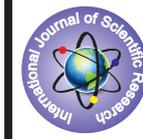


LEADERSHIP EFFECT ON ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE IN THE UPPER PRIMARY SCHOOLS OF GAMO GOFA ZONE IN SNNPR OF ETHIOPIA



Education

KEYWORDS: *Academic Performance, Effect, Leadership Practice.*

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effects of current leadership practice on students' academic performance. To this end, descriptive survey design as well as both quantitative and qualitative methods was employed. The study included 2 sample schools selected by maximum variation sampling technique based on academic performance. It considered a total of 330 participants composed of school leaders and teachers that were entirely included, and student respondents who were selected by simple random sampling technique. The data were analyzed using independent samples t-test and multiple regressions. The findings indicated that leadership practice had high effect on academic performance. Moreover, the study indicated that more effective leadership practice enhanced academic performance regardless of poor learning environment, whereas less effective leadership practice hindered academic performance regardless of more conducive learning environment. Thus, it is recommended that the school leaders in the study area need to enhance their leadership skills through different forms of training and applying appropriate leadership styles. Besides, alternative solutions need to be sought through rigorous research.

1. Introduction

Countries over the world have persistently been exerting efforts to ensure improved living conditions of their citizens which could be manifested in appropriate nutrition, better health condition, quality environment, etc. Moreover, every nation has been striving to enhance its technological advancement without which a nation would fall in obsolescence within short period of time. However, the goal of attaining optimal economic development, improved living condition of the citizens, attempts to boost technological advancement, etc are unlikely to be attained unless education plays its vital role. This view is found to prominently be supported by authors. Hallack(1990) states that education has effect on increase in life expectancy via its contribution to the improvement of health. Similarly, Clayson (1993) argues that without education no economic development could be attained. Nsubuga(2008) contends that it is the human resource of a nation which ultimately determines the pace of a country's development rather than its physical resources.

Thus, it can be inferred that it is for this reason that governments tend to design the education systems of their respective country so as it would fit the countries' development plans. In this regard, Agba, et al. (2010) state that the Nigerian National Policy on Education specifies that education is an instrument for effective national development. MoE (1994B) indicates, in the Education Sector Strategy of Ethiopia, that the educational objective was to produce citizens who have the ability to appropriately solve real problems of the community. Primary education is of particular importance in this regard. This opinion is stressed by a number of authors. MoE (2010) confirms this saying "Primary education is absolutely critical to a nation's development, providing on average the highest public returns to investment for the state, and the critical underpinning for later education." With respect to economic significance, the average rate of return of investment on primary education was 27 per cent in low income countries(Baum and Tolbert, 1985). Social return of investment on primary education is 28 per cent higher than the returns in most other sectors(Anderson, 1992).

However, realization of the governments' efforts to link education and national development can obviously be determined by the effectiveness of the education system. One of the major determinants of the effectiveness of a country's education system is the leadership practices exercised in schools. In this regard, Yukl (2006) states that organizations are created for specific objectives, whereas leadership is in place to realize the achievement of those objectives. One of the indicators of achievement of the goals of educational institutions is students academic performance. In this connection, the Education and Training Policy of Ethiopia specifies that the curriculum would be based on the objectives of education ensuring that the relevant standard and the expected profile of students are achieved (MoE, 1994A). Unless the graduates of certain level of education develop the

desired level of behavior, which is partly manifested in the graduates' academic performance, the government's desire to ensure development would not be fulfilled.

In practice, students' academic performance of most schools is unsatisfactory. The proportion of students who achieved the passing score in grade 8 regional examinations of the Southern Nations' Nationalities' and Peoples' Region (SNNPR) was 55.4%, 61.5%, and 54% in 2009, 2010 and 2011 academic years respectively (SNNPREB, 2011). Besides, the proportion of the students who obtained passing marks in Banda Primary School was only 36.7%, whereas in that of Zada was 81%. Hence, this research was conducted in order to find out the major causes of the problem described. To this end, it investigates leadership effectiveness and how significant its effect on academic performance was in the study area.

2. Objective of the Study

As it has been mentioned, this study was designed to investigate leadership effect on student academic performance. Thus, the objective of this study was to identify the status of leadership effectiveness, and to distinguish the level of the effect of leadership practice on student academic performance.

3. Scope of the Study

The study was delimited to leadership practice with respect to the topic, and it was geographically confined to Gamo Gofa Zone because of its manageability. Regarding school level, the study focused on upper primary schools because of immense benefit of primary education in the country's context and because of significantly low students' academic achievement observed.

4. Research Methodology

As the purpose of this study was to investigate the current status of leadership effect on academic performance, and as there is large size of target population, sample survey design was employed (this is supported by Leedy(1989)). As far as the research method is concerned, both quantitative and qualitative research methods were used so as it would help to secure authentic information through triangulation. Data were collected from both primary and secondary sources in order to supply the study with dependable evidences and original information. With respect to sample size, a total of 330 participants composed of 14 school leaders, 66 teachers and 250 students were included. The study included 2 upper primary schools which were selected by maximum variation sampling technique: Zada Primary School the zonal highest performer from Dita district and Banda Primary School the zonal lowest performer from Oyda District. Regarding selection of subjects, simple random sampling technique was employed for students, and school leaders and teachers were considered entirely as their size was limited. Descriptive survey questionnaires were filled by the respondents,

and semi structured questions for conducting focus group discussion were employed for gathering the primary data. As indicated by Morgan et al, (2004), pilot test was conducted in Abaya Primary School in Arba Minch Town in order to check the appropriateness of the items. Through applying Cronbach's alpha reliability measure, the calculated reliability coefficient was .89 the result of which showed that the items were reliable.

