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## Effect of Leadership Behavior of the Principal on Students' Academic Achievement in Secondary Schools

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**Abstract:** *The purpose of this study was to assess the dominant leadership behaviours exhibited by principals in their respective schools and to examine the relationship between principals' leadership behaviour and school performance in terms of students' academic achievement in secondary schools of Afar region in Ethiopia. To achieve these objectives, descriptive survey method was employed. This study was conducted in three districts in the same region using simple random sampling technique. A total number of 30 secondary schools, teachers who had 3 years of teaching experience were selected purposefully and 5 principals and Vice-Principals were selected through comprehensive sampling technique. Data were collected through standardised Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) which was developed by Bass and Avolio (2000) to determine principals' leadership behaviour and examination records were reviewed to assess the school performance as measured by average score of GPA in grade X national examination result, 2015. The quantitative data were analyzed using t-test and Pearson's product moment correlation. The findings of the study were: most of the school principals exhibited mostly transformational leadership behaviour in leading to their schools; the results indicated that the transformational leadership behaviour of school principals' is strong, significant and positive relationship with school performance in terms of students' academic achievement; there is a strong, positive and statistically significant relationship among principals' transformational leadership behaviour and school performance in terms of students' academic achievement in secondary schools.*

**Keywords:** *Leadership, Leadership Behaviour, Academic Achievement, Secondary Schools*

### Background of the Study

Education has a vital role to achieve the present and future development of national economic, social and political goals. The education system in many developing countries are being decentralized, the educational value of decentralization lies in the devolution authority and responsibility for schools from the central level administration to the schools themselves. Educational institutions will be autonomous in their internal administrations and implementing educational programs with an overall coordination. Schools are established for the achievement

of country's educational goals; to produce good citizen and the success of school mission and goals depend largely on the quality of its leadership.

Social and political forces have combined to create an environment in which educational reforms is expected and in which schools feel continued pressure to improve. Contemporary educational reform places great attention upon the relationship between leadership and school improvement (Harris, 2005). In many western countries, there has been an ongoing interest in the power of leadership to generate and sustain school improvement (Anderson, 2004; Hoyle, 2007).

Leadership is the process of influencing the activities of a group of people by a leader in efforts towards goal achievement. Leadership considered as a key factor in organizational effectiveness and the interest in educational leadership have increased over recent decades due to change on education system. The success or failure of educational program depends on the quality of leadership of the principal. Principals are expected to have strong vision, good communicative skills and be able to motive teachers to bring about effective change. The main task of principal is to create conducive atmosphere for the teacher to be able to achieve desired change in student learning (Firestone and Riehl, 2005). According to Avolio, Bass and Jung (1999), effective leader typically displaced both transformational and transactional leadership that is the two styles are complimentary in the sense that transformational leadership style is ineffective in the total absence of a transactional leadership between leaders and followers.

Moreover, Leithwood and Jantzi (2000) suggested that, Principals transformational behaviour such as; setting a vision, fostering acceptance of group goals, providing individual support, intellectual stimulation, providing an appropriate model and setting high performance expectations have a positive on teachers commitment. Whereas, transactional leadership moves followers to do expected from them. Transactional leader exercises influence during daily leader support exchange without any special emotional consideration. Furthermore, the empirical findings of MoE, Ethiopia (2005) showed that in successful school, principals create strong sense of vision and mission, build a strong culture of collaboration, foster positive school climate, practice shared leadership and promotes student learning. Hence, an effective principal is thought to be a necessary pre condition for successful school.

Educational research on leadership is a broad field spanning a myriad of leadership styles and concepts of effective leadership. Traditionally, research focused on the school principal as leader, while our contemporary view of educational leadership and the changing roles of school administrators acknowledge the impact of unofficial leaders in schools (Fullan, 2001). Research has more commonly explored the effects principals have on their schools; creating the opportunity for a look at specific leadership practices formal and informal school leaders use to reach those ends.

