

Teacher Perceptions of Leadership Styles in Distinguished Title I Schools and the Effect on Teacher Satisfaction and Effort

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Abstract

Leadership in schools makes a difference in the school climate, culture, and in student achievement. There are several studies related to this topic but none focused on the leadership styles in Distinguished Title I schools. The purpose of this quantitative survey research was to determine common styles of leadership in Distinguished Title I schools and the outcomes on teacher satisfaction and effort. Research questions focused on three leadership approaches: transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership and how they are applied in the Distinguished Title I schools. Data were collected with the Management Leadership Questionnaire 5X (MLQ) in order to determine the leadership approaches used in Distinguished Title I schools and the impact on teacher satisfaction and extra effort. Data were analyzed by using multivariate analysis of the variance (MANOVA) and multiple regressions. Findings show transformational leadership to be the leadership style used the most frequently in all of the Distinguished Title I schools in the study. Transformational leadership impacted teacher job satisfaction and extra effort the most. Transactional leadership had positive effects but not as strong as transformational leadership. Laissez-faire leadership proved the least effective with negative effects.

Key Words: Title 1 schools, transformational leadership, job satisfaction, teacher effort

1. Introduction

The education system today has placed enormous pressure on schools for students to achieve at high levels on state and national assessments. Schools provide for students from poverty an opportunity to acquire skills and knowledge that will help them find better paying jobs (Pai, Adler, & Shadiow, 2006). Schools that are considered Title I have a great challenge when it comes to high achievement (Jacobson, Brooks, Giles, Johnson, & Yilamaki, 2007). Students coming to school from lower income backgrounds tend to have a more limited academic vocabulary and less exposure to literature (Pai et al., 2006). In order to improve society, children from all backgrounds and socio economic levels need to achieve in school (Mulford et al., 2008).

School leadership can make a significant difference in schools where there are more students from poverty. The principal's actions do make a difference. Leaders impact student learning through their influence on the organization (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). Principals can create an environment that is conducive for teaching and learning through setting up structures and climates that support both of these efforts. Some of the ways principals have created positive change is establishing a strong vision, creating collaborative teams focused on student improvement, and establishing relationships with trust and mutual respect as the central tenet (Chenoweth & Theokas, 2013; Wallace Foundation, 2013).

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Principals need to ensure that teachers are motivated and feel as though they are making a difference in what they do every day. The job of a teacher is intense and requires long hours to plan and prepare to meet student needs. Teachers that are motivated and satisfied in their positions will meet the increased demands of student achievement (Aydin, Sarier, & Uysal, 2013; Finnigan, 2012;). Principals need to pay attention to the wellbeing of their employees because the level of teacher job satisfaction can have direct effects on their mental and physical health. When principals clearly state expectations and motivate their teachers, job satisfaction can increase (Rowold & Schlotz, 2009).

With the increased demands to hold schools responsible for the achievement of students, there is a need for leadership that transcends the difficulties of the situations in the schools (Klar & Brewer, 2013). Principal leadership can have a significant effect on student learning (Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008). There are some principals that are able to increase student achievement on state assessments even with the high and moderate poverty levels in their schools. Leadership practices of principals of the high and moderate poverty level schools need to be examined and analyzed (Jacobson et al., 2007).

2. Background of Study

Principal leadership is central to the success of the school (Klar & Brewer, 2013). The principal sets the vision, mission, and tone for the school. The way in which the principal interacts with teachers and students will set the tone for the school environment. The environment needs to be one based on mutual trust and respect. The principal and the teachers need to work collaboratively to impact the success of students. The impact of the principal's behavior on teachers' and students' achievement is a notion that needs examination in order to continue to create successful schools (Leithwood, 1994; Valentine & Prater, 2011). Schools with students from higher poverty backgrounds have increased challenges of educating their students. Students come to school with many more burdens than students of a different income level (Mulford et al., 2008). Principal leadership can make a positive impact on student achievement (Marzano et al., 2005), on teacher job satisfaction (Nir & Kranot, 2006), and on the total school environment (Bogler, 2005; Griffiths, 2004).

There exists extensive literature examining the impact of transformational leadership on business environments and in school environments. Several studies have shown positive impacts in employee satisfaction, motivation, and employee effort (Avolio & Bass, 2004). Transformational leadership has also been proven to inspire employees to solve problems in unique ways and increase their commitment to the organization (Bono & Judge, 2003; Herold et al., 2008; Ismail et al., 2011). The transformational leader establishes a strong vision and mission. The transformational leader understands how to influence their employees' values and beliefs to that of the organization (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978). The transformational leader builds strong relationships with employees and builds strong levels of trust so that employees will feel valued and give extra effort in their work (Griffin & Green, 2013; Rowold & Scholtz, 2009).

