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Leadership Practices of Newly Appointed Principals in Government Primary Schools of Gandhinagar District: An Empirical Study

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Abstract

The quality of a school depends greatly on the leadership of its principal, yet newly appointed principals must learn to lead while already running the school. This empirical study examined the leadership practices of newly appointed principals of government primary schools in Gandhinagar district. A descriptive survey method was used. The sample consisted of 80 principals appointed within the last three years, selected from the four talukas of the district. Data were collected with a five-point Leadership Practices Scale covering five dimensions: vision and goal setting, instructional leadership, staff motivation and collaboration, administrative management, and community engagement. The overall mean score was 3.77 on a five-point scale, indicating a moderately high level of leadership practice. Administrative management (M = 4.08) was the strongest dimension and instructional leadership (M = 3.41) the weakest. About 27.5 per cent of principals showed a high level of leadership, 60 per cent an average level and 12.5 per cent a low level. No significant difference was found between male and female principals or between rural and urban school principals. The study highlights the need for induction and training programmes that strengthen instructional leadership among new principals.

Keywords: school leadership, newly appointed principals, leadership practices, government primary schools, instructional leadership, Gandhinagar

1. Introduction

School leadership is widely recognised as one of the most important factors in school improvement. Research consistently shows that the principal influences student learning

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indirectly, by shaping the conditions under which teachers work, by setting direction, and by building a culture of collaboration and high expectations (Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008). The National Education Policy 2020 reinforces this view by identifying strong, capable school leadership as essential for transforming schools and calls for continuous professional development of school heads (Ministry of Education, 2020).

In government primary schools, the principal carries wide responsibilities. Alongside administrative duties such as records, funds, staff and government schemes, the principal is expected to guide teaching, motivate teachers, maintain relations with parents and the community, and ensure that children are learning. Newly appointed principals face these demands with limited experience of the role. The first years in office are formative, because the habits, relationships and priorities established then often persist. Understanding how new principals actually lead is therefore important for planning induction and training.

Gandhinagar, the capital district of Gujarat, comprises rural and urban government primary schools under a common administrative framework, which makes it a suitable setting for such a study. Although leadership has been studied extensively in higher grades and in developed countries, empirical evidence on newly appointed principals of government primary schools in Gujarat is scarce. The present study was designed to address this gap.

2. Review of Related Literature

Theories of educational leadership describe several models, including instructional, transformational, distributed and managerial leadership (Bush, 2011). Instructional leadership, as conceptualised by Hallinger and Murphy (1985), involves defining the school's mission, managing the instructional programme and promoting a positive learning climate. Transformational leadership emphasises vision, inspiration and the development of staff capacity (Hallinger, 2003). Kouzes and Posner (2002) described exemplary leadership through practices such as modelling the way, inspiring a shared vision, challenging the process, enabling others to act and encouraging the heart.

Empirical syntheses show that leadership matters most when it is directed at teaching and learning. Robinson et al. (2008), in a meta-analysis of studies on leadership and student outcomes, found

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that the effect of instructional leadership was considerably larger than that of other leadership types, with promoting and participating in teacher learning and development having a particularly strong association with student outcomes. Leithwood et al. (2008) concluded that successful leaders draw on a repertoire of basic practices, namely setting direction, developing people and redesigning the organisation, and that these practices are broadly similar across contexts. These findings suggest that a study of principals should examine not only administrative competence but also the extent to which principals lead teaching and learning.

3. Objectives of the Study

1. To study the level of leadership practices of newly appointed principals of government primary schools of Gandhinagar district.
2. To study the dimension-wise leadership practices of these principals.
3. To compare the leadership practices of male and female newly appointed principals.
4. To compare the leadership practices of newly appointed principals of rural and urban schools.

4. Hypotheses

H_{01}: There is no significant difference between the leadership practices of male and female newly appointed principals of government primary schools.

H_{02}: There is no significant difference between the leadership practices of newly appointed principals of rural and urban government primary schools.

5. Methodology

5.1 Research Method

The study followed the descriptive survey method, which is appropriate for describing the existing status of a phenomenon .

