



## **PRINCIPAL'S LEADERSHIP CAPACITIES AS PERCEIVED BY TEACHERS IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN GALLE DIVISION**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Sri Lanka is a developing country. The developing process requires a highly productive management and administrative mechanism to improve the economic and educational sectors in the country. This is owing to the fact that higher or lower level performance of an institution totally depends on its management. According to the UNESCO, (2006) 'Education is an essential tool for achieving sustainability.' People around the world recognize that current economic development trends are not sustainable and require public awareness, education, and training, which are key factors to moving society towards sustainability (McKeown, 2006). Hence, there is always a positive correlation between economic development and an effective educational system. Generally, research shows that better education is the key to a nation's ability to develop and achieve sustainability targets. Research findings have shown that education can contribute to improve agricultural production, enhance the status of women, reduce population growth rates, enhance environmental protection, and in general, raise the standard of living. Accordingly, there is a positive relationship between effective school management and productive education. The performance of a school always depends on efficient and effective leadership qualities of the principal. It is the responsibility of the schools to produce and supply skilled human resources to the markets. Therefore, the responsibility of a principal and teachers is not limited to teaching. The future generations observe and absorb the standard leadership characteristics from the principal and school teachers.

The principal is the chief executive officer in a school. His responsibility is more complex and challengeable than that of other institutional executives. A principal is the key to a good school environment, in achieving standard teaching and learning quality (Hang, 2014). Accordingly, "the responsibility of a principal is not limited. Also he is playing a key role in the school by balancing all stakeholders especially when dealing with the teachers and he has to play many roles to manage them" (Dissanayake, 1988, p. 33). Therefore, it is important to note that fulfilling the teachers' expectations is a special feature of school leadership. Therefore, it is the duty of a school principal, to develop and maintain his leadership qualities through his personality, behaviour, management skills and communication skills. Failing this, he has to face many difficulties and a non-supportive environment to achieve the tasks.

The actions of school leaders impact school capacity and may either enhance or diminish student achievement. School capacity is defined as the collective power of a school staff to raise student achievement (King, 2002). Such leadership is determined by the followers, not the leaders (Bhindi, 2003). Therefore, it may be claimed that student achievement is affected by the leadership of the school principal.

According to researchers, leaders are made by the society, or alternatively, they have developed themselves to become leaders. Some leaders are born with leadership qualities and those qualities automatically make them leaders in the society. Here, the way of gaining leadership is not important, but he must have the capacity to get necessary support from his subordinates to achieve the desired goal.

In order to establish a successful principal and teacher relationship it's important to begin with



the end in mind. The start of a successful principal and teacher relationship begins with one's expectations. Great relationships are founded on good communication and trust. When there is a positive relationship both the principal and teacher have major enthusiasm regarding each student's success. (Jhons, 2011, para.7)

An effective principal will always keep his subordinates with a higher satisfactory level and it will help to succeed in his tasks with the support of the teachers. So, the responsibility of an effective principal is to evaluate his personnel based on their capabilities, interests, skills, and share the responsibilities according to the said traits. (Jayasinghe, 2009, p. 101)

Many research studies proved that there is a key relationship between school leadership and performance of the school. Good leadership practices make teachers more satisfied and stay in, or continually return to teaching, but there are also those that lead through the classroom and school for improved student outcomes.(Mulford, 2003)

Teachers will be attracted to, and stay in the profession if they feel they belong and believe they are contributing to the success of their school and students. Hargreaves (2000) states that teacher morale, efficacy, conditions of work and professional autonomy have all been shown to be crucial to the emotional satisfaction of teachers. Therefore, it is a requirement and duty of a principal to upgrade the skills of teachers in order to achieve higher productivity. At the same time, a principal should consider that all the teachers do not possess the same level of skills; and when sharing the responsibilities, the level of skills of each person should be observed.

A principal plays several roles in a school such as disciplinary controller, teacher evaluator, event manager, policy maker, recruiter, communicator, and delegator. During the time of playing these roles a principal should be a good leader by example.