Hallinger (2003) study shown that, schools is one of the most important organizations in society, established to achieve specific educational objectives. Some of those objectives are to motive teachers and to promote student learning and academic achievement. An effective school should meet a set of common characteristics which includes; clear goals and high expectation, strong leadership of the principal, healthy school environment, increased time on task, positive home-school relation, and frequent monitoring of student results. School leadership plays a key role in improving school outcomes by influencing the motivations and capacities of teachers. Leithwood and Jantzi (2000) argued that successful school leaders engaged in four sets of core practices; setting direction, developing people, redesigning the organization and managing the curriculum. Effective educational leadership constitutes a number of characteristics such as; creating climate to high expectations for staff and students,

building commitment among teachers and students to the school goals, encouraging collaborative relationship and staff development, facilitating teachers in spending maximum time on direct instruction and setting purpose and atmosphere of order.

According to Bass and Avolio's (1994) empirical work, transactional leadership is generally sufficient to maintain the status quo. Transactional leaders set goals, articulate explicit agreements regarding what the leaders expect from organizational members and how they will be rewarded for their efforts and commitments, and provide constructive feedback to keep every person on task. Higher organizational commitment among school teachers influences school performance in terms of student academic achievement.

Moreover, Madiha's (2012) research result showed that committed teachers engaged in behaviour that led to achieve school goals and enhance student's achievement. MoE, Ethiopia (2005) stated that, the school principals are expected to maximize the learning environment and the learning outcome of schools. The role of the school principal is to make vigorous efforts to create a safe learning environment in school with a sense of ownership, work in collaboration with parents, facilitate effective communication among school actors, find solutions to student learning problems, lead staff development, organize experience sharing programs to the school community and be role model.

## **Literature Review**

### ***Transformational and Transactional Leadership***

Bass (1990) claimed that there have also been numerous criticisms regarding the traditional approaches already discussed. Consequently, a new style of leadership has emerged in order to ensure the survival of organizations and to overcome limitations of the trait, behavioural and contingency theories of the past. The new theories of leadership evolved in reaction to traditional models, which become difficult to implement. This new leadership approaches suggest that there are two views of leadership-transactional and transformational. However, the current competitive business environment requires a new style of leadership in order to ensure the organizational survival and performance namely, transformational leadership.

### ***Transformational Leadership***

One of the newest and most encompassing approaches to educational leadership that has been the focus of much research since the early 1980s is the transformational approach. Transformational leadership is part of the new leadership paradigm, which gives more attention to the charismatic and affective elements of leadership (Northouse 2009). According to Krishnan (2005), transformational leadership is the favoured style of leadership given that it is assumed to produce result beyond expectations. Transformational leaders form a relationship of mutual stimulation and elevation that converts followers in to leaders and may convert leaders in to moral agents. Transformational leaders are recognized as change agents who are good role models who can create and articulate a clear vision for an organization and who empower followers to meet higher standards. It is a process that involves an exceptional form of influence that moves followers to accomplish more than expected. This implies that transformational leadership emphasizes the importance of followers in the leadership process. Transformational leadership is concerned with improving the performance of followers and developing followers to their fullest potential. The components of transformational leadership have evolved as refinements have been made in both the conceptualization and measurement of transformational leadership. As articulated by Bass and Avolio (1994) four factors characterize the behaviour of transformational leaders': individual consideration, intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation, and idealized influence.

Individual consideration (IC) is characterized by giving “personal attention” to members who seem neglected and the leaders act as coaches and advisers to assist followers. Individual consideration is practiced when new learning opportunities are created along with a supportive climate. Individual differences in terms of needs and desires are recognized and also two-way communication is common. The individually considerate leaders are considered to be good listeners, and along with this come personalized interaction. Intellectual stimulation (IS) is characterized by stimulate followers efforts to be innovative and creative by questioning assumptions reframing problems and approaching old problems in new ways. Leaders with this style stimulate and encourage creativity in their followers. Inspirational motivation (IM) is characterized by communicating high performance expectations to followers and leaders inspire followers through motivation to become committed to and a part of the shared vision in the organization. Leaders with inspirational motivation challenges and followers with high standards, communicate optimism about future goals, and provide manning for the task at hand. Idealized influence (II) is characterized by modelling behaviour through exemplary personal achievements, character and behaviour. The transformational leader provides a role model for high ethical behaviour instils pride, gains respect and trusted. The leaders are respected, admired and trusted.

