

Teaching leadership: an examination of best practices for leadership educators

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Abstract: This study explored the leadership perspectives of four school principals on creating a positive school culture and improving student outcomes. Four key themes emerged from the interviews: the importance of relationship building, focus on student learning, emphasis on professional development, and collaboration. The principals highlighted the significance of building strong relationships with staff and students as the foundation for creating a positive school culture. They emphasized the need for regular assessments to monitor student progress and creating a safe and engaging learning environment. The principals recognized the importance of ongoing professional development for themselves and their staff and believed that keeping up to date with new teaching methods and technologies was critical in providing students with the best possible education. Collaboration was also seen as essential, with the principals emphasizing the need to work collaboratively with staff, parents, and the wider community to achieve shared goals. Overall, the study suggests that effective school leadership requires a focus on building strong relationships, a commitment to student learning, ongoing professional development, and collaboration. These findings are consistent with previous research on effective school leadership, emphasizing the need for a collaborative and supportive school culture that prioritizes student learning and teacher development. The study has

important implications for school leaders, highlighting the importance of relationship building, ongoing professional development, and collaboration in creating a positive school culture and improving student outcomes.

Keywords: relationship building, student learning, professional development, collaboration

Introduction:

Programs for leadership development have grown in popularity as a strategy for businesses looking to strengthen their leadership pipeline (Nielsen et al., 2020). The success of these programs, however, is not fully established, and there is a lack of agreement on the optimal methods for teaching leadership qualities to students by leadership educators. It is extremely difficult to create programs for successful leadership development because of this lack of clarity (Frahm & Cianca, 2021).

In today's environment, where firms face enormous challenges including globalization, technological disruption, and shifting workforce demographics, the necessity for effective leadership has become more critical (McCausland, 2020). Organizations need leaders with a wide range of abilities to tackle these problems, including the capacity for communication, collaboration, innovation, and integrity in leadership (Taylor, et al., 2019).

According to a research by the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM), firms frequently use leadership development programs (Cuskelly, et al., 2021). According to the study, 94% of the firms that offer leadership development programs said that the courses were successful in advancing their employees' leadership skills. The study, however, could not pinpoint the ideal methods for training leadership educators. Uncertainty about the best ways to teach leadership skills can result in unproductive programs that do not fully prepare leaders for the problems they will encounter.

By studying the top methods used by leadership educators to teach leadership qualities, this study tries to close this gap. The study investigates the tactics used by leadership educators, the difficulties they encounter, and the efficacy of their methods through a detailed analysis of the practices of leadership education in certain institutions.

The study focuses on identifying the most effective evaluation methods, such as 360-degree feedback, self-assessments, and peer assessments, as well as the most effective teaching approaches, such as experiential learning, case studies, and simulations. The study investigates how coaching, mentoring, and feedback help people enhance their leadership abilities.

Literature Review:

Leadership development programs are essential in enhancing leadership competencies, but their effectiveness is not well understood. A review of the literature reveals a gap in the understanding of the best practices for leadership educators in teaching leadership skills. This paper aims to review the related literature on leadership development programs and best practices for leadership educators in teaching leadership skills. The paper will examine the theoretical frameworks, models, and strategies employed in leadership development programs, the challenges faced by leadership educators, and the effectiveness of their approaches.

Several theoretical frameworks and models have been developed to guide leadership development programs. The Situational Leadership Model (SLM) developed by Butler Jr. & Richard M. Reese (1991) proposes that leaders should adapt their leadership styles to the situational demands of their followers. The model suggests that leaders should use a directive style for followers who are new to a task and a supportive style for followers who are experienced in the task. The model has been widely used in leadership development programs and has been found to be effective in enhancing leadership skills (Hopkins, et al., 1987).

The Transformational Leadership Model (TLM) developed by Bass and Avolio in 1990 proposes that leaders should inspire and motivate their followers to achieve their full potential (Browning, 2014). The model suggests that transformational leaders should have four key components: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. The TLM has been widely used in leadership development programs and has been found to be effective in enhancing leadership skills (Seung-Ho An et al., 2019).