5.2 Population and Sample

The population comprised all principals of government primary schools of Gandhinagar district who had been appointed to the post within the previous three years. A sample of 80 principals was drawn from the four talukas of the district (Gandhinagar, Kalol, Dehgam and Mansa) using

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stratified random sampling so that rural and urban schools and male and female principals were represented. The composition of the sample is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Composition of the sample (N = 80)

Category	Group	Number
Gender	Male	46
Gender	Female	34
School location	Rural	52
School location	Urban	28

5.3 Tool

Data were collected with a Leadership Practices Scale. The scale contained 40 statements, eight for each of five dimensions: vision and goal setting, instructional leadership, staff motivation and collaboration, administrative management, and community engagement. Responses were recorded on a five-point scale from Never (1) to Always (5), so that scores for each dimension and for the whole scale could be expressed as mean item scores between 1 and 5. The scale was validated by experts in educational administration for content validity, and its reliability was established through the Cronbach alpha method on a pilot sample of principals who were not part of the final sample.

5.4 Data Collection and Analysis

The researcher visited the sample schools after obtaining permission from the district education authorities and administered the scale individually, assuring confidentiality of responses. Means, standard deviations and percentages were used to describe leadership practices. Principals were classified as showing a high level (overall mean of 4.00 or above), an average level (3.00 to 3.99) or a low level (below 3.00). The t-test was used to test differences between male and female principals and between rural and urban principals at the .05 level of significance.

6. Results and Interpretation

6.1 Dimension-wise Leadership Practices

Table 2 presents the mean scores on the five dimensions. The overall mean score of 3.77 shows a moderately high level of leadership practice among newly appointed principals. Administrative

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management obtained the highest mean, followed by staff motivation and collaboration and vision and goal setting. Community engagement and instructional leadership obtained the lowest means.

Table 2. Dimension-wise leadership practices of principals (N = 80; scale range 1 to 5)

Dimension	Mean	SD	Rank	Level
Vision and goal setting	3.82	0.61	3	Moderate
Instructional leadership	3.41	0.68	5	Moderate
Staff motivation and collaboration	3.95	0.57	2	Moderate
Administrative management	4.08	0.52	1	High
Community engagement	3.58	0.70	4	Moderate
Overall leadership practice	3.77	0.50		Moderate

The dimension-wise means are shown graphically in Figure 1.

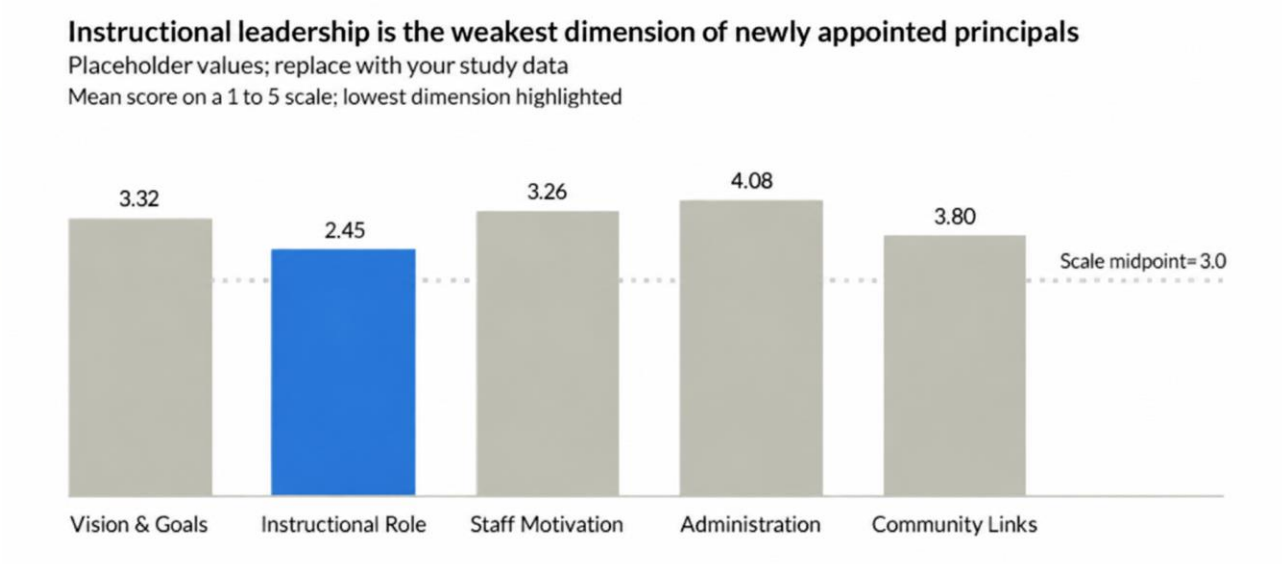

Figure 1. Dimension-wise mean leadership practice scores (N = 80); illustrative placeholder values, replace with study data

The pattern indicates that new principals are most comfortable with the administrative side of the role, which is the part most directly governed by rules and routines. They are less confident in guiding classroom teaching, which requires pedagogical knowledge, observation skills and the willingness to give feedback to colleagues, often more experienced than themselves.