### *Transactional Leadership*

Northouse (2009) described that transactional leadership refers to the bulk of leadership models which focus on the exchanges that occur between leaders and their followers. It is a contractual relationship between the leader and followers, where the leader rewards or disciplines the follower depending on the adequacy of the followers’ performance. It assumed that people are motivated primarily by reward and punishment and also tends to perpetuate and legitimate the status quo. Transactional culture concentrates on explicit and implicit contractual relationships. Job assignments are in writing accompanied by statements about conditions of employment, rules, regulations, benefits and disciplinary codes. In this case, motivation to work is a matter of trade-offs of worker effort in exchange for rewards and the avoidance of disciplinary actions commitments remain short term and self-interests are underscored. Transactional organization is an internal competitive market place of individuals whose rewards are contingent on their performance. In this theory, leaders are negotiators and resource allocators in which the power and politics behind request may be as important as its merit. Innovation and risk taking are typically discouraged.

In addition, Bass and Riggio (2006) indicated that transactional leadership is more management than leadership unfortunately it’s also the most wide spread form of leadership in the organizations to day. This is because charismatic transformational leaders are rare while transactional leader managers are aplenty. Transactional leaders set goals, articulate explicit agreements regarding what the leader expects from organizational members and how they will be rewarded for their efforts and commitment, and provide constructive feedback to keep every person on task. They emphasized that by providing contingent rewards, transactional leader might inspire reasonable degree of involvement, loyalty, commitment & performance from subordinates. It indicated that transactional leaders are those who sought to increase followers’ commitment. These leaders encouraged subordinates commitment to achieve expected levels of performance by helping them to recognize task responsibilities, identify goals and develop confidence about meeting desired performance levels.

### **Rational of the Study**

School leaders today are challenged to educate a growing and diverse student’s population to address their needs. School leaders face challenges due to raising expectations to schools and

schooling in a century characterized by technological innovations and globalization (Hallinger and Murphy, 1986). In the local context; Afar Education Sector Development Program, Ethiopia (AfESDP III, 2006) identified the factors and the major bottleneck for the timely implementation of planned activities is lack of leadership skills. Those who stayed in the school leadership role are not updated with the recent leadership styles. The degree of implementation of an innovation and success is different in different schools because of the actions and concerns of the principals and teachers. Therefore, this study is designed to examine the Effects of Principals Leadership Behaviour on Students' Academic Achievements from transformational and transactional perspectives in selected secondary schools in Afar region in Ethiopia.

### **Objectives of the study**

1. To investigate the different types of leadership behavior which are mostly practiced by the secondary school Principals to lead their schools.
2. To assess the relationship between Principals leadership behavior and students academic achievement (Grade-10) in secondary schools.

### **Methodology of the Study**

This study is intended to assess the dominant principals' leadership behaviour and to examine the relationship between principals' leadership behaviour and school performance in terms of student academic achievement in Afar zone one in Ethiopia. This study used descriptive survey research design using quantitative approach.

### **Population and Sample**

The target population of this study was Afar Regional State secondary schools in Ethiopia. The researcher selected Zone-1 purposefully out of which 3 secondary schools were selected from 3 different districts of same zone by random sampling technique and all the principals (3) and vice-principals (2) were selected by comprehensive sampling technique and 30 teachers (10 X 3 schools) who had 3 years of teaching experience in that particular sampled school were selected purposefully.

