

**Leadership Behavior of Principals and School Performance
in Public and Private High Schools**

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Abstract

This mixed-method study determined the relationship of principals' leadership behavior to school performance. The respondents were teachers, students and parents from high performing and low performing public and private high schools. To determine the leadership behavior of the principals, three sets of self-constructed questionnaires were administered to students, teachers and parents. Focus group discussions were conducted with students, teachers and parents, while separate interviews were conducted with the principals. Findings revealed that teachers and parents perceived the leadership behavior of the principals as *very evident* while the students perceived the leadership behavior of their respective principals as *evident*. It was revealed in the focus group discussions that all principals are strict in implementing school policies. Among four (4) performance indicators, only Completion and Attrition Rates had a significant relationship with leadership behavior. Interview data revealed that principals recognized the crucial role of parents in the school, however, only the high performing schools had consistent activities and programs for parents. Consultations for major school decisions are also being practiced in the high performing schools.

Keywords: Leadership behavior, school performance, high performing schools, low performing schools

Like any organization, a school's success is dependent on the kind of leadership behavior its principal exercises. Theoretical explanations have been proposed for how leadership has greatly impacted culture, history and civilization of mankind. Leadership is not only associated with industry and business but with education as well. It is essential to improve the context of any department or institution. Productive schools and excellent performance do not exist without effective leadership style. Leadership behavior refers to the measures being undertaken by leaders to achieve the goals on an organization and promote the interest of its stakeholders (Hoek *et al.*, 2021).

Among all the education policies all over the world, school leadership has been given greater importance. Increased school autonomy and a greater focus on schooling and school results have made it essential to reconsider the role of school leaders (Pont *et al.*, 2008). As a result of the shift of policy priority, calls for the need to professionalize school leadership are growing. Educational policies that are geared toward the professionalization of school leadership are seen to provide support to school leaders by providing them a more definitive role in the school.

Over the years, the role of school principals has clearly evolved from being mere scientific managers, democratic leaders, and humanistic facilitators to instructional leaders. The role of principals before was purely managerial and relational in nature, but today, principals have taken on a more active role in the delivery of instruction. This role was also brought about by placing great importance to a more dynamic and adaptive curriculum of schools that must be properly implemented and monitored. The evolution of their role was also a result of their being conscious of the academic achievement of students.

On one hand, the perceptions of the students, teachers, and parents were invaluable so as to validate the responses of academic leaders as regards leadership behavior. On the other hand, school performance was also taken into consideration to determine whether the leadership behavior of academic leaders has an impact to both public and private schools. Although proof on leadership effects on student learning may not be easy to interpret, several of the existing research underestimates these effects. The entire effects of leadership on student learning account for about a portion of total school effects (Leithwood *et al.*, 2004). Moreover, the review of educational leadership and student achievement reveals a plethora of empirical information about the behavior of the school principal as it relates to school performance based on student achievement. Thus, the principal's leadership behavior is the most vital component to the functioning of a school as it relates to student achievement (Moffitt, 2007). It is then the intent of this study to determine the extent to which principal leadership behavior influences school performance. There is nothing new about the idea of the difference that effective education leadership makes an improvement on student learning, however, what has remained unclear is how leadership matters and the ingredients of successful leadership and how it translates to successful schools which this study also attempts to find out (Deal, T.E. and Peterson K.D., 1990).

Statement of the Problem

This study aimed to determine the relationship of the leadership behavior of school principals to student achievement. Specifically, it attempted to answer the following questions. 1) What is the leadership behavior of the principals as perceived by the teachers, students and parents? 2) What is extent of the leadership behavior of the principals that influences the school performance of the students in high performing public and private schools and low performing public and private schools? 3) Is there a significant difference in the leadership behavior of school principals between high performing schools and low performing schools as perceived by teachers, students and parents? 4) Is there a significant relationship between the leadership behavior of the principals and school performance in terms of National

Achievement Test ratings, completion rates, attrition rates and participation in academic and non-academic competition outside the school?