3. Statement of the Problem

This quantitative study contributes to the body of knowledge with a focus not only in general school environment, but in a specific type of school - a Distinguished Title I school. Schools with high poverty students have greater barriers to educating students such as building background knowledge to learn and less supports at home for learning (Pai et al., 2006). Transformation can make a difference in the entire school environment (McIntyre, 2003). This study begins with an examination the leadership style of principals in high performing Title I schools. The examination of leadership styles determine if there are commonalities in schools where student achievement has been at high levels. After the initial examination of leadership styles additional comparisons are made with employee satisfaction, effort, and the level of poverty at the school.

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this quantitative survey research was to determine common styles of leadership in Distinguished Title I schools and the outcomes on teacher satisfaction and effort. The purpose of this survey research study is threefold. First, the researcher identified leadership styles of principals in high performing Title I schools that have reached distinguished performance status according to the state of Texas standards (see definitions).

Secondly, the researcher examined the difference between schools with high poverty versus mid-high poverty in order to determine if there is a difference in leadership styles. Thirdly, the researcher examined employee satisfaction and extra effort to determine if the leadership style impacts these two areas.

5. Research Questions

The following research questions will be used to guide this study:

1. What type of leadership style (transformational, transactional, laissez-faire) do teachers identify in schools that are Distinguished Title I?
2. To what extent is there a difference in the three leadership styles (transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire) by the poverty status of the school (mid-high poverty vs. high poverty) at Distinguished Title I schools?
3. To what extent do the three leadership styles (transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire) predict teachers' job satisfaction at Distinguished Title I schools?
4. To what extent do the three leadership styles (transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire) predict extra effort in teachers at Distinguished Title I schools?

6. Significance of the Study

Principal leadership is central to effective schools (Edmonds, 1979). The principal's role is to empower and motivate teachers to improve the performance of students. In high poverty school principals not only need to ensure that the vision and mission of the school is firmly entrenched, but they also need to ensure increased structure and routines are firmly in place (Finnigan, 2012). Principal leadership can have a significant effect on student learning (Marzano et al., 2005; Robinson et al., 2008), on teacher job satisfaction, and on the total school environment (Bogler, 2005; Griffiths, 2004).

7. Method of Procedure

The *Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) 5X* (Avolio & Bass, 2004) was used in the study to examine the leadership styles of principals. There are 45 Likert 5-point questions on the assessment. The MLQ measures each of the three types of leadership in the full range of leadership models, transformational leadership, transactional leadership, and laissez-faire leadership (Avolio & Bass, 2004). The leadership behavior classification was used to determine whether there are similarities and differences between principals in schools that are Distinguished Title I. The leadership questionnaire also provides data on satisfaction and extra effort of employees. The data was used to make comparisons of various schools. Scores for the three leadership types were computed by finding the mean of questions regarding specific factors. Scores for the satisfaction and effort questions were computed by adding the scores for the questions addressing each.

7.1 Selection of Sample

The selection of participants in the study was made by purposive sampling (Babbie, 2007). Purposive sampling is no probability-based sampling relying upon the researcher's judgment about which units are the most useful for the study. This type of sampling was used because of the type of school needed. Distinguished Title I schools in the same district with the same curriculum will rule out a confounding variable of the curriculum. The curriculum used in the district is the same at all of the schools. The focus was six schools in a suburban Texas school district, all of which are considered Distinguished Title I schools. Demographic data about the schools' poverty level will be used to compare the schools in the study.

7.2 Collection of Data

Data was collected through the use of the MLQ-5X survey. The researcher attended a staff meeting at each school and explained the study. After the researcher outlined the study, consent forms were given to each person along with the survey. The researcher gave the instructions, left a box where the surveys could be turned in, and left the area so that participants were not pressured to complete the survey. Staff members completed the survey to determine the leadership style that is prevalent on the campus. The survey was taken through paper and pencil and the participants had the right to refuse to participate at any time.

Confidentiality measures included collecting no demographic or personal data on participants, and ensuring that only the researcher would be working with the individual data from surveys. The final aggregated results of the study for each school were shared with each principal. The overall aggregated results of the study without identifying school information was shared with the Superintendent designee.

