



Effective Leadership For Improved Learning Outcomes In Schools

KEYWORDS

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India's education system does not develop human resources properly. It fails to train the people for the jobs consistent with present economic environment. As a result, even the highly educated people in India fail to get appropriate jobs. There is no correlation between education and employment as far as Indian planning is concerned.

The recently released Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2013 covers every rural district in India contains up-to-date statistics about India's quality of education. Enrolment in India's primary schools is still at an impressive 96%, and the number of schools compliant with the Right to Education (RTE) Act 2009 norms, such as providing drinking water and usable toilets, continues to rise. However much of this is undermined by a fundamental challenge faced by public and private schools alike. ASER identifies that learning levels are unacceptably low, and have been stagnant or getting worse over the past few years, especially in government schools. In basic reading and numeracy skills, the majority of our schoolchildren are falling several years behind where they should be based on their ages and the classes they attend. ASER studies show that 95.5% children go to school in Tamilnadu but, sadly more than 50% children in Std.5 cannot read Std 2 text (Source ASER 2013). Although we have schools that are open and children that attend, many of these schools fail in their basic mission of teaching.

Media reports on ASER analysis reveals that the education departments in several states are only beginning to shift their focus to student learning outcomes. ASER in its 2013 report articulates that the thrust of policy and practice in India is beginning to shift from "schooling" to "learning" (Rukmini Banerji, Director, ASER Centre). Madhav Chavan, chief executive and president of Pratham Education Foundation says, "The problem is immediate and urgent. We have not moved forward for years. We have got students to schools but the learning outcome remains poor." While a few states are experimenting with new and innovative policies aimed at improving learning, there is very little consensus on interventions that are scalable and proven effective at improving learning in primary schools.

Also, research and analysis on the Right To Education Act clearly indicates that the country has students to school, however the system hasn't succeeded in improving learning outcomes.

If we accept that education, a lifelong process, is the sum of learning acquired through interaction with one's environment, family, community members, schools and other institutions and agencies then there are glaring concerns about the quality of

education in India. Professionals at various levels had made it clear over the past two decades.

It is recently trending to discuss "its time for an education revolution". The most important question in the education revolution is what is the purpose of education for all?

Before we get there let us understand the purpose of education. Below is a summary of the purpose of education:

- To prepare children for citizenship
- To cultivate a skilled workforce
- To teach cultural literacy
- To help students become critical thinkers
- To help students compete in a global marketplace

This paper aims to better understand the links between leadership and student learning; and there by improve the quality of education and to internalize better purpose of education.

Educational leadership has a critical role in the transformation of society, and for change to happen, effective leaders are key. Along with the widespread belief that the quality of leadership makes a significant difference to school and student outcomes, there is also increasing recognition that effective school leaders and managers have to be developed if they are to provide the best possible education for their learners. (Source: Azim Premji Foundation).

One point that needs to be made clear is that change is not required because the education system has significantly failed. Indian education system had produced great leaders like Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan, Ambedkar, Gokale, and Abdul Kalam to name a few. It needs change because it is still based on centuries old model that did not emphasize a rigorous and relevant practical curriculum for all students, but rather one that encouraged and ensured rote learning – so much so that the public board examination system is designed to ensure rote learning. The world of today requires a different core of knowledge that all students need for success. The drive of global competition, elimination of unskilled jobs, advancement in technology, and the demand for maintaining better quality services has led the public, media and government to push for higher standard for all students. This is why change must happen in schools soon.

A five-year-research study conducted by The International Centre for Educational Leadership revealed five key themes for student success in schools:

1. Leadership: A clear sense of purpose that empowers staff toward a common vision.

2. High expectations: For academic performance as well as college/career readiness.
3. Relationships: Valuing relationships as part of a successful learning environment.
4. Student opportunities: Both academic "stretch" and personal skill development opportunities.
5. Professional culture: Teachers, administration, and staff collaborate toward goals.

Recognizing the challenges facing schools today is easy. Identifying the most effective ways to address them is not. Education research is plentiful and comprehensive, so much so that studies are available to prove or disprove almost any decision made by education leadership. However, most of the respected research is consistent on one key school improvement issue: effective instruction really matters. No single variable has more impact than teaching.

Over the last couple of years, international and national attention has begun to shift from being input focused to learning outcome oriented. There is no question that schools need to have good infrastructure, but to keep achievement of quality on hold until all infrastructure is taken care of is quite absurd.

IT TAKES A SYSTEM, NOT JUST A TEACHER

Research supports what most of us see as common sense: What goes on between the teacher and the student is central to high-level learning. Effective teaching is not the end goal. However, it is the means to an end: Student achievement. Nevertheless, all teaching is more effective when effectively supported. Achieving the goal of improving instruction requires a supportive and aligned system. Stated another way, although effective teaching is essential, it is not sufficient to maximize achievement for all students. This understanding of the need for an organization-wide commitment will enhance the quality of education in schools.

While there is no consensus among educationists regarding the definition of the quality in education, there are several ways of measuring quality in education. In the context of school effectiveness, the concept of quality is linked to the efficiency of teaching learning processes. Quality is a relative concept and not something that is absolute. One useful approach could be to select a range of educational indicators that are explicit and measurable representing various facets of quality.