Theoretical Framework

Theories derived at the disciplines of psychology and sociology tend to underpin the perception that the behavior of a school administrator, for instance, is formed by several factors, including his own value system, or, which develop in the course of time through an incorporation of many different experiences. The said belief system that is associated with the behavior of a person is a synthesis of several others such as political and religious belief systems (Null and Smead, 1971).

One of the most recent leadership theories is the High Performance Theory introduced by Thomas J. Sergiovanni. This theory came as a response to the lack of a genuine educational leadership theory because existing prevalent theories at that time were originally conceptualized for corporate companies and not for schools. The High Performance Theory suggests that instead of connecting people to rules and scripts, it is better to connect them to outcomes (Sergiovanni, 2006). In the field of education, the test results manifest the outcomes. The theory is closely associated with outcomes and emphasizes the need for the participation of principals, teachers, parents and the community in decision-making. In this regard, it views that principals are expected to be 'outcomes-minded' and that the school should always act in a coordinated fashion. In relation to the current study, it is an accepted fact that school principals always aim to improve school performance based on different indicators. The theory supports standardized performance indicators which aim to improve a school's performance.

Review of Related Literature

As Stogdill (1974) posits, leadership as a construct has been defined in different ways by various scholars. A review of

these definitions suggests leadership can be defined as: 1) process (act) of influencing the activities of an organized group in its efforts toward goal setting and goal achievement 2) a complex process involving the acts of: assessing one's environment and one's leadership constraints, developing numerous necessary leadership traits and skills (such as integrity, self-confidence, a drive for excellence, and skill in communications and influencing people), refining and modifying one's style for different situations, achieving predetermined and continually self-evaluating one's performance and developing one's potential; and 3) a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal. Stogdill (1974) further noted that there are nearly several different definitions of leadership as there are people who have tried to define the term. Until now no one can come up with a common definition of leadership.

For Sergiovanni (2006), hegemony has many features, each subsidizing uniquely to school excellence and school competence. The present focus in leadership theory and practice provides a limited view, dwelling excessively on some aspects of leadership to the virtual exclusion of others. Unfortunately, these ignored facets of leadership are connected to excellence—a revelation now unravelling from current research on school effectiveness and school excellence. Facets of leadership can be characterized metaphorically as forces available to administrators, supervisors, and teachers as they impact the events of schooling. Force is the energy brought to support on circumstances to commence or cease motion or change. Leadership forces can be construed as a weapon available to academic leaders such as: administrators, supervisors, and teachers to yield or sustain changes needed to develop schooling.

According to Cummins (2015), on school campus, leadership is second only to teaching in its impact on student success. What is crucial is that a strong leader pulls together all the important variables into a critical mass. He also specified five effective leadership practices such as, 1) shaping a vision of academic success for all students where effective principals make clear the school is committed to high standards and success for every child. 2) Creating a climate hospitable to education in which

from ensuring orderliness to making teachers feel they are part of a community of professionals, great school leaders ensure all people in the school can focus on learning. 3) Cultivating leadership in others where students perform better in math and reading tests in schools that show good leadership at all levels—including principals, teachers, and staff. 4) Improving instruction where principals focus relentlessly on the quality of instruction. 5) Managing people, data, and processes where effective principals make good use of the resources at hand proving that they are good managers (Deal and Petterson, 1990).

In the same manner, Gomez (2010), pointed out that to enhance higher achieving middle level schools, academic leaders are motivated to (1) focus on team building strategies to capacitate staff, strengthen collegiality, and permit the principal to zero in on school performance, (2) link parents to the school through meetings and workshops designed to develop parental support at home, and (3) allot time and resources for teachers to engage in decision-making and to brainstorm best teaching practices with colleagues.