A principal should be positive, enthusiastic, have their hand in the day- to- day activities of the school, and listen to what their constituents are saying. An effective leader is available to teachers, staff members, parents, students, and community members. Good leaders stay calm in difficult situations, thinks before they act, and puts the needs of the school before themselves. An effective leader steps up to fill in holes as needed, even if it isn't a part of their daily routine. (Derrick, 2017, p.154)

While dealing with teachers, a principal should act as a leader of the task team and is the right person to develop effective interaction among the teachers, students and parents. This approach will help to smooth operations of the school with higher achievements. According to the research carried out by the National Institute of Education in 2017, a good school always appreciates the teachers' performance. According to this background, in the present study, the researcher expected to find out how those qualities of a principal are perceived by teachers.

### **Research objectives**

1. To identify how the teachers perceive their principals' leadership capacity in the school environment.
2. To study gender based perceptual analysis on each survey statements.
3. To explore how teachers perceive about principals' 'shared vision for high student achievement', instructional leadership of principals, development and guidance of the staff professionally, principals' personal leadership, deal with systems, operations and resource management.
4. To identify the dimensions needed for further development of the leadership capacities of a principal.



## **Literature review**

### **Introduction**

There are a number of articles discussing principal's leadership capacity, leadership styles, effective leadership and administrative effectiveness. All these discuss relatively the same leadership features of a principal. However, unique qualities of each literature have been developed to justify the topic based on the research questions and the population of the data.

This study also aims to develop its unique features based on the study area, research questions, data collection methods and population samples.

Various researchers have attempted to interpret school leadership in a divergent manner. The Webster dictionary defines leadership as "the power of ability to lead other people. According to National Education Commission of Sri Lanka (NEC) Leadership is a high priority issue for many people concerned with education these days. Here the researcher paid much attention on the leadership capacity of a principal. Accordingly, the following are the objectives of the study:

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1. Teachers' perception
2. Key dimension in the literature review
3. Least value dimensions
4. Strategies to improve leadership capacity

In this study, the researcher has divided the literature review into several parts:-

1. Leadership, principal leadership skills and capacities
2. Teachers' perception of their principal leadership capacities
3. Key dimensions of leadership capacity according to literature review
4. Which aspects of principals' leadership are least valued by teachers?
5. Strategies to enhance or improve principal leadership capacity

There are many books and researches discussing about leadership, leadership models and theories about leadership. In this study, the researcher will not go deeply into the subject of leadership, and will limit to leadership skills that are required for a leader to perform well. Since this study focuses on a principal's leadership, the findings from literature will be matched and modified as per the requirement of this study.

There are many researchers and field experts who have expressed their opinion about leadership, based on their background of work or involvement. Stogdill, (1950) states that, "there are countless definitions about leadership as many experts tried to define the leadership as per their view" (p. 12) and he is defining leadership as follows - "Leadership may be considered as the process (act) of influencing the activities of an organized group in its efforts toward goal setting and goal achievement. (p. 13)"

This study identifies a number of selected definitions about leadership. Hemphil, 1957 (as cited in Malik & Asmath, 2019) states that Leadership is the behaviour of an individual when he is directing the activities of a group toward a shared goal. (Tannenbaum, 1961) States in his book that Leadership is an interpersonal influence, exercised in a situation, and directed, through the communication process, toward the attainment of a specified goal or goals. As per the business directory the leadership is defined as follows: The individuals who are the leaders in an organization, regarded collectively and the activity of leading a group of people or an organization or the ability to do this. Leadership involves: establishing a clear vision, sharing that vision with others so that they will follow willingly, providing the information, knowledge and methods to realize that vision, and coordinating and balancing the conflicting interests of



all members and stakeholders. A leader steps up in times of crisis, and is able to think and act creatively in difficult situations(www.businessdictionary.com, n.d.)

According to Mohan (2014) a skilled principal is optimistic, full of confidence and keeps a good relationship with teachers and pays them satisfactory attention. In addition, an effective principal maintains direct contact with the pupils of the school and is helpful to them. This will also solve the problem of discipline because the pupils will come to know their principals. An effective principal is high in social ability. He interacts successfully with others in problem solving. Helping teachers with problems associated with the institution is his greatest job satisfaction. His good relationship with parents and other society members reduces many problems and carries good support inside and outside the school; and he must be knowledgeable in social science, psychology, philosophy, sociology, economics and political science. He must also keep abreast with the latest scientific developments.

