



## Leadership Quality and Its Impact on Quality of Teaching and Academic Achievements of Students in the Post-Pandemic Period

Dhurata Lamçja

Received: 10 January 2022 / Accepted: 21 March 2022 / Published: 30 March 2022  
© 2022 Dhurata Lamçja

Doi: 10.56345/ijrdv9n1s104

### Abstract

*Effective leadership in education makes a significant difference in improving classroom learning. What is much less clear and studied is the impact that school leadership has on the quality of teaching and on students' academic achievement. A growing number of school leaders are paying attention to data showing that expert teachers are the real leaders who hold the key to student achievement. But these leaders at the administrative level face a difficult challenge: how to identify, attract and retain a staff of expert teachers who can help redesign and lead even the most challenging schools. The purpose of this study will be to examine the effects of leadership on the quality of teaching, student achievement, and sustainable school success. There is still much to explore about the importance of effective leadership in schools, how to reap its benefits, and how to ensure that we do not continue to reject good leaders because of bad systems. Especially when we think of leadership in formal administrative roles, the greater the challenge the greater the impact of their actions on learning. While various studies show that there are significant effects of leadership actions on student learning across the school spectrum, other existing studies also show that the demonstrated effects of successful leadership are significantly greater in schools that are not in difficult socio-economic circumstances. Especially in the post-pandemic period from which education and educational institutions emerged highly affected in terms of quality, it is important to understand the value of changing or enhancing leadership skills, and above all of reforming them as part of their efforts for improvement or as part of school reconstruction and the impact of leadership on the quality of teaching and on students' academic achievement.*

**Keywords:** teaching, leadership, education, pandemic, student, teacher

### 1. Introduction

Effective leadership in education makes a significant difference in improving classroom learning and more importantly, has significant impact on students academic achievements. Nonetheless, the impact on student achievement is less studied than the overall impact on the organization front of the institution. A growing number of school leaders are paying attention to data showing that expert teachers are the real leaders who hold the key to student achievement. But these leaders at the administrative level face a difficult challenge: how to identify, attract, and retain a staff of expert teachers who can help redesign and lead even the most challenging schools. This issue was also undermined during the COVID-19 pandemic times, where both teacher and school staff had to 'lead' from behind a camera, therefore challenged to make the most for the institution and students. The purpose of this paper is to examine the effects of leadership on the quality of teaching, student achievement, and sustainable school success.

### 2. Literature Review

While studies on the effects of leadership on student learning may be difficult to interpret, many of the existing studies actually underestimate the effects of leadership in schools. The total (direct and indirect) effects of leadership on teaching

and students' academic achievement account for about a quarter of studies on the effects of leadership in schools.

Although the quality of teachers has the greatest impact on the motivation and achievement of students, the quality of leadership in schools is important in determining the motivation of teachers in the first place and the quality of their teaching, which then affect the performance of students (Marzano et al., 2005). Moreover, these indirect effects of high-quality leadership appear to be particularly important in schools with low socio-economic status, and which are more at risk for academic failure (Scheerens and Bosker, 1997).

But the question is, what is high quality leadership and in what forms does it impact the overall student achievement? Traditional images of leaders perpetuate individualistic and non-systemic perspectives that strengthen a focus on short-term events and charismatic individuals. This view of the leader, is associated with systemic forces, empowerment, transformation, collective learning and of course community (Senge, 1990). School leadership no longer refers only to officially defined positions in the administration; instead it has become a collective construct that can be disseminated between teachers and support staff (Spillane et al., 2007), and moreover, it is the cultivation of multilateral relationships in the school, including parents and other important partnerships (Fullan, 2001). If schools are to become better at improving student learning and their overall academic achievement, they must nurture opportunities for teachers to innovate, develop and learn, so they can transfer their knowledge as fully as possible. In other words, student outcomes are more likely to improve when leadership is distributed throughout the school and its community and when teachers are empowered in areas they believe are important (Crowther et al., 2000).