King (2002) discussed that today's academic leaders are learning leaders. They join in continuous, collaborative, professional learning experiences to enhance teaching and learning. Principals and superintendents work with teachers in adult learning activities such as study groups, school visits and examination of student work. Academic leaders acknowledge their own need to improve a broad knowledge based on curriculum instruction and assessment, and they ask for continuing professional development trainings/seminars to realize that goal. Among the countless expectations of today's academics leaders, the new cohort of principals need to formulate the conditions needed for professional learning communities to prosper. Academic leaders have to act as lead learners and set a good example within the institution that all community members continue to learn best practices and continue to work to meet the needs of all students. Academic leaders must improve the skills necessary to gather and use data from a myriad of sources to

respond to accountability measures set forth in performance standards and help enlighten decisions related to school development.

Methodology

Participants

Four secondary schools in the City of Manila served as the research locale of the study. Two are public high schools (one high performing and one low performing) and the other two are private high schools (one high performing and one low performing). The classifications of the participant-schools are based on their National Achievement Test (NAT) ranking from 2012 to 2014. Schools that were consistently at the bottom of ten of the NAT ranking were considered as low performing schools while those that have been consistently in the top ten were considered as high performing schools. These classifications of the school-participants are necessary to obtain the objectives of the study. A total of 531 respondents participated in this study and cross-analysis of the respondents showed the following:

As grouped according to types of school, 131 were from private schools and 400 were from public schools. Moreover, 287 of the respondents are from high performing schools, while 244 were from low performing school. The respondents consisted of three (3) groups; 122 teachers, 279 students, and 165 parents.

Research Instruments

Questionnaire

The primary instrument of the study was self-constructed questionnaires. There were three (3) sets of questionnaires constructed by the researcher specifically for the high school teachers, students and parents. All questionnaires were duly validated by experts. The experts included principals from private and public high schools who were not part of the study, a psychologist, a language expert and a statistician. The validation of the initial sets of questionnaire revealed that there were terms that needed to be changed for several reasons such as; double-

meaning, vague, not suited for the level of students, bias and suggestive. There were also some statements that were revised, replaced or deleted because they were not appropriate for the study. The researcher applied all the suggestions and recommendations of the experts.

For the statistical treatment, the study used a four-point Likert scale in computing for the weighted means. The T-test was used to determine the significant difference between the leadership behavior of principals in the high performing schools and low performing schools. The Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient formula was used to identify the correlation between the leadership behavior of principals and school performance.

The researcher also conducted individual interviews with the principals of the selected schools as well as focus group discussions with the teachers and students. An interview protocol served as a guide in the actual conduct of interviews of the principals, teachers, students and parents.

Focus Group Discussion

The focus group discussions conducted allowed this study to provide supporting data for the survey results. In addition, they helped clarify gray areas of the survey results. To come up with the core questions for the focus group discussions, items in the survey questionnaires that yielded conflicting results based on the answer of the teachers, students and parents were used as focal points.

The number of participants per group ranged from five to eleven. The researcher conducted the focus group discussions with an assistant to ensure that all the responses of the participants were noted. The researcher took all necessary means to ensure that the participants in the interview were comfortable (Krueger, 2002). In cases when the respondents did not want the discussion to be recorded, the researcher conducted the interview

at a slower pace to ensure that all information were documented. After each focus group discussion, the researcher compared his notes with the notes of the assistant. In case there were data that were not clear in both notes, the researcher went back to the respondents to clarify the items. The discussions with the Parents Teachers Association (PTA) officers were conducted during their school meetings. Non-PTA officers who were parents themselves were interviewed while waiting for the children. For the minors (students) who participated in the focus group discussions, the researcher asked permission from school authorities. The researcher also ensured that the focus group discussions with the students were exclusively conducted on-campus during their free time.

Interview with the Principals

The principal-respondents were interviewed after organizing the results of the focus group discussions. All principal-respondents preferred to be interviewed in their respective offices. They also did not want the interview to be recorded and so the researcher brought an assistant with the permission of the principals. Each interview session lasted for less than an hour.