Increasing emphases on the quality of education in our schools is challenged by the lack of resources, staff training, and expectation for students. Education in India is frequently seen as fulfilling curriculum requirements rather than focusing on individual student achievement. Schools have a duty to look for both improved student achievement and improved quality of teaching. When genuine learning takes place and individuals thrive then India will have an education system to be proud of. To promote improved outcomes for students, the way educators view their students and focus on individual achievement is a direction that reinforces change. How will effective instruction change from traditional teaching methods:

Traditional Teaching Frameworks	Framework needed for Effective Instruction
What teachers should do	What the entire system should do
Teacher-focused	Student-focused
Teachers deliver instruction	Teachers facilitate learning
Goals are set by top leaders	Goals are in collaboration with teaching teams
Define vision primarily in terms of academic measures	Define vision as strong academics and personal skills and the ability to apply them
Rigid structures support adult needs	Flexible structures support student needs
Focus on teaching	Focus on learning

Source: Daggett System of Effective Instruction, International Centre for Leadership in Education.

LINKING PRINCIPAL LEADERSHIP AND STUDENT LEARNING

In a recent report, the Wallace foundation highlighted an important message from research: "A particularly noteworthy finding is the empirical link between school leadership and improved student achievement" (Review of research: "How leadership influences student learning", Wallace Foundation, 2011, p. 3).

Education research shows that most school variables, considered separately, have at most small effects on learning. The real payoff comes when individual variables combine to reach critical mass. Creating the conditions under which that can occur is the job of the principal. (Review of research "How leadership influences student learning", Wallace Foundation, 2011, p. 2)

Effective school leaders know how to focus the work of the school on the essential. They have a clear mission or purpose for the school and identify goals that align with that mission. They communicate the purpose and goals in a meaningful way such that all stakeholders understand what they need to do. (McIver, Kearns, Lyons, & Sussman, 2009, p. 12)

In a recent report on how leadership influences student learning Wallace Foundation (2011) identified five key functions of principal leadership:

- Shaping a vision of academic success for all students, one based on high standards.
- Creating a climate hospitable to education in order that safety, a cooperative spirit and other foundations of fruitful interaction prevail.
- Cultivating leadership in others so that teachers and other adults assume their part in realizing the school vision.
- Improving instruction to enable teachers to teach at their best and students to learn at their utmost.
- Managing people, data and processes to foster school improvement.

The study also says that good Principals attract, support, and retain a high-quality teaching staff; and at the same time manage their personal time and priorities to focus on the right stuff.

Nick Morrison, an Education Researcher who consulted a group of academics from the Institute of Education (IoE) in London came up with a list of what makes an effective school leader.

Not surprisingly, the researchers identified the quality of leadership as one of the key factors driving the transformation, in line with many previous studies into school improvement, such as Kenneth Leithwood and Karen Seashore-Louis' influential 2011 *Linking Leadership to Student Learning*.

But the IoE academics – professors David Woods, Chris Husbands and Dr Chris Brown went further. Through a study of reports by school inspectors, they came up with a set of characteristics shared by successful school leaders.

1. They have consistent, high expectations and are very ambitious for the success of their pupils.
2. They constantly demonstrate that disadvantage need not be a barrier to achievement.
3. They focus relentlessly on improving teaching and learning with very effective professional development of all staff.
4. They are expert at assessment and the tracking of pupil progress with appropriate support and intervention based upon a detailed knowledge of individual pupils.
5. They are highly inclusive, having complete regard for the progress and personal development of every pupil.
6. They develop individual students through promoting rich opportunities for learning both within and out of the classroom.
7. They cultivate a range of partnerships particularly with parents, business and the community to support pupil learning and progress.
8. They are robust and rigorous in terms of self-evaluation and data analysis with clear strategies for improvement.

Although this list was drawn up with particular reference to schools in difficult circumstances, they appear to readily translate into different contexts.

David Carter, chief executive of the Cabot Learning Federation, says in an article – principals skilled in turning around struggling schools – the need to work relentlessly on behalf of pupils, having a clear and consistent vision, and working closely with the community the school serves.

He also adds other qualities, some perhaps implicit in the IoE list, but all crucial to the successful school leadership. Among these was the ability to balance strategic and operational roles, and the ability to manage change and understand how it works. Another is talent spotting. A huge amount of time should be invested in making the right appointments and in getting people in the right roles.

Effective principals also need to have a high level of emotional intelligence and interpersonal skills. Often, the power of school leaders is vested in their capacity to persuade and influence, rather than to direct.

CONCLUSION

By nature children have the inquisitiveness to learn. The job of schools is to challenge student's inquisitiveness, instead of training them to pass examinations. While researchers and policy makers in India are working towards redesigning the assessment pattern, present school leaders should be able to make the best of the situation by strategically planning to encourage better learning outcomes from students.

Efforts to improve teacher recruitment, training, evaluation and ongoing development should be considered highly cost-effective approaches to successful school improvement. These efforts will be increasingly productive as research provides us with more robust understandings of how successful leaders make sense of and productively respond to both external policy initiatives and local needs and priorities, and of how those practices soak into the fabric of the education system, improving its overall quality and substantially adding value to students' learning.

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