

The Role of School Leadership toward Improving Student's Achievement: A Case Study of Secondary Schools in Changchun, China

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Abstract

Effective leadership practices are indispensable in contributing to student's achievement. School leaders, more than ever, are expected to create a conducive learning environment. The purpose of this study was to explore the role of school leadership toward improving student achievements at secondary schools in Changchun, Jilin Province, China, by considering principals' leadership behaviors and practices. Student achievement was evaluated in terms of grades that is based upon student passing examinations (national entrance exams). Quantitative and qualitative research methodologies were employed, and questionnaires, interviews and document analysis were used to collect data from teachers and principals about the role of a principal on student achievement. The findings revealed that principals' behaviors promote higher performance through practices, such as classroom supervision, directing, setting goals, teamwork, collaboration, continuous monitoring of students' progress and supporting teacher autonomy.

Keywords: School leadership, student's achievements, Instructional leadership, Leadership behaviors, Leadership practices.

I. INTRODUCTION

Principals play a significant role in determining academic achievement due to their pivotal roles. A good principal can create a climate that can foster excellence in teaching and learning. A principal as a leader and manager of a school plays a vital role in fulfilling the school vision and goal by specific approach in achieving the target. The educational system in China is largely examination oriented. Secondary education in China is entirely focused on exam preparations. At the end of every three years, students sit for the National Entrance Exams as a requirement for an admission to the next level. Examination results provide direct evidence of the effectiveness of a school in terms of the number and level of students' preparation.

When the success rate of a school becomes public knowledge, judgments can be made about the effectiveness of the school and the organization's contribution to student success (Mohandas, Meng & Keeves, 2003).

The assumption in this study was that good school leadership behavior and practices employed by a school principal are expected to enhance student achievement. The role of the principal is to promote an academic performance (Berhane, Ephrem & Gaikar, 2021). In China, a school principal demonstrates effective instructional leadership skills that provide focus on student achievement and guide the development of a caring collaboration (Dou, Devos & Valcke, 2016). School leaders promote high expectation for students by continuously focusing on

instruction and emphasizing the importance of academics, improvements in teaching and learning environments, supporting collaboration amongst educators and informing instructional decision-making (Slater, 2011). In most school systems, a school leader is required by the systemic authorities to improve student learning and is held responsible to building commitments in developing a shared vision for motivating and energizing teachers and students.

Effective principals show strong leadership capacity. The principal is an important figure for a school success (Barth, 1990). Strong school principalship might be defined as having the knowledge of teaching and learning processes, and the power to inspire stakeholders to achieve the common goal. A principal, as a school leader, is often recognized as the central force behind successful schools through establishing goals, setting high expectations, organizing classrooms, allocating resources, promoting a positive and orderly learning environment (Bell, 2001; Griffith, 1999). Eberts and Stone (1988) determined that a principal's effect on student achievement results from interactions and communications with teachers. The interactions might include identifying clear objectives, spending time in classrooms, providing support and guidance (Brewer, 1993). Principals begin the process of influencing student achievement by recruiting and selecting teachers, building collegiality and collaboration among, encouraging staff development, modeling behaviors, and celebrating and rewarding teachers for accomplishments (Huang, Hochbein & Simons, 2018).

1.1. Statement of the problem

Concerns about leadership practices that impact student achievement are not new. There has always been a debate about what leadership behaviors affect student achievement besides other non-leadership factors, but it is difficult to discuss student achievement without studying leadership practices. School leadership by a principal is possibly the most important single determinant for student

achievement. However, creating an effective teaching-learning process, developing a supportive school culture, positive school climate, participatory decision-making, equitable evaluation process and teacher advocacy, might take several instructional leadership practices or behaviors from principals. While principals are deeply committed to their beliefs, visions, principles or values, they are equally committed to identify the best behaviors and practices. Principals on a daily basis, face multitude of challenges, but if they know the best instructional leadership practice, behavior or skills, they could surpass them. Schools display good results each year because the principals demonstrate appropriate leadership practices that emphasized the importance of academics, improvements in teaching and learning environments (Slater, 2011)

1.2. Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to explore the role of school leadership toward improving students' achievement at secondary schools in Changchun, China by considering school leadership behavior and practices as factors. Specifically, the objective of the study is to examine the behaviors and practices of a school leader that impact student achievement.

1.3. Research questions

1. What are the leadership behaviors and practices of a school principal in regards to curriculum and classroom instruction?
2. How does a school leader's role influence students' achievement?
3. What is the importance of instructional leadership in creating students' achievement?

1.4. Basic assumptions of the study

- (i) In China at junior secondary school level, examination is an accurate instrument for measuring student achievement.
- (ii) The principal's behavior and practices are the central factors in determining academic achievement in schools.

(iii) School principals supervise and provide academic and professional guidance to teachers to ensure that the teaching skills of the staff are always improving.

(iv) Principals are responsible and qualified professionals in supervising and management of school curriculum and instructional observations in a classroom.

(v) Principals encourage a wide scale of stakeholders' participation.

1.5. Definition of terms

School leadership

School leadership is defined as the process of enlisting and guiding students, teachers and other stakeholders toward achieving common educational aims (Diamond & Spillane, 2016). The school leaders, in this context are those persons who occupy various roles in schools in order to achieve school goals.

Student achievement

Student achievement is viewed from two perspectives. The first perspective is to view achievement in terms of enrollment, or the number of students who pass a course, and the second perspective is to examine student achievement in terms of whether they mastered the learning objectives (Cheryan, 2014).

Instructional leadership

Instructional leadership has been broadly defined as leadership functions that are related to teacher instruction and student learning (Bush, 2015).

Leadership behavior

Leadership behavior refers to the actions of the school principal that are relevant to school administration and school programs, particularly that deals with teachers and students, and supervising learning, handling meetings and communicating with parents and supporting staff (Yammarino, 2013).

Leadership practices

Leadership practices refer to the ways that a school principal goes about carrying out duties.

It refers to how a principal leads a school to achieve the common education goal. (Yammarino, 2013).

1.6. Significance of the study

The information obtained from this study would contribute to the growing body of school leadership research. The study would provide evidence that, effective school leadership adds value to leadership practices by principals. The study confirms that school principal's practices and behavior have an influence on students' progress. On the theoretical value, the findings of the study would provide greater insight to the administrators and managers of schools into the factors that contribute to a broader array of instructional practices that are linked to an improved students' achievement. The study also would contribute to the existing literature of school leadership and may provide implications for future school principal's development, preparation, training, and help current school administrators to meet standards and expectations. Academically, the study might contribute to the extension of knowledge about productive, helpful or successful leadership.

2. Review of Literature

School leaders are now more accountable for an academic performance. The Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL) analyzed studies conducted over a 30-year period about the effects of leadership responsibilities on student achievement (Waters & Cameron, 2007). The research results were translated into a balanced leadership framework, and identified 21 leadership behaviors and practices that are significantly associated with student achievement. The 21 leadership behaviors and practices are: affirmation, change agent, contingent rewards, communication, culture, discipline, flexibility, focus, ideals/beliefs, input, intellectual stimulation, assessment, evaluation, optimizer, order, outreach, relationship, resources, situational, awareness and visibility (Dou, Devos & Valcke, 2016).