There are many literatures discussing on a principal's leadership capacity and how this is perceived by teachers. The meaning of 'capacity' differs from place to place and person to person. In an institution or school, this word refers to the ability of the management or the person who is leading the institution. The definition for the word of capacity is varying and according to the Webster dictionary the capacity is "an individual's mental or physical ability" to handle the job or lead the institution.

The academic article of Phil Eastman the Principal Advisor at Leadership Advisors Group explains the word of leadership capacity. "Leadership capacity is bounded with three factors. Those are leader's skill, experience and motivation" (Eastman, 2013). And these three factors can improve or elastic and when changes happen in these three factors, the leadership capacity also will change. Since leadership is the single greatest enabling force in every organization, the organization's performance level depends on a leader to continually push against the boundaries of his/her leadership ability.

Trust is pivotal in efforts to improve the quality and productivity of education. School personnel must be able to trust one another in order to accomplish goals and maintain an atmosphere of cooperation and cohesiveness. "Trust is a two-way street. Principals and teachers must share a mutual level of trust and respect, but "a principal must earn trust from her teachers" (Hoerr, 2005, p. 89).

Effective relationships between a teacher and principal become essential in the operation of the school. Leithwood (2004), reveals that good instruction is built on teachers' job satisfaction, collegial trust, a sense of professionalism, influence, and opportunities for collaboration among colleagues. The influence of power structures from principal to teacher may have negative or positive consequences. According to Johnson (1998), leader-subordinate interactions often produce constructive consequences such as cooperative planning among teachers, support for administrative-based policies, and a willingness to improve teaching strategies through professional development opportunities. Alternately, they may also have destructive consequences such as teacher isolation, low levels of compliance on school policies, and high levels of conflict between teachers, students, and the principal. Teachers feel powerless and become passive or combative, with the end result a climate of mistrust, low morale, and low motivation to do their job. Repeated negative strategies from the principal such as criticism can have adverse negative effects in teacher behaviour and cognition, and ultimately affect student learning (Blase, 2009).

Hang (2011) Has cited few qualities of a school leader in the study of "Cambodian Teachers' Perceptions of Their Principals' Leadership Capacities". They are respect the rights of others, develop a School vision, treat students fairly, promote a positive school culture, understanding of the policies, laws that affect schools, use and promote technology in school, be fully updated



& aware of learners' diverse needs, use public resources and funds productively, use community resources positively.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This research is based on descriptive research of survey type. A total of 10 government schools and 100 teachers were sampled from secondary schools in the Galle division, using random sampling techniques. The data was collected using a self-structured questionnaire. There were five main segments in the questionnaire and the Likert scale was used to collect data. Since most of the educational researches use quantitative methodology, the researcher also found that the quantitative methodology is the most suitable to conduct this study. In Nigeria Akomolafe's (2003) research to examine the teacher's perception of principal leadership capacities in secondary schools was a descriptive survey in nature.

A quantitative study was chosen to examine teachers' 'perceptions of their principal's leadership capacities', because the quantitative paradigm allows a large sampled population to be successful. The aim of the quantitative research is to investigate and explain the nature of the relationship between two variables in the real world. For this study the variables involved are principals' leadership capacity and teachers' 'perception'.

The design of this study utilized a quantitative survey instrument to collect data from teachers, to identify their perception of the leadership capacities of their principal.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

The purpose of this study is to evaluate principals' leadership capacity as perceived by teachers. The results of the leadership capacity survey are presented with the statistical analysis by using charts, graphs etc.

The data analysis of this study is carried in the following manner: the first part of the analysis would be a demographic analysis and the second part is a totally perceptual analysis of each survey statement in the questionnaire; and there are five sections in the questionnaire. This analysis will bring the results that indicate how teachers perceive their principal, in each survey statement. The third part of the analysis is developed with gender based perceptual analysis on each survey statement.

### **1. Research question one**

**To identify how the teachers perceive their principals' leadership capacity in the school environment**

Based on the research results, principals were identified as more positive than negative.