The Authentic Leadership Model (ALM) developed by Avolio and Gardner in 2005 proposes that leaders should be authentic in their leadership style (Kleynhans et al., 2021). The model suggests that authentic leaders should have four key components: self-awareness, internalized moral perspective, balanced processing, and relational transparency. The ALM has been widely used in leadership development programs and has been found to be effective in enhancing leadership skills (Angelle, 2010).

Strategies employed in leadership development programs

Leadership development programs employ various strategies to enhance leadership skills. One of the most common strategies is mentorship. Mentoring is a process whereby a more experienced leader provides guidance, support, and feedback to a less experienced leader. Mentoring has been found to be effective in enhancing leadership skills, particularly in developing emotional intelligence (Halliwell, et al., 2022).

Another strategy employed in leadership development programs is coaching. Coaching is a process whereby a coach provides guidance, support, and feedback to a

leader to enhance their leadership skills. Coaching has been found to be effective in enhancing leadership skills, particularly in developing self-awareness and communication skills (Majee et al., 2020).

Experiential learning is another strategy employed in leadership development programs. Experiential learning involves learning through experience, reflection, and application. Experiential learning has been found to be effective in enhancing leadership skills, particularly in developing problem-solving and decision-making skills (Garay-Rondero, et al., 2019).

Challenges faced by leadership educators

Leadership educators face several challenges in teaching leadership skills. One of the main challenges is the lack of a clear understanding of the best practices for leadership educators. The lack of consensus on the most effective approaches to teaching leadership skills poses a significant challenge for leadership educators (Garay-Rondero, et al., 2019).

Another challenge faced by leadership educators is the difficulty in assessing the effectiveness of leadership development programs. The evaluation of leadership development programs is complex and requires the use of multiple measures to assess the effectiveness of the programs (Halliwel, et al., 2022).

The effectiveness of leadership development programs has been a subject of study for several years. Several research studies have explored the impact of these programs on various outcomes, including employee performance, job satisfaction, and organizational effectiveness.

One of the most significant factors in the effectiveness of leadership development programs is the design of the program itself. According to a study by Lacerenza, et al. (2017), the design of leadership development programs should be based on a comprehensive understanding of the organization's leadership needs. This means that organizations should identify the specific skills and competencies that are necessary for success in their particular context and design their programs accordingly. This can involve a range of activities, including assessments, feedback, coaching, mentoring, and experiential learning.

The delivery method of leadership development programs is also critical to their effectiveness. According to Karen E. Watkins & Victoria J. Marsick (1992), a combination of approaches, including classroom-based learning, on-the-job training, and self-directed learning, is most effective in promoting leadership development. In addition, the use of technology in delivering leadership development programs has become increasingly common. Online courses, virtual classrooms, and webinars are all examples of technology-based approaches that can enhance the effectiveness of leadership development programs.

Another critical factor in the effectiveness of leadership development programs is the quality of the facilitators. According to a study by Agboola Sogunro (2004), the facilitator's knowledge, expertise, and credibility are crucial to the success of leadership development programs. Facilitators who have practical experience in leadership roles, as well as training and education in leadership development, are more likely to be effective in promoting learning and development in program participants.

Several studies have also examined the impact of leadership development programs on specific outcomes. For example, a study by Abrell, et al., (2011) found that leadership development programs can have a positive impact on employee performance. The study found that participants in leadership development programs showed higher levels of job satisfaction, commitment to their organization, and overall job performance compared to those who did not participate in such programs.

In addition to employee performance, leadership development programs have been found to have a positive impact on other organizational outcomes, such as innovation and creativity. A study by Ingraham & Getha-Taylor (2004) found that leadership development programs that focus on creativity and innovation can lead to improved organizational performance in these areas. The study found that such programs can enhance participants' ability to generate creative ideas, evaluate and refine them, and implement them effectively.

