

Abstract

Principal Leadership at the Junior Secondary Schools in Trinidad and Tobago.

by
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This study sought to investigate the following research objectives:

- (i) Which leadership frames principals at junior secondary schools in Trinidad and Tobago used most often?
- (ii) How effective were the frames used by principals?
- (iii) What impact did the principal's leadership have on teachers' commitment to their school, as well as on teachers' commitment to student learning?

The conceptual framework used in this study was derived from the work of Sergiovanni (1991), Bolman and Deal (1992), and Rosenholtz (1989). A causal-comparative design using both the quantitative and qualitative methodologies was employed.

For the quantitative phase of the study an 88-item questionnaire was administered to 360 teachers, while a 39-item questionnaire was administered to six principals. The questionnaires measured five dimensions of leadership, three dimensions of commitment to the school, and three dimensions of teacher

commitment to student learning. Also, document search was employed to elicit data on students' examination test scores.

The schools of the study were categorized as high -achieving or low-achieving, based on the scores from nine years of 14+ Examinations in English and Mathematics, as well as from results of school-specific tests.

For the qualitative phase, semi-structured interviews were conducted with six principals and 36 teachers at the six schools in the sample.

The major findings of the study were that at the high-achieving schools principals used the structural, human resource, and symbolic/cultural leadership frames quite frequently. These principals were also highly effective in their use of two of these frames. Also, principals of high-achieving schools made moderate use of the instructional and political frames but experienced low levels of effectiveness on these frames.

At the low- achieving schools principals used two frames, and in some schools, one leadership frame, very often; the common frame for these schools being the structural frame. These principals made moderate to low use of the others frames. Further, principals of low-achieving schools were moderately effective on two frames; one of which was the human resource frame, but they experienced moderate to low levels of effectiveness on the others.

At high-achieving schools, teachers demonstrated moderate to high levels of commitment to their schools and as well as to their students. Specifically, continuance and normative commitment levels were particularly strong among teachers in one of the high achieving schools. At low-achieving schools, teachers demonstrated moderate to low levels of commitment to their schools, and generally low levels of commitment to student learning.

According to the model that was used to facilitate theoretical analysis, the results of the study indicated that none of the principals or the schools could be described as effective or excellent. The study however, confirmed that there are leadership differences as well teacher commitment differences in high – achieving schools and low-achieving schools. The results also suggested that the academic performances of student in high-achieving schools might be directly related to principal leadership and teacher commitment.

Recommendations were offered for principals to assume more effective instructional leadership roles in their schools by combining bureaucratic and cultural linkages. Recommendations were also offered to training institutions to emphasize more of the micropolitics of school leadership as well as the necessity for principals to develop the skill of combining bureaucratic and cultural linkages in their leadership repertoire. It was also recommended that further research should be conducted to determine the specific ways in which teacher commitment

and student academic achievement are influenced by principals' leadership practices.