### **2. Research question two**

**To study gender based perceptual analysis on each survey statements.**

According to the collected data, there are many differences in the perception between male and female teachers. Women actually have more rods and cones in their eyes than men.

### **3. Research question three**

**To identify the perception of teachers about principals' 'shared vision for high student achievement', instructional leadership of principals, development and guidance of the staff professionally, principals' personal leadership, dealing with systems, operations and resource management.**

### **4. Research question four**

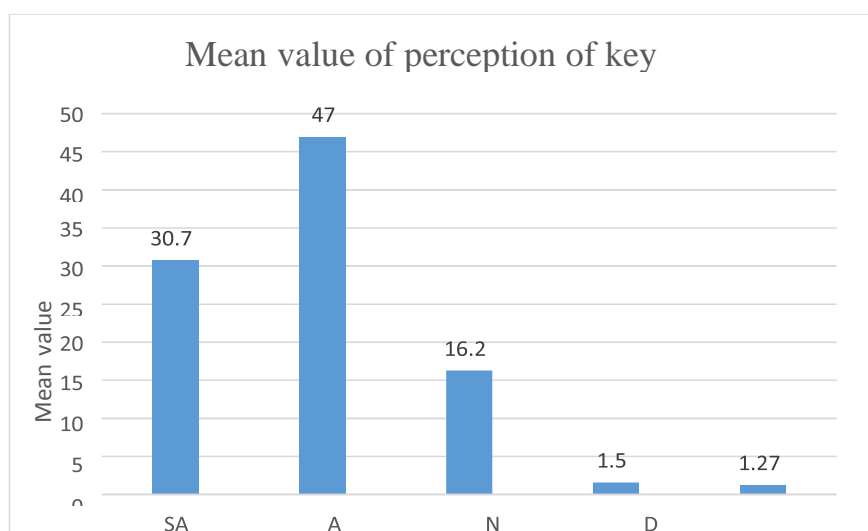


**To identify the dimensions to be developed further in leadership capacities of a principal.**

**Table 1.**

*Mean value of key areas of teachers' perception*

NO.	STATEMENTS	SA	A	N	D	SD
01.	shared vision for high student achievement	35.5	51.1	11	1.3	0.6
02.	instructional leadership of principals	26.5	44	18.6	2.3	2.421
03.	develop and guide the staff professionally	30.6	44.5	17.6	1.3	1.6
04.	principals' personal leadership	24.8	49.6	20	2.25	1.25
05.	systems, operations and resource management	36.5	45.8	14.2	0.8	0.5
	Mean	30.78	45.8	14.2	1.59	1.272



**Figure 1. Mean value of perception of key areas**

The above table and the graph shows that principals were perceived positively by 78% of the respondents.

The statement in section one - *“Shared vision for high student achievement”* has received a 70% favourable perception on their principals. The second statement - *Teaching or Instructional Leadership* is also perceived by teachers as highly positive, with a percentage of 75%. The third survey statement in section three is *Staff professional development & guidance* and the principals get a higher positive response in this leadership capacity and its percentage is 75%. The fourth leadership capacity determination statement - *Personal leadership* of the principal is positively perceived by the teachers with a value of 82%. For the final leadership quality statement - *System operations and Resource management*, the principals of the schools have earned the highest reputation from their teachers with a 87%..



## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the findings of this study, the conclusion can be made that in general, teachers perceived their principals' capacities more positively (STD DV= 78) though some studies argued *the Sri Lankan principals' leadership capacities to successfully implement their role*. Principals were perceived highest in all aspects of school leadership attributes but in few areas their skills were perceived as negative.

Another significant finding was that teachers in the age group 41-50 perceived their principals significantly higher than other age groups. Through the analyses on principals' 'gender, age, educational level, and years of service; a significant difference was found in the principals' demographic factors of gender and educational level. Female principals were perceived significantly higher than male principals.

Principals were perceived least positive on some dimensions of leaderships (Use and promotion of technology in schools; Being fully aware of learners' diverse needs; Deploying financial and human resources; Use of public resource funds appropriately; Implementing professional development; Allocation and use of fiscal, human and material resources; and using community resources positively). These aspects are the ones in the central of leadership levels that teachers considered to be the lowest among other dimensions of leadership; as a result, teachers have rated them as least positive..