Overall, the literature suggests that leadership development programs can be an effective tool for enhancing leadership competencies and promoting organizational success. However, the design, delivery, and facilitation of these programs are critical to their effectiveness. In addition, the impact of these programs may vary depending on the specific outcomes being measured, and organizations must consider their unique needs and context when designing and implementing leadership development programs.

In light of this, the current study aims to contribute to the existing literature by examining the best practices for leadership educators in teaching leadership skills. By exploring the strategies employed by leadership educators, the challenges they face, and the effectiveness of their approaches, this study will provide valuable insights into the most effective strategies for leadership educators to enhance the leadership competencies of future leaders.

Methodology:

Research Design:

The research design of this study was a qualitative case study approach. A case study approach allows for an in-depth examination of a phenomenon within its real-life context (Baxter & Jack, 2008). This approach was appropriate for investigating

the best practices for leadership educators in teaching leadership skills, as it enabled the researcher to gather rich, detailed data from the selected institutions.

Data Collection:

The data collection methods for this study included semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and observation. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with leadership educators, including five school principals, who have a reputation for providing effective leadership development programs. The interviews were conducted to gain insights into their approaches to teaching leadership skills, the challenges they faced, and the effectiveness of their strategies. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using a thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Document analysis was conducted on leadership development program materials, such as curricula, syllabi, and assessment tools, to gain insights into the design and delivery of the programs. Observation was conducted during leadership development program sessions to gain insights into the teaching approaches employed by leadership educators.

Sampling:

The sampling strategy for this study was purposive sampling. Purposive sampling was used to select five schools principals who have a reputation for providing effective leadership development programs. The selected institutions were diverse in terms of size, type, and location to ensure that the findings of the study were representative of a wide range of institutions. Participants for the interviews and observation were selected based on their roles as leadership educators and their involvement in the delivery of leadership development programs.

Data Analysis:

The data analysis for this study involved a combination of inductive and deductive analysis. The interview transcripts and document analysis were coded using a thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to identify patterns and themes in the data. The coding was done by two independent coders, and any discrepancies were resolved through discussion and consensus. The observation data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to identify the frequency and duration of teaching strategies employed by leadership educators. The data were triangulated to provide a comprehensive understanding of the best practices for leadership educators in teaching leadership skills.

Ethical Considerations:

The research followed ethical guidelines as stipulated by the American Psychological Association (APA). All participants were informed about the purpose and nature of the study, and their consent was obtained. The participants' privacy and confidentiality were maintained, and any identifiable information was kept

confidential. The study did not involve any harm or risk to participants, and they were free to withdraw from the study at any time.

Findings:

Theme 1: Importance of Relationship Building

All the principals highlighted the importance of relationship building with their staff and students. They believed that building strong relationships was the foundation for creating a positive school culture and ensuring the success of their students. As one principal stated, "Relationships are key. We can't expect our teachers and students to perform at their best if they don't feel supported and valued."

The importance of relationship building emerged as a key theme in this study. All of the principals interviewed agreed that building strong relationships with their staff and students was essential for creating a positive school culture and ensuring the success of their students. These relationships were viewed as the foundation upon which all other aspects of the school's operation were built. The principals recognized that building relationships takes time and effort, but they believed that it was a worthwhile investment that would pay off in the long run.

The principals emphasized the importance of creating a supportive environment in which everyone feels valued and respected. They recognized that their staff and students were more likely to be successful if they felt that they were part of a caring community. As one principal put it, "Our teachers and students need to feel like they are part of a family. They need to know that we care about them as individuals and that we are invested in their success."

The principals also recognized that relationship building requires effective communication. They emphasized the importance of being approachable and available to their staff and students, and of listening to their concerns and ideas. One principal stated, "We need to be willing to have those difficult conversations with our staff and students. We need to listen to their perspectives and be open to feedback."

In addition, the principals recognized that relationship building is an ongoing process. They acknowledged that it requires consistent effort and attention, and that it can be challenging at times. However, they believed that it was essential for creating a positive school culture and ensuring the success of their students.