Ethical Consideration

Before the data gathering phase, the researcher obtained an informed consent from the participants to protect their identity. This also provided an assurance of confidentiality as to their participation in the study and data privacy protection.

Data Analysis

A mixed method research design was used in this study to explain and explore the phenomenon of principal's leadership behavior being related to school performance. Specifically, it used the sequential explanatory mixed method strategy introduced by Creswell (2003). This strategy was characterized by collection and analysis by quantitative data followed by a collection and analysis of qualitative data. Thematic analysis was used in this study. The

researcher read and transcribed the transcriptions and coded and came up with theme.

Results and Findings

1. Leadership behavior of the principals as perceived by:

1.1 teachers

1.2 students

1.3 parents

Teachers

The leadership behavior of the principals from both high and low performing private and public high schools is perceived as *very evident* by the teachers. This was also reflected in the responses of the teachers during the focus group discussions. The teachers were contented with the leadership performance of their principals.

High Performing Public and Private High Schools

Teachers from the private high performing school *strongly agreed* that the principal 1) recognizes the teachers' exemplary performance; 2) encourages teachers to keep their classrooms clean and orderly for conducive learning; 3) does not interfere with the way teachers handle their classes; 4) provides updated information that help teachers properly implement the school's program and 5) emphasizes teachers' best performance in teaching. The teachers from the high performing public school *strongly agreed* that the principal discusses plans of activities with the teachers.

Low Performing Public and Private High Schools

The teachers from the low performing private school *strongly agreed* with the highest mean response that the principal accepts ideas of teachers in classroom management while the teachers of the low performing public school *strongly agreed* that

the principal discusses plans of activities with the teachers and requires review classes for students.

Instructional Leadership

Although the teachers rated the Instructional Leadership behavior of the high and low performing private school principals as *very evident*, during the focus group discussions, the teachers stated that they were not really given specific details about their delivery of instruction but more on abiding by school policies and maintaining high standards for the private high performing school and improving school rating for the low performing school.

The overall weighted mean perception of 3.84 and 3.88 of teachers from the high and low performing public schools, respectively means that the principal's Instructional Leadership is *very evident*. The Instructional Leadership of the school principals, when correlated with school performance showed results that were *not significant*.

The quantitative data for Instructional Leadership in all school-respondents were supported by the teachers during the focus group discussions.

Faculty Professional Growth/Development

The overall weighted mean of 3.61 from the teachers of high performing private school and 3.57 from the teachers of low performing private school showed that the leadership behavior of the principals in terms of Faculty Professional Growth/Development is *very evident*.

With an overall weighted mean 3.66 (high performing) and 3.58 (low performing), the public school teachers perceived the leadership behavior of their principals in terms of Faculty Professional Growth/Development as *very evident*. The Faculty Professional Growth/Development, when correlated with school performance showed results that were *not significant*.

The quantitative data for Faculty Professional Growth/Development in all school-respondents were supported by the teachers during the focus group discussions.

Professional Relationship with Teachers and Students

The overall weighted mean of 3.83 of the high performing private school and 3.78 of the low performing private school proved that the Professional Relationship with Teachers and Students of the principal was *very evident*.

With an overall weighted mean of 3.80 (in high performing schools) and 3.84 (in low performing schools), the public school teachers perceived the leadership behavior of their principals in terms of Professional Relationship with Teachers and Students as *very evident*. The Professional Relationship with Teachers and Students of the school principals, when correlated with school performance showed results that were *not significant*.

The quantitative data for Professional Relationship with Teachers and Students in all school-respondents were supported by the teachers during the focus group discussions.