### **Tools used for Data Collection**

The data gathering instrument for this research was standardized Multifactor Leadership Questionnaires (MLQ) was developed by Bass and Avolio (2000). The MLQ has 32 items to describe Principals' leadership behaviour as perceived by teachers and Principals with regard to transformational and transactional leadership perspectives. The teachers will be asked to rate their principals' school leadership on 5 point Likert scale ranging from not at all (0) to frequently if not always (4). The second instrument was document analysis which was for grade 10 students' national exam result report on General Secondary Education Certificate Examination of 2015.

### **Techniques of Data Analysis**

For the analysis and interpretation of the results of the study, the researcher used quantitative data analysis techniques like, paired sample t-test to assess the difference between the two groups' responses on leadership styles, Pearson's product moment correlation was employed to determine the strength of relationship between the principals' leadership styles and students academic achievement.

## The Results and Discussion

As stated in the preceding part, the major purpose of the study was to assess the dominant leadership behaviours of secondary school principals and to examine the relationship among principals' leadership behaviours and school performance in terms of student academic achievement in Afar Region, Ethiopia.

### 1. Leadership behaviour which are mostly practiced by the secondary school Principals to lead their schools

To see the observed mean difference between transformational and transactional leadership behaviour of secondary school principals through paired sample t-test.

**Table 1: Leadership practiced by the secondary school principals perceived by teachers and principals**

Variables	Principals (N=5)		Teachers (N=30)		Weighted Mean	t -value	Sig (2-tailed)
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD			
Transformational Leadership	2.71	0.73	2.57	0.99	2.64	3.35	0.02
Transactional Leadership	2.75	0.81	2.071	0.96	2.41	4.67	0.00

Significant at  $P < 0.05$ ,  $DF = 33$ ;  $t$ -table value 2.037

As table 1 indicates that the weighted mean score the two groups of transformational leadership behaviour are 2.64 and 2.41. The value indicates that the school principals were fairly often transformational leader. The independent sample t-test result shows there is significant difference between the two groups' responses on both transformational and transactional leadership behaviours. Since, the p value is less than at 0.05 levels. Therefore, there is a significant difference between the two groups' responses on both leadership behaviours of school principals. It also indicates that, the averaged weighted mean value of transformational leadership is 2.64 for teachers and principals responses that were found in between 2.71 and 2.57. The value indicated that the school principals were fairly often transformational leader.

Finally, the independent sample t-test was employed to test whether there is a statistically significant difference between responses of the two groups. Since the calculated t-value 3.35 is greater than the table value 2.037 at 0.05 level of significance and 33 degree of freedom for two tailed test. So there is a significance difference between the responses of the two groups on transformational leadership.

### 2. Relationship between Principals' leadership behaviour and students' academic achievement (Grade-10) in secondary schools

The mean value of Principals Leadership behaviour and also the average score of GPA on grade X national exam of 2015 in each sample schools.

**Table 2: Principals' leadership behaviour and students' academic achievement (Grade-10) in secondary schools**

No	Secondary Schools	Mean		Average Score of GPA
		Transformational Behavior	Transactional Behavior	
1	School-I (Dubti Sec. School)	2.77	2.34	2.56

2	School-II (Md. Hanfare Sec. School)	2.61	2.47	2.43
3	School-III (Logia Sec. School)	2.54	2.42	2.35
	<i>Grand Mean</i>	<i>2.64</i>	<i>2.41</i>	<i>2.45</i>

The result in table 2 revealed that, the obtained mean value of transformational leadership behaviour in general secondary school of Dubti ( $x = 2.77$ ) is relatively high as compared to the remaining sample schools score respectively. This implies that the school principal practiced mostly transformational leadership behaviours tend to have a high average score of GPA ( $x = 2.56$ ) on grade X national examination of 2015. Again, in the same table shows that the observed mean value of transformational leadership in the secondary schools of Logia ( $x = 2.54$ ) is relatively low as compared to the remaining sample schools score. Furthermore, table 2 revealed that the average value of school performance ( $x=2.35$ ) in terms of student academic achievement on grade X national exam of 2015 in the school of Logia were relatively low as compared to the remaining sample schools students result.