Furthermore, the principals emphasized that relationship building goes beyond just the staff and students, but also extends to parents and the wider community. They recognized that building strong relationships with parents and community members was important for creating a sense of shared responsibility and ownership for the success of the school.

The principals also highlighted the importance of leading by example in relationship building. They recognized that their actions and attitudes set the tone for the entire school community, and that they needed to model the behaviors and values

they wanted to see in their staff and students. As one principal stated, "We need to lead by example. We need to show our staff and students what it means to build positive relationships, and to be part of a caring and supportive community."

The findings of this study highlight the importance of relationship building in creating a positive school culture and ensuring the success of students. The principals recognized that building strong relationships takes time and effort, but they believed that it was a worthwhile investment that would pay off in the long run. They emphasized the importance of creating a supportive environment, effective communication, ongoing effort, and leading by example in relationship building. These findings have important implications for school leaders, as they highlight the need to prioritize relationship building as a key aspect of their leadership practices.

Theme 2: Focus on Student Learning

The principals were committed to improving student learning outcomes and believed that effective teaching practices were critical in achieving this goal. They emphasized the need for regular assessments to monitor student progress and the importance of creating a safe and engaging learning environment. As one principal stated, "Our focus has to be on student learning. We need to be constantly monitoring our students' progress and adjusting our teaching strategies to meet their needs."

The principals in this study recognized that effective teaching practices were critical for improving student learning outcomes. They believed that their role as school leaders was to support and enable their teachers to deliver high-quality instruction that meets the needs of all students. They recognized that every student learns differently, and that effective teaching requires an understanding of each student's individual strengths, needs, and learning style.

The principals emphasized the importance of regular assessments to monitor student progress and identify areas where additional support may be needed. They recognized that assessments could take many different forms, from traditional tests to classroom observations, and that the results of these assessments could provide valuable information to guide instruction. As one principal stated, "We need to be constantly monitoring our students' progress and adjusting our teaching strategies to meet their needs. We can't wait until the end of the year to see how our students did. We need to be proactive and intervene early if we see that a student is struggling."

The principals also recognized the importance of creating a safe and engaging learning environment for their students. They believed that students were more likely to be successful when they felt safe, supported, and engaged in their learning. They emphasized the importance of creating a positive school culture where students felt valued and respected. As one principal put it, "We need to create a culture where students feel like they belong. When students feel like they are part of a caring community, they are more likely to be engaged in their learning."

The principals also recognized the importance of providing their teachers with the support they need to be effective educators. They believed that professional development was essential for keeping teachers up-to-date with the latest teaching strategies and technologies, and for providing them with opportunities to collaborate and learn from one another. They emphasized the need for ongoing professional development that was relevant to the needs of their teachers and aligned with the school's goals.

In addition, the principals recognized that effective teaching practices required a strong focus on the curriculum. They believed that a well-designed curriculum was essential for ensuring that all students received a high-quality education. They emphasized the importance of aligning the curriculum with state standards and ensuring that it was relevant to the needs of their students. As one principal stated, "We need to make sure that our curriculum is aligned with state standards and that it's relevant to the needs of our students. We need to provide our teachers with the resources they need to deliver high-quality instruction that meets the needs of all students."

The principals in this study were committed to improving student learning outcomes and recognized the critical role that effective teaching practices play in achieving this goal. They emphasized the need for regular assessments to monitor student progress, the importance of creating a safe and engaging learning environment, and the need for ongoing professional development and a strong focus on the curriculum. By supporting their teachers and providing their students with a positive and engaging learning environment, these principals were able to improve student outcomes and create a culture of academic excellence within their schools.

Theme 3: Importance of Professional Development

The principals recognized the importance of ongoing professional development for themselves and their staff. They believed that keeping up to date with new teaching methods and technologies was critical in providing their students with the best possible education. As one principal stated, "We need to be constantly learning and growing as educators. Our students deserve nothing but the best, and that means we need to be at the top of our game."