Students

The students' overall weighted mean of 3.36 from the high performing private school and 3.60 from the low performing private school perceived the leadership behavior of the principals as *evident*. The focus group discussion with the students in the high performing private school revealed their appreciation of the behavior of their principal. Even if they all agreed that their principal was strict and was a disciplinarian, they acknowledged that the principal did it for their own welfare. The low performing private school has a total weighted mean of 3.60 equivalent to *very evident*. The students of the low performing private school showed respect and appreciation toward their principal being the 'mother' of the school. Her seemingly tireless efforts for the school were also considered by the students. With an overall weighted

mean of 3.60 the students of the low performing public school perceived the leadership behavior of their principal as *very evident*. The changes brought about by the new principal were being felt by the school.

Parents

Except for the low performing private school which has an overall weighted mean of 3.36 or *evident*, the leadership behavior of all principals is *very evident* according to the parents. The parents in the high performing schools are proud of their active involvement in the school. They feel that they are also part of the school. However, for the public low performing school, parents' participation in the school is very limited. Similarly, for the low performing private school, parents are not actively involved in the school activities.

2. Extent of the leadership behavior of the principals that influences the school performance of the students

The respondents were asked about the influence of the principals' leadership behavior and the following was revealed.

One principal of the high performing private school was described as supportive, policy-oriented, strict but fair, pro-discipline, responsive, pro-excellence, open to suggestions, humble and gives importance to values and character formation of students.

One principal of the low performing private school was described as hardworking, motherly and totally devoted and passionate for the school. Another principal of the low performing public school was considered as strict, disciplinarian, straightforward, supportive of student in-campus activities and always active.

3. Significant difference in the leadership behavior of school principals between high performing schools and low performing schools as perceived by:

3.1 teachers

- 3.2 students
- 3.3 parents

There is *no significant* difference between the leadership behavior of principal in the high performing private school and principal in the low performing private school. Likewise, there is *no significant* difference between the leadership behavior of the principal in the high performing public school and principal in the low performing private school. Conversely, during the focus group discussions there were differences in the leadership behavior of the principals from the high and low performing schools.

4. Significant relationship between the leadership behavior of the principals and school performance in terms of:

- 4.1 National Achievement Test ratings
- 4.2 Completion rates
- 4.3 Attrition rates
- 4.4 Participation in academic and non-academic competition outside the school

National Achievement Test Rating

There is no significant relationship between principals' leadership behavior and the schools' NAT ratings ($r = -0.151$, $p > 0.05$).

Completion Rate

There is a *significant* relationship between the perceived leadership behavior of the school principals and the Completion Rates of the schools considering that there is a moderate positive correlation between the leadership behavior of the school principals and the schools' performance (Completion Rate) based on the Pearson's r of 0.621 since the computed p-value = 0.0426 is less than the 0.05 level of significance.

The same result can be inferred in the qualitative study of Osorio (2016) when it revealed that certain leadership practices of principals and assistant principals are observed in schools that demonstrate an increase in graduation rates. Among these leadership practices are: (a) school leaders establish a clear vision, mission or goal to increase graduation rates, (b) identification, management and evaluation of academic enrichment programs are considered necessary interventions for student success, (c) school leaders build a culture of student learning and achievement through a system of processes, programs and support initiatives, (d) the leadership team is knowledgeable, strongly motivated and devoted to their role as leaders in serving all students, (e) school leaders use data as guiding variables in making decisions regarding at-risk student achievement and success, and (f) school leaders develop and foster positive relationships with students and teachers.

Attrition Rate

There is a moderate negative correlation between the leadership behavior of the school principals and the schools' performance (Attrition Rate) based on the Pearson's r of -0.756 since the computed p -value = 0.038 is less than the 0.05 level of significance, thus, there is a *significant* relationship between the perceived leadership behavior of the school principals and the Attrition Rates of the school.

This result is consistent with the findings of the study of Evans-Brown (2015) by being able to establish a link between leadership and reduced dropout rates. Her study posited that initiatives must come from the principal to reduce dropout rates. The responses of principals of the respondent-schools generated several themes pertaining to their leadership strategies in reducing dropout rates.