7.3 Treatment of the Data

The leadership style of each of the principals was determined by adding the scores on the items that match the style and averaging the total. Each principal has a score for the three leadership styles, transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership. The score indicates the degree to which they behave in that style. Scores closer to 4 indicate a higher amount of the leadership style. Scores that are closer to 0 represent less of the style indicated (Avolio & Bass, 2004). For Research Question 1, the leadership style of each of the principals was determined by adding the scores on the items that match the style and averaging the total. Each principal has a score for the three leadership styles, transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership. The score indicates the degree to which they behave in that style. Descriptive statistics were used to report and analyze results of this research question.

For Research Question 2, the data was analyzed through the use of a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA). This is an analysis of variance with several dependent variables. The MANOVA tests for the difference in means of more than one dependent variable for two or more groups (Field, 2013). The independent variable is the school's poverty level (mid-high or high). The dependent variables are the three leadership styles, transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership. Teachers' rating of their principal on each factor was used as a second set of dependent variables. Research Question 3 was answered using a multiple linear regression. A multiple linear regression is appropriate to conduct when the goal is to assess if a set of interval/ratio independent variables predicts a single interval/ratio dependent variable (Pallant, 2010). The interval-level independent variables were the scores on three leadership styles (transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire). The interval-level dependent variable was the scores on job satisfaction. Research Question 4 also was answered using a multiple linear regression. The independent variables were the scores on the leadership style of the principal (transformational, transactional, or laissez-faire leadership) and the dependent variable were the teachers' mean score on the four questions regarding effort.

8. Summary of the Study

In order for a school to be effective strong principal leadership is essential (Edmonds, 1979). The principal involvement in the school matters and makes a difference to the culture and learning environment established at the school (Bogler, 2005 & Griffiths, 2004). The role of the principal is to motivate and empower teachers so that the teachers are able to improve the academic performance of students. Principal leadership can have a significant effect on student learning (Robinson et al., 2008; Wallace Foundation, 2013), on teacher job satisfaction (Nir & Kranot, 2006), and on the total school environment (Bogler, 2005; Griffiths, 2004). Transformational leadership can make a difference in the entire school environment. With the advent of No Child Left Behind (2011), increased accountability measures were placed on schools for high achievement test scores. These standards have placed enormous pressure on principals to ensure that all students are making academic progress and are ready for more rigorous assessments. This study holds relevance for all principals of Title I schools. The ability of the principal to examine their own leadership style and begin to learn about other possibilities of leadership practice could change the school culture and increase student achievement.

9. Summary of the Findings

The results from this study provided data that could benefit school district central office administration and principals in relationship to leadership style. The study provided perspectives from teachers about the effect of various leadership styles employed by principals. The data collected in this study adds to the existing body of research on leadership styles, but offers a more specific examination of Distinguished Title I schools. This section will address each research question and summarize the findings of this study.

9.1 Research Question 1

Means and standard deviations were computed for each school. There were three leadership style scores for every school. Transformational leadership received the highest mean rating at Distinguished Title I schools.

9.2 Research Question 2

A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted to assess research question two. The means and standard deviations for the dependent variables by school poverty level were compared. High-poverty schools had higher mean scores for transactional leadership and lower mean scores for transformational and laissez-faire scores. However, upon examination of between-subjects effects, none were significant. The findings suggest that although there were significant differences among leadership scores simultaneously, there was no specific leadership style that was different by poverty level.

9.3 Research Question 3

To assess research question three, a multiple linear regression analysis was conducted. The multiple regressions used the three measures of leadership style, transformational leadership, transactional leadership, and laissez-faire leadership, as the predictor variables. Transformational style showed a positive correlation; meaning the more the leadership style was present the more satisfied employees were in their job. Laissez-faire leadership scores were negatively correlated; meaning that when laissez-faire leadership was present, job satisfaction decreased. This suggests that as transformational leadership increased, job satisfaction also tended to increase.

9.4 Research Question 4

To assess research question four, a multiple linear regression analysis was conducted. The multiple regressions used the three measures of leadership style, transformational leadership, transactional leadership, and laissez-faire leadership, as the predictor variables. Again, two leadership styles showed a positive correlation, transformational leadership and transactional leadership, meaning that the more the leadership style was present the employees would show extra effort in their job. Laissez-faire leadership scores were negatively correlated; meaning that when laissez-faire leadership was present, extra effort decreased. All predictor variables showed a significant correlation with extra effort. Therefore as transformational leadership and transactional leadership increased, extra effort tended to increase as well. It also indicates that as laissez-faire increased, extra effort tended to decrease. Transformational leadership was the strongest predictor.