Through the analyses on principals' demographic factors of gender, age, educational level, and years of services, the significances were found in principals' demographic factors of gender and educational level. Female principals were perceived significantly higher than male principals. In addition, principals with higher educational qualifications tended to be perceived significantly higher than those with lower educational qualifications.

The school principals who are the leaders of schools are responsible for ensuring effective learning in schools. Effective schools require effective school management, assisted by the relevant stakeholders. The school Head is the key figure in the management and administration of an effective school (New Education Act for General Education in Sri Lanka 2009:144). Therefore, the importance of the leadership of principals to enhance the effectiveness of school cannot be overlooked. Research findings from different countries and different school contexts have shown the powerful impact of leadership towards school development. (Hettige, 1996; Nowlan, 2001; Barnett, 2005; Oluremi, 2008; Adeyemi, 2011 as cited in Obeybanj, 2015).

This study revealed that from all indications, secondary school teachers in Sri Lanka considered their principals as having the leadership capacity to administer the schools. This is unlike the Chinese principals whom their teachers considered as having a generally moderate negative capacity (Luo and Najjar, 2007).

It is however recommended that Sri Lankan principals should be trained in Information Communication Technology (ICT). No doubt, the world has virtually become a global village, with the advancement in information technology. A sound knowledge of ICT will therefore enhance the administrative effectiveness of the principals. There is also the need to equip the principals with modern management skills, which this study shows that the principals are deficient in. This deficiency stems from the fact that the professional training of school administrators has not been given the proper attention by successive governments in Sri Lanka, because teaching experience is the major yardstick used by government to promote teachers from the classroom to administrative positions (Arikewuyo and Onanuga, 2005). But it must be emphasized that teaching and administration are not the same. It is therefore recommended that before any teacher is appointed as a principal, he/she must be made to undergo a course in school administration.



It is recommended to conduct programs in pre-principal training and support for ongoing professional training, and collegial learning opportunities for serving principals; providing positive and timely responses to the school principals' enquiry and requests from the Ministry of Education and Education authorities; in addition, providing adequate human resources for the schools in time by the relevant authorities to enable principals to manage their school effectively, since they do not have power and authority to recruit staff. Principals should be empowered to face challenges in leading schools. For instance, they must be skilled for organizing fund raising activities at school level to meet financial and other essential requirements of the school, without depending on the Ministry of Education. Therefore, principals must develop entrepreneurial skills to be a successful leader.

Mutual respect is also important in developing good working relationships. An administrator needs to respect his teachers and the teachers need to respect their administrator. This respect is usually earned through consistent behaviour built up through time, and is present on both sides of the relationship. Incidents deemed trustworthy and reliable can support relationships of mutual respect and this will result in highly positive perceptions and relationships between principal and teachers.

A good leader will show benevolence toward his teachers, staff, students, parents, and community. An administrator must exhibit care and general concern for all, through their professional demeanour. It must be the focus of their professional attitude. Showing benevolence has a positive effect on developing and maintaining positive relationships in the workplace.

The positive perceptions always built on good working relationships are important to overall school improvement. Good leadership is at the core of developing good working relationships. An administrator needs to possess good leadership attributes such as being honest, benevolent, supportive, positive, professional, informative, effective, organized, respectful, respected, good role model, consistent, involved, open, appreciative, and personable.

### **Suggestions for Further Research**

Based on the findings of this study and literature, the following suggestions are made for further researches:

- a) Conduct further research with a better developed research procedure and literature on Sri Lankan school management in contemporary setting.
- b) Conduct further research covering more on locations and areas with possibilities to extend the content, coverage, and sample selection.
- c) Conduct further studies with schools having a broad range of variance in academic performance indicators to identify differences in leadership to see if there are any differences in student learning and achievement among schools that are run by highly perceived principals and those by lowly perceived principals.
- d) Conduct studies that add several continuous variables for analysis between principals' leadership, teachers' satisfaction and several contextual variables.
- e) Conduct studies that explore more broadly and in depth, focussing on principals' and teachers' demographic factors.





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