Therefore, in order to address the constraints imposed by time, successful school leaders begin to focus on building the skills of their teachers through the use of staff development, to create more favorable learning conditions and to increase their student achievements. Most often, capacity building in school setting, has been defined as creating the conditions, opportunities and experiences for collaboration and mutual learning (Harris, 2002) and moreover, as the collective competence of the school as an entity to bring about effective change (Harvey, 2003). In the same terms, a study by Fullan and Hargreaves (1996), recommended that schools develop a collaborative culture that supports the skills and expertise of its members - a culture that differs from the most characteristic individuality of schools highly dependent on the principal. In this sense, leaders can cultivate greater skills by providing high quality professional development that allows teachers to engage in collective exploration of different approaches to teaching and learning (Harris, 2002). However, staff development will not have its intended impact if given as discrete, unrelated projects (Fullan, 1992) or without ongoing support (Harris, 2002). Authentic involvement of teachers in school improvement initiatives, and more importantly in student achievement increase, should be essential to this process.

To make improvements, all key actors need to be involved and engaged, eventually becoming communities together, which can eventually provide a context for collaboration and shared understanding. Simply put, relationships and collective learning are at the core of building school skills for sustainable improvement, if you need to improve students school performance or their academic achievements you need to develop their teacher. In this sense, leadership is passed to teachers and teacher can effectively develop students academic achievements.

There are a few challenges. Leaders have to contend with far greater issues than time constraints especially in schools with low socio-economic status. They usually face problems related to poor nutrition, low pass rates, drug use, crime and other by-products of socio-economic disadvantage, as well as community perceptions that the school has little to do with their lives and aspirations. In addition to building the skills of their students in terms of academic

achievement, leaders in such schools should also build bridges for their community and build relationships with parents and students families. A study by Harris and Chapman (2002) found that schools with strong community ties are more likely to gain their support and loyalty in difficult times. These connections include opportunities for parents to enter the school, talk to teachers, use the facilities, and see the school as a resource for their children and themselves. Hargreaves (1995) describes this as a "*cultural relationship*" with the parent community based on the principles of openness and cooperation.

On the other hands, a study by Leithwood and Riehl (2005) analyzed school leadership and concluded that there are a number of key leadership practices that are necessary, but insufficient, to improve student achievement in all contexts. Specifically, they listed leadership placement, people development, and school redesign, which although not strictly sequential, represent a logical progression of practices by which values and ideas have been translated by school leaders into meaningful action.

Leadership setting requires leaders to identify and articulate a vision, foster acceptance of group goals, and create high-performance expectations for students. Developing people to meet these expectations requires intellectual stimulation, individual and collective support, and for the leader to provide an appropriate role model. Essentially, human development practice this is building the personal and collective skills needed to create and maintain the "*practice communities*" as

described above. The school itself needs to be redesigned to strengthen school cultures, build collaborative processes, and remove obstacles to success. In other words, to increase students' chances of success in school and eventually their academic achievements, as all the studies showed, is important that leaders create a sense of a coordinated purpose within their school, then provide the appropriate resources and motivation to enable staff to develop the skills needed to their collective enterprise.

### 3. Teacher as Leader and Student Academic Achievement

We shortly analyzed Danielson (2007) states that teachers in the role of leader are an important part of school success and students' academic achievement. As a concept teacher leadership is defined as the process by which teachers influence their peers and other members of the school community to improve teaching and learning practices. Teacher leaders are experts in teaching and learning; they encourage success from their peers; and they facilitate learning for students. Teachers who take leadership roles in their schools are successful representatives in promoting cultural change within their schools. The work of these teachers inside and outside the classroom shifts the school culture to a more collaborative and effective one. Since administrators cannot be expected to perform all of an administrator's duties, the active involvement of teacher leaders is essential to improving the school. Teachers as leaders have the same attributes as good teachers: open-mindedness, flexibility, confidence and experience in their fields. Along with these attributes, they also possess the ability to actively listen, facilitate meetings, decide on a course of action, and monitor progress.