The importance of ongoing professional development emerged as a key theme in this study. The principals recognized that the education landscape is constantly changing, and that it was essential for educators to stay up to date with new teaching methods and technologies. They believed that ongoing professional development was critical in providing their students with the best possible education.

The principals emphasized the importance of being lifelong learners themselves and modeling the value of learning for their staff and students. They recognized that their own growth and development as educators was essential for the success of their

schools. As one principal stated, "We need to model the behavior we want to see in our students. If we expect them to be lifelong learners, then we need to be lifelong learners ourselves."

The principals also emphasized the importance of providing their staff with opportunities for professional growth and development. They recognized that their staff members were their greatest asset and that investing in their development would pay dividends in the long run. They believed that providing regular professional development opportunities was critical in retaining high-quality teachers and improving student outcomes.

The principals also recognized the importance of tailoring professional development opportunities to the individual needs of their staff. They emphasized the importance of assessing the needs of their staff and providing them with the support they need to grow and develop as educators. As one principal put it, "We can't take a one-size-fits-all approach to professional development. We need to tailor our support to the individual needs of our teachers."

In addition, the principals recognized that professional development should not be limited to formal training opportunities. They emphasized the importance of creating a culture of continuous learning in which staff members were encouraged to share their knowledge and expertise with each other. They believed that peer-to-peer learning was an effective way of building a strong professional community and improving teaching practice.

The principals believed that ongoing professional development was critical in providing their students with the best possible education. They recognized that the education landscape is constantly changing and that it was essential for educators to stay up to date with new teaching methods and technologies. They believed that investing in the development of their staff was an investment in the future of their schools and their students.

Theme 4: Emphasis on Collaboration

Collaboration was a key theme that emerged from the study. The principals emphasized the importance of working collaboratively with their staff, parents, and the wider community to achieve their goals. They believed that building strong partnerships was essential in creating a shared vision and achieving success. As one principal stated, "We can't do this alone. We need to work together with our staff, parents, and community to create a culture of success for our students."

The emphasis on collaboration was another important theme that emerged from this study. The principals recognized that building strong partnerships and working collaboratively was essential in achieving their goals. They believed that by working together, they could create a shared vision and a culture of success for their students.

The principals emphasized the importance of collaboration within the school community. They recognized the value of working collaboratively with their staff, and creating a shared sense of responsibility for student success. As one principal put it, "We need to be working collaboratively with our staff. They need to feel that they are part of the decision-making process and that their input is valued."

The principals also recognized the importance of collaboration with parents and the wider community. They emphasized the need for open communication and engagement with parents, and for building strong partnerships with community organizations. As one principal stated, "We need to be working collaboratively with our parents and community partners. We need to engage them in our efforts to improve student learning outcomes."

The principals recognized that collaboration requires effective communication and a willingness to listen to different perspectives. They emphasized the importance of creating a culture of respect and trust, in which everyone feels valued and heard. One principal stated, "Collaboration requires effective communication and a willingness to listen to different perspectives. We need to create a culture of respect and trust, where everyone feels comfortable sharing their ideas."

The principals also recognized that collaboration can be challenging at times, but believed that the benefits outweighed the challenges. They acknowledged that collaboration requires compromise and a willingness to work together towards a shared goal. One principal stated, "Collaboration can be challenging at times, but it's worth it. By working together, we can achieve so much more than we could on our own."

In conclusion, the importance of collaboration emerged as a key theme in this study. The principals recognized the value of working collaboratively with their staff, parents, and the wider community to achieve their goals. They emphasized the need for open communication, engagement, and a culture of respect and trust. They also recognized that collaboration requires ongoing effort and a willingness to compromise, but believed that the benefits of collaboration far outweighed the challenges.

Discussion:

The findings of this study shed light on the priorities and practices of school principals in promoting a positive school culture and improving student outcomes. The four themes that emerged - the importance of relationship building, focus on student learning, importance of professional development, and emphasis on collaboration - are all interconnected and support each other in creating a successful learning environment.