To investigate the relationship that existed among principals leadership behaviour, and school performance in terms of students academic achievements as measured by average score of GPA on grade ten national exam of 2015 Pearson's correlation coefficient ( $r$ ) was computed.

**Table 3: Correlation of Transactional Leadership and Transformational Leadership**

Variables	Schools Performance
Transformational leadership	0.98
Transactional leadership	-0.71

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

As it has seen from table 3, there was a strong positive and statistically significant relationship between principals transformational leadership behaviour and school performance in terms of students' academic achievement on grade ten national exam ( $r=0.98$ ;  $p<0.05$ ). In this study, the result revealed that school principals were practiced highly transformational leadership behaviour tend to have high average score of GPA on grade X national examination of 2015 national examination. This implies that the schools under principals who fairly often practiced transformational leadership behaviour have high student academic achievements on grade X national examination of 2015. In some schools where principals demonstrated highly transformational leadership behaviour brings low school performance in terms of student academic achievement. In contrary, there was strong negative and statistically significant relationship between principals transactional leadership behaviour and school performance in terms of student achievement ( $r=-0.71$ ;  $p<0.05$ ). This implies that there was a high negative relationship between principals transactional leadership behaviour and school performance on students academic achievement as measured by average GPA on grade X national exam of 2015.

Finally, for effective implementation of school program, transformational leadership is very crucial. The school management team or principals have to gear their approach more towards transformational leadership dimensions. This should be articulated as: Participating teachers in school issue decisions and activities. This makes teachers responsible to their school. Acknowledging teachers input as valuable contribution to the functioning of the school, recognizing and publicizing teachers' successful accomplishment in each administrative levels.

Therefore school principals should be practiced transformational leadership behaviour to improve students' academic achievements and school performance.

### **Major Findings**

- 1) Transformational leadership was exhibited fairly often by sample school principals as perceived by their teachers. This implies that transformational leadership is the dominant leadership behaviour is practiced by the secondary school principals to lead their school.
- 2) The study revealed that principals transformational leadership behaviour was high positive strong relationship with students academic achievement, because the correlation for transformational leadership behaviours, which indicates very high relationship between transformational behaviour and school performance. In contrast, there was negative relationship between transactional leadership and students' academic achievement in terms of school performance at grade X Ethiopian National exam in 2015.
- 3) For effective improvement of school performance, transformational leadership is suggested according to this study finding. In this study result there is a high positive strong relationship between the transformational leadership and school performance. Therefore, school principals should be continuing transformational leadership behaviour to improve school performance in terms of students' academic achievement.

### **Educational Implications**

The school management team and principals have to gear their approach more towards transformational leadership dimensions. This should be articulated as: Participating teachers in school issue decisions and activities. This makes teachers feel responsible to their school; and acknowledging teachers input as valuable contribution to the functioning of the school, recognizing and publicizing teachers' successful accomplishment in each administrative levels and so.

The concerned body should consider and adjust principals' selection, training and career advancement systems in order to gain qualified and able leaders. In line with the new education and training policy, continuous and intensive training must be offered to principals on leadership and teaching methodology issues to enhance more school achievements. For effective implementation of school program, teachers' willingness and positive reactions very crucial. Therefore, educational leaders should emphasize on sharing power and responsibility, facilitating continuous discussion and training with teachers to create shared vision and to maximize more school performance in their Schools.

### **Conclusion**

The school principals dominantly exhibited transformational leadership behaviours. This means that school principals prefer transformational to transactional leadership behaviours. Hence, it can be concluded that principals of Zone one in Afar Region, Ethiopia secondary schools apply more of transformational leadership behaviour than transactional leadership behaviour. The results indicated that the principals that exhibited transformational leadership behaviour had high positive and statistically significant relationship with school performance in terms of students' academic achievement. This means that teachers working under principals who practiced high transformational leadership is high academic achievement in their schools. On the other hand, the transactional leadership had negative correlation with school performance in terms of students' academic achievement in their schools.

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