5. Methods of Data Analysis

The mean ratings of the perceptions of the respondents, as independent variables, and the mean scores of the students' academic performance, as dependent variables, were used in order to conduct the data analysis. By applying SPSS version 15, multiple regression analysis was employed to examine the effect of leadership on students' academic performance in comparison with the effect of student's learning environment on the students' academic performance. Alpha value of .05 was used for testing significance values. The data obtained through focus group discussion were analyzed in narration.

6. Data Presentation and Findings

A total of 330 questionnaires were distributed to different groups of respondents among which 95.5% were collected. Major results of the analysis of these data as well as that of data regarding students' academic performance were as follows:

Table1: Mean Scores of Grade Eight Regional Exams of 2009, 2010 and 2011(GGZED, 2011);

No	Name of School	Frequency								min	max	x	sd
		< 36		36 - 49		>49		Total					
		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%						
1	Banda	76	63.3	34	28.3	10	8.3	120	100	23	64	34.7	8.4
2	Zada	29	19.0	97	65.0	24	16.0	150	100	28	80	42.4	9.0

Key: max – maximum, min – minimum, x – mean, sd – standard deviation.

Table 1 shows that the weighted mean scores of the eighth grade regional examinations of the academic years 2009, 2010 and 2011 were 34.7% and 42.4% in Banda and Zada primary schools respectively. Besides, the proportion of the students who obtained passing marks was 36.7% and 81% in Banda and Zada primary schools respectively. Thus, students in Banda Primary School performed lower, and majority of them were found to score below the passing mark compared to that of Zada Primary School.

Table2: Respondents' Perceptions Regarding Leadership Effectiveness & Learning Environment

School	Variables	Respondents				WM	T	sig	df
		Leaders		Teachers					
		X	SD	X	SD				
Banda	Average Leadership practice	3.37	.432	3.16	.473	3.20	1.093	.281	36
	Average Learning Environ't	3.95	.448	3.81	.322	3.84	1.985	.049	139
Zada	Average Leadership practice	4.12	.232	3.94	.298	3.97	1.365	.180	37
	Average Learning Environ't	3.57	.396	3.58	.390	3.58	1.151	.880	155

Note: t-critical (table) value = 2.02 for LP, t-critical (table) value = 1.96 for LE.

Key: if x < 2.75 LP is ineffective, x = 2.75 – 3.50 moderate, x > 3.50 effective,

X – mean, SD - standard deviation, WM – weighted mean, df – degree of freedom, LP - Leadership Practice, LE - Learning Environment

Table 2 depicts that the overall weighted mean of the respondents' perceptions regarding variables related to leadership were 3.20 and 3.97 in Banda and Zada primary schools respectively. Hence, leadership was less effective in Banda than in Zada Primary School. Similarly, the overall weighted mean of the respondents' perceptions regarding variables related to learning environment was 3.84 in Banda and it was 3.58 in Zada Primary School. Thus, the overall learning environment was more conducive in Banda Primary School than in Zada.

Table3: Result of Multiple Regression Analysis of Variance in the Dependent Variable

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Df	F
Leadership practice	.791	.626	.610	.314	(3, 76)	40.692**
Learning Environment	.783	.613	.608	.313	(4, 298)	116.376**

Source: computed from survey data, Note: *** P < .001.

In table 3 above, the result of multiple regression analysis revealed that about 61% of variation on the students' academic performance was accounted for by leadership practices as predictor variables. Hence, the effect of the predictor variables related to leadership practice was significantly high on students' academic performance. Similarly, about 60% of variation on the students' academic performance was accounted for by learning environment in the sample schools. Thus, the effect of the predictor variables related to learning environment was also significantly high on academic performance, with slightly lesser magnitude than that of leadership practice.

The following conclusions were drawn from the findings presented above:

1. More effective leadership practice contributed to the improvement of the students' academic performance in Zada Primary School, whereas less effective leadership practice hindered students' academic performance in Banda Primary School. Thus, leadership practice had significantly high positive effect on students' academic performance in the sample schools.

2. Less conducive learning environment didn't mask the effect of leadership practice on academic performance in Zada Primary School where there was more effective leadership practice, whereas more conducive learning environment didn't outweigh in improving students' academic performance in Banda Primary School where there was less effective leadership practice. Thus, leadership practice is the most influential variable without which learning environment could not bring about significant effect on the students' academic performance in the sample schools.

Therefore, it was recommended that the school leaders in the study area need to enhance their leadership skills through different forms of training and applying appropriate leadership styles specifically contingency model of leadership. They need to improve leadership practice through providing short term training, and through undertaking leadership development programs. Besides, alternative solutions need be sought through rigorous research.

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