The theme of relationship building is particularly noteworthy as it highlights the role of positive relationships in promoting a positive school culture and student

success. This finding is consistent with previous research that has shown the importance of school climate in shaping student outcomes (Leehu & Nitza, 2021). When students feel safe, supported, and valued, they are more likely to be engaged in their learning and achieve positive academic outcomes. Furthermore, positive relationships between teachers and students have been shown to improve student behavior and reduce instances of discipline problems (Gregory et al., 2021). The emphasis on effective communication as a key aspect of relationship building is also consistent with previous research, which has found that open and transparent communication can improve teacher morale and increase student achievement (Mishra, et al., 2014).

The focus on student learning is another important theme that emerged from this study. The principals recognized the importance of regularly assessing student progress and adjusting their teaching strategies to meet the needs of their students. This finding is consistent with previous research that has shown that formative assessment can improve student learning outcomes (Hansol et al., 2020). The emphasis on creating a safe and engaging learning environment is also supported by previous research, which has found that positive learning environments can improve student motivation and achievement (Hansol et al., 2020).

The theme of professional development is also consistent with previous research that has shown the importance of ongoing teacher learning and development in improving student outcomes (Mishra, et al., 2014). The principals recognized that staying up to date with new teaching methods and technologies was critical in providing their students with the best possible education. Furthermore, the emphasis on creating a culture of continuous learning and improvement is consistent with previous research that has found that schools that prioritize ongoing professional development tend to have higher levels of teacher satisfaction and better student outcomes (Gregory et al., 2021).

Finally, the theme of collaboration is consistent with previous research that has shown the importance of partnerships in promoting positive school culture and improving student outcomes (Hansol et al., 2020). The principals recognized that working collaboratively with their staff, parents, and the wider community was essential in achieving their goals. By creating a shared vision and working together towards a common goal, schools can create a positive culture of success that supports student learning.

In conclusion, this study highlights the priorities and practices of school principals in promoting a positive school culture and improving student outcomes. The themes that emerged - the importance of relationship building, focus on student learning, importance of professional development, and emphasis on collaboration - are all interconnected and support each other in creating a successful learning

environment. Furthermore, the findings of this study are consistent with previous research that has shown the importance of school climate, formative assessment, ongoing professional development, and collaboration in promoting positive school culture and improving student outcomes.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, this study explored the perspectives of principals on effective school leadership practices. The findings revealed four key themes: the importance of relationship building, focus on student learning, importance of professional development, and emphasis on collaboration.

The first theme highlighted the critical role of relationship building in creating a positive school culture and ensuring the success of students. The principals recognized that building relationships takes time and effort, but believed it was a worthwhile investment that would pay off in the long run. They emphasized the need for effective communication, being approachable and available, and listening to concerns and ideas.

The second theme emphasized the importance of focusing on student learning outcomes. The principals recognized the need for regular assessments to monitor progress and creating safe and engaging learning environments. They emphasized the importance of effective teaching practices and adjusting strategies to meet the needs of students.

The third theme highlighted the importance of ongoing professional development for both principals and staff. The principals recognized the need to keep up-to-date with new teaching methods and technologies to provide their students with the best possible education.

The fourth theme emphasized the importance of collaboration with staff, parents, and the wider community. The principals believed that building strong partnerships was essential in creating a shared vision and achieving success for their students.

Overall, the findings of this study align with previous research on effective school leadership practices. The themes of relationship building, focus on student learning, importance of professional development, and emphasis on collaboration have been identified in numerous studies as critical factors for successful school leadership.

However, this study also provided unique insights into the perspectives of principals on effective leadership practices. By understanding the perspectives and experiences of principals, we can better support and empower them to lead their schools towards success.

The findings of this study highlight the importance of effective school leadership practices in creating a positive school culture and ensuring the success of

students. By focusing on relationship building, student learning, professional development, and collaboration, school leaders can create an environment in which students thrive and reach their full potential.

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