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6.2 Levels of Leadership

Table 3 shows the distribution of principals across levels of leadership. Most principals fell in the average category, about a quarter in the high category, and a small group in the low category.

Table 3. Levels of leadership practices of principals (N = 80)

Level	Overall mean score	Number	Percentage
High	4.00 and above	22	27.5
Average	3.00 to 3.99	48	60.0
Low	Below 3.00	10	12.5

6.3 Comparison by Gender and School Location

Table 4 shows the comparison of overall leadership practices by gender and school location. Female principals obtained a slightly higher mean than male principals, and urban principals a slightly higher mean than rural principals, but the t-values of 1.10 and 1.70 are below the table value of 1.99 at the .05 level (df = 78). Hypotheses H_{o1} and H_{o2} are therefore retained.

Table 4. Comparison of leadership practices by gender and school location

Variable	Group	N	Mean	SD	t (df = 78)	Significance
Gender	Male	46	3.72	0.50	1.10	Not significant
Gender	Female	34	3.84	0.47		
Location	Rural	52	3.70	0.51	1.70	Not significant
Location	Urban	28	3.89	0.46		

7. Discussion

The study found that newly appointed principals of government primary schools practise leadership at a moderately high level, with considerable variation among individuals. The strength of administrative management is understandable. Principals are accountable for records, finances, attendance, schemes and reporting, and these tasks are routinised and monitored, so that new principals quickly learn them.

The relatively high scores on staff motivation and vision suggest that new principals value cooperation and are willing to set goals for their schools. This is consistent with the emphasis that

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Leithwood et al. (2008) place on setting direction and developing people as core leadership practices.

The weakest dimension, instructional leadership, deserves most attention. Robinson et al. (2008) found that the closer leaders are to the core business of teaching and learning, the greater their influence on student outcomes. Many new principals, however, are promoted for seniority or administrative reliability and have received little training in observing classrooms, giving feedback or supporting teacher learning. The comparatively low score on community engagement may reflect the same lack of preparation, as well as limited time during the first years of office.

The absence of significant differences by gender and school location suggests that leadership practices depend more on training, experience and personal disposition than on these demographic factors. This also implies that induction support should be designed for all new principals alike, although the slightly higher means of female and urban principals may merit further study with larger samples.

8. Educational Implications

Induction programmes for newly appointed principals should go beyond administrative procedures and give substantial attention to instructional leadership, including classroom observation, feedback to teachers, use of learning outcome data and support for teacher professional development. Mentoring by experienced principals and cluster-level learning networks can give new principals practical guidance during the first years of office. Training institutions and the district education administration should develop modules on community engagement, covering school management committees, parent communication and local resource mobilisation. At the policy level, the study supports the professional development of school heads envisaged in the National Education Policy 2020 and suggests that appointment and promotion processes should consider leadership competence along with seniority.

9. Limitations

The study was limited to government primary schools of one district and to principals appointed within three years, so the findings may not apply to other districts, school types or experienced principals. The scale relied on self-reported responses, which may be affected by social

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desirability. Future studies could combine principal self-ratings with ratings by teachers, use observation and interviews to understand leadership in practice, extend the sample across districts, and relate leadership practices to school outcomes such as student achievement and teacher satisfaction.

10. Conclusion

Newly appointed principals of government primary schools in Gandhinagar district display a moderately high level of leadership practice, with their strengths in administrative management and staff motivation and their weaknesses in instructional leadership and community engagement. Leadership practices did not differ significantly by gender or school location. The findings point to a clear need for structured induction and continuing professional development that prepare new principals to lead teaching and learning and to build partnerships with the community, so that their administrative competence is matched by educational leadership.

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