Effective school leadership and teachers as leaders are known for using transformational leadership. For example, a study from Bass and Riggio (2006), shows that transformational leaders are those who can stimulate and inspire followers to achieve outstanding results and, in the process, develop their leadership skills. Therefore, transformational leaders can help their followers grow and develop into leaders. On the other hand, Danielson (2007) describes teachers as leaders who can call on others to act and activate them in order to improve teaching and learning. It is important that school success is linked to the role of teachers as leaders not only within the classroom, but to understand both the importance that teachers play as leaders in a school and the use of transformational leadership by these teachers. Teachers as leaders are experts in their field and often present information from their lessons to colleagues and encourage them to do the same. They have the same attributes of good teachers: open- mindedness, flexibility, confidence and experience in their fields. In the figure below we can see the core attributes that a teacher as a leader has.



Figure 1. Core attributes of a teacher as a leader  
Source: Author

Therefore, by encouraging teachers to be leaders, they will be persuasive, take risks, and take greater responsibility, and student perceptions and performance can be positively impacted. In this regard, most of the studies agree upon that effective leadership supports that leaders who use a transformational leadership style deliver the highest student achievement (Bass and Riggio, 2006). Also a study by Andrews and Crowther (2002) describes leading teachers as those who have a belief in a "better world"; strive for authenticity in their teaching, learning, and assessment practices; facilitate learning communities through organizational processes around the world; face obstacles in school culture and structures; translates ideas into sustainable systems of action; and nurtures a culture of success in school. Moreover, York-Barr and Duke (2004) define teacher leadership in terms of influencing peers and other school stakeholders by improving teaching and learning practices in order to improve student achievement. Danielson (2007) suggests that knowledge for school improvement can be provided by a group of teachers. Danielson (2006) claims also that a school is as good as the teaching practices it offers and the achievements that come from students. He also states that a successful school must offer an excellent curriculum for its students and the heart of such a curriculum is teaching and learning. The requirements set for today's directors are very difficult to meet. School leaders today are expected to be visionaries (fostering a sense of purpose in their staff) and competent managers (maintaining the physical plant, delivering budgets on time), as well as leaders in teaching. In this terms, leaders have a specific area of teaching expertise. Unfortunately, principals are expected to be experts in all areas, including curriculum and instruction. One solution to this problem may be the development of "teachers as leaders in schools", who are experts in teaching and learning and serve to help their peers develop more effective classroom practices, translated into students' academic benefits.

#### **4. Effective Academic Leadership in Crisis: Pandemic and Post Pandemic Case**

All the attributes mentioned in the previous sections did not fade during the pandemic, on the contrary, these qualities were not only re-emphasized but also intensified, thus showing their importance. The most important feature of leadership during the COVID-19 crisis was precisely the distribution of leadership throughout the school structure. So when we talk about leadership in educational institutions, the academic leader should be the one who sets the institutional strategy and priorities and at the same time give their team, ie teachers as much autonomy as possible to take responsibility for the decisions they make based on the specifics of the subjects or their roles in school. This type of leadership, even during the pandemic, was more effective in improving the quality and speed of decisions by increasing the sense of empowerment and motivation of each team but also to properly balance the needs of students who were greatly affected many of the changes brought about by the pandemic, and all the consequences of online teaching. The challenges of such a complex period required school administrative leaders to engage in a clear delegation of leadership to teachers as the only way to minimize the problems of students' academic success. This method of decision-making in educational institutions helped universities to find solutions tailored to the crisis and to make decentralized decisions. Decentralized leadership means building connections between people at all levels of the educational institution facing the challenges of a crisis and allowing the transformation to feel meaningful to all. Moreover, it promotes psychological security. Thus, the role of leaders, to disperse and decentralize decision-making in educational institutions, became a vital issue in the time of the pandemic, where those institutions that had this practice in place before the pandemic broke out survived and flourished (Dumulesku and Mutiu, 2021).

Because the COVID-19 crisis, beyond all challenges, brought with it a lot of stress and uncertainty, the personality traits of the leader (both in terms of administrative staff as well as teachers), and the leadership style they used, were very important for building trust and

accountability and above all for consistency in imparting knowledge to students. In this case, it was necessary for teachers to be more cooperative with students, more empathetic, more emotionally stable even though for them the experience with the pandemic was the same. But these skills helped them build a strong community through commitment to the needs of students.

