be conducted on these issues in a larger scale for exploring the broader view about instructional leadership and its dimensions. Leaders in high-performing schools mostly focus on planning, curriculum design and implementation, teachers' professional development, evaluation and monitoring of teachers and students, and assessment for further improvement of instruction to deliver in the classroom. It is clear that if the principals are well aware of improving the instructions through implementation of all components of instructional leadership, leadership thrives. To some extent, this study proved wrong my perception of principals in private schools of Nepal. It showed that, in recent years, principals in schools are more sincere and serious about their knowledge and skills to enhance the academic quality of students. This, in fact, would lead our education system to a new height in the days ahead. This study has certain implications that it has helped me understand better the dimensions of instructional leadership. This study will make school administrators and other stakeholders know more about how the improvement in instructions can be carried

out and educational excellence promoted. For building a successful school, the dimensions of instructional leadership studied herein, and others can be replicated.

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