10. Conclusions

Leadership in schools is the responsibility of the building principal. The principal sets the vision and mission for all to follow. When principals use transformational leadership, teachers have increased job satisfaction and extra effort. With the increase demands on teachers, job satisfaction is important. School districts invest significant resources into training teachers and when teachers leave the school increased time and increased money resources need to be expended by the school and the district. Leadership training is essential to the continued development of schools, as it helps leaders to develop the skills and methods that will affect employee growth and development, which will, in turn, increase teacher retention and student achievement. This study provided evidence that transformational leadership produces positive impacts for teachers. Continuing to provide training in these methods and internships where these methods are used would be beneficial to any school district.

11. Implications

Principal leadership is the key to building an effective school (Edmonds, 1979). The principal's role is to empower, support, and motivate teachers to improve the performance of students. Principal leadership can have a significant effect on student learning (Marzano et al., 2005; Robinson et al., 2008; Wallace Foundation, 2013), on teacher job satisfaction (Nir & Kranot, 2006), and on the total school environment (Bogler, 2005; Griffiths, 2004). Oftentimes principals enter into the leadership position with leadership theory from the classroom, however, possibly not putting the theories into practice. After being in the position for at least a year, taking a leadership self-assessment to determine the areas of strength and areas to work on would assist principals in developing leadership qualities. Principals learn their leadership through self-reflection.

Training the leadership team of a school district on the principals and practices of transformational leadership will help create an environment where teachers will be more satisfied and put forth extra effort. School districts employ millions of people. If the work environments become places that are positive and inspire teachers to work hard every day, then it will benefit not only the teachers, but the students. The awareness of the vision and mission of the organization will guide the team (Aydin et al., 2013; Finnigan, 2012). Transformational leadership training for principals is vital to the total school climate and student achievement. This study cannot be generalized to other school districts because it was a case study of one school district. The lessons learned from the study can be transferred to other schools and districts. One of the lessons is that laissez-faire leadership does not promote teacher satisfaction and extra effort by teachers. A second lesson is that transformational leadership has the most significant positive employee outcomes on job satisfaction and extra effort. School districts can use these two lessons as a starting point for training the principals in the school district. The training could result in a common vision and mission for leadership.

12. Recommendations

12.1 Training

The findings of this qualitative research suggest that transformational leadership can increase employee satisfaction and extra effort in Distinguished Title I schools. Training in the area of transformational leadership practices should be conducted with principals in order to ensure that principals are able to recognize transformational leadership and focus their leadership in this area. In the training the leaders would score themselves on a self-assessment, followed by a study of the self-assessment data to look for patterns. The trainers would then develop training to target areas that appear on the self-assessment. In this self-assessment, the school district would be able to target training toward empowering leaders, which may, in turn, transfer to increased teacher satisfaction and extra effort. Laissez-faire leadership has been shown, through this study and through previous research, to have negative effects on employees (Skogstad et al., 2007). Internships for aspiring administrators in the Distinguished Title I schools is another way that training could take place. Training aspiring administrators in essential practices that are successful is a logical way to take theory and apply it to best practice.

12.2 Replication of the Study

Further studies should be conducted using the *MLQ-5X* in schools to determine the effectiveness of transformational leadership. In this study, transformational leadership was the most identified leadership style prevalent in the studied schools. Transformational leadership also showed a significant impact in the area of employees' job satisfaction and extra effort. Would these results be similar in a different demographic? Would there be similar indications of transformational leadership used in different schools? Questions such as these cannot be answered through examining one case; a further investigation into other schools would need to be conducted.

Further studies should also be conducted into why there were differences in schools with identification of leadership style. The differences in the schools perception of leadership styles was an additional analyses conducted. This information allows schools to view how the teachers' view the leader and begin to think about practices in relationship to the findings of this study. School B had the highest transformational leadership scores and the lowest laissez-faire scores. This school is a high-poverty environment with students making progress. The data identifies areas for further investigation. The next step in this study would be to examine qualitative responses from teachers to determine specific patterns of leadership behavior that produce the job satisfaction and extra effort. Digging deeper to gain more insight into practices at school B would be another step that could be taken in order to give concrete practices to principals at other schools.

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