#### **5. Conclusion**

There is still much more to learn about the importance of effective leadership in schools, how to reap its benefits, and how to ensure that we do not continue to reject good leaders because of bad systems. Especially when we think of leadership in formal administrative roles, the greater the challenge the greater the impact of their actions on learning. While evidence shows that there are small but significant effects of leadership actions on student academic achievements across the educational institutes spectrum, existing research also shows, as we have also seen in this article, that the demonstrated

effects of successful leadership are significantly greater in schools that are not in difficult socio-economic circumstances. Therefore, these results indicate the value of changing or enhancing leadership skills, as part of their efforts to improve or as part of school reconstruction and the impact of leadership on the quality of teaching and on students' academic achievement.

Also, the findings of this article from show that we should be careful in selecting academic leadership strategies should be more oriented towards knowledge on effective dynamic leadership processes characterized by empowering each person in strengthening the link between adaptive needs of created during but also in the post-pandemic period. We need to raise awareness in the context of empowering the role of the teacher within the leadership in the classroom and the decision-making that he or she should have, as well as educating the teachers themselves about the importance of leadership processes in difficult times, and moreover on the needs of leadership training initiatives to foster change, innovation and adaptation to find the best solutions to help students and enhance their academic achievement. The future in teaching in teaching tells us that now is the time for a new mentality, attitudes and practices new to the classroom and beyond, and to effectively utilize the experience gained during the COVID-19 era.

## References

- Andrews, D.; Crowther, F. Parallel leadership: A clue to the contents of the "black box" of school reform. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 16,152-159, 2002. doi:10.1108/09513540210432128.
- Bass, B. M.; Riggio, R. E. *Transformational leadership* (2nd ed.). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2006.
- Beachum, F.; Dentith, A. M. Teacher leaders creating cultures of school renewal and transformation. *The Educational Forum*, 68, 276-286, 2004. doi:10.1080/00131720408984639.
- Crowther, F., Hann, L., McMaster, J. and Ferguson, M. (2000), "Leadership for successful school revitalization: lessons from recent Australian research", paper presented at the Annual Meeting of AERA, New Orleans, LA.
- Curtis, R. Finding a new way: Leveraging teacher leadership to meet unprecedented demands. Washington, D.C.: The Aspen Institute, 2013.
- Danielson, C. The many faces of leadership. *Educational Leadership*, 65(1) 14-19, 2007.
- Dumulescu, D. and Muțiu, A. I. (2021). Academic Leadership in the Time of COVID-19— Experiences and Perspectives. *Frontiers in Psychology* 12. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.648344>.
- Fullan, M. (2001), *Leading in a Culture of Change*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, CA. Fullan, M. (1992), *Successful School Improvement – The Implementation Perspective and Beyond*, Open University Press, Buckingham.
- Hargreaves, A. (1995), "Rethinking educational change", invited Keynote Address to the ACEA International Conference, Sydney, July.
- Harvey, S. (2003), "Looking to the future", *Ldr*, Vol. 1 No. 7, pp. 21-3.
- Harris, A. (2002), *School Improvement – What's in it for Schools?*, Routledge Falmer, London. Harris, A. and Chapman, C. (2002), *Effective Leadership in Schools Facing Challenging Circumstances*, National College for School Leadership, London.
- Leithwood, K. and Riehl, C. (2005), "What do we already know about educational leadership?", in Firestone, W. and Riehl, C. (Eds), *A New Agenda for Research in Educational Leadership*, Teachers College Press, New York, NY, pp. 12-27.
- Marzano, R.J., Waters, T. and McNulty, B.A. (2005), *School Leadership that Works: From Research to Results*, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, Alexandria, VA.
- Scheerens, J. and Bosker, R. (1997), *The Foundations of Educational Effectiveness*, Elsevier, New York, NY.
- Senge, P. (1990), *The Fifth Discipline*, Doubleday, New York, NY.
- Spillane, J., Camburn, E. and Pareja, A. (2007), "Taking a distributed perspective to the school principal's workday", *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, Vol. 6 No. 1, pp. 103-25.
- York-Barr, J.; Duke, K. What do we know about teacher leadership? Findings from two decades of scholarship. *Review of Educational Research*, 74, 255-316, 2004.