Participation in Academic and Non-academic Competition Outside the School

The high performing private and public schools participated and won in several academic and non-academic

competitions from the years 2012 to 2014. The low performing public school only participated in competitions in 2014 while the low performing private school did not participate in any competition in 2012, 2013 and 2014. The principals of the low performing public and private schools admitted that they did not participate in academic and non-academic competitions because of lack of budget and participating in competitions was not prioritized.

Conclusion

School principals play a crucial role in charting the direction of where schools move forward. They are tasked to unveil the master plan of the school, either in print or in the mind, every year making their roles vital in improving the school as a whole. Also, their smallest decisions or actions get magnified, depending on the results they bring. Nevertheless, the power that they have to influence people, especially those belonging to the same institution cannot be discounted. Their everyday actions create an imprint that remains with people who constantly and sometimes unknowingly adapt to these.

This study presented two contrasting school status based on performance; the high performing and low performing. At first glance, the high performing schools may be more appealing to lead than the low performing ones. However, upon examination of both schools, it is not the case. Principals of both schools have the same weight of problems that they have to carry around every day. The principals of the high performing schools have the ultimate problem of sustaining their excellence. This entails continuous motivation to teachers and students to be on top. What they are doing right has to be maintained or exceeded. It is also difficult for the principals of these schools to introduce new ways considering the status of their school. They have to be extra careful so as not to upset the current system that brought them to the top. Nonetheless, they cannot forever stay on the 'safe' side

and must think of other ways to maintain or further improve school outcomes.

The principals of the low performing schools have the ultimate problem of improving performance. To do this, a new system must be put in place. Overhauling a school is never an easy task and it does not happen overnight. It requires the sincere efforts and support of everyone in the school. This is where the influences of the principals come in to play. How they are able to do this will also leave a lasting impression on the people around them especially if they became successful.

In any school or learning institution, the value of initiative of the principal is important. This value becomes even higher for schools that lack resources. A principal must initiate moves to augment resources and use them efficiently. Most of the time, the legacy that a principal leaves behind is based on how he or she is able to provide for the school when there is nothing and provide more when they already have something. Given the unpredictable educational landscape, a principal has to be dynamic and be able to garner the support of his or her followers.

Recommendation

The success of a learning institution is dependent on the union of all stakeholders. Given its importance, the school principal should be the facilitator to start and maintain the said union. The school principal should ensure that everybody is on the same page and acting towards a common goal for the school. This feeling of involvement to achieve a common goal is a strong motivational factor for teachers, students and parents to productively contribute and make their own sacrifices.

Compared to students and teachers, the parents are the least involved in the school, thus, the principal must be able to provide activities for them and sustain existing relationship that will give them a chance to feel that they are part of the school. The involvement of parents in the school opens up other opportunities for the school such as resource generation. Since in most cases,

activities and projects are not implemented due to lack of funding, the principal has to be innovative in finding ways to source out funding. The vigor of the school depends on the activities and projects that are effectively implemented. Aside from this, parents should be considered as partners. They can greatly help the school in its academic and non-academic decisions to improve learning conditions.

Schools should also provide learning opportunities outside of the classroom and this may come in the form of academic and non-academic competitions. The participation of students in these activities should be supported by the school as it challenges the students to work harder and may greatly help develop them holistically. Moreover, such activities, keep teachers active and sharp because they are immersed to a different platform.

With leadership and school performance being a broad subject matter that produces a wide spectrum of topics, future researchers may also include school culture as a variable affecting students' performance. How the culture of the school helps students achieve better academic standing or even alter their outlooks as students is certainly worth spending time on. Furthermore, future researchers may also delve into the socio-economic status of the students affecting their academic performance. It is worthy to qualitatively reveal how the background of students plays a role in their student life. In doing so, future researchers may increase the number of school-respondents to gather varied data results. Lastly, the leadership of principals who have either retired or already practicing a different field may also be studied especially if they have been proven effective during their days. Qualitatively revealing their accounts may open up a variety of forgotten but highly effective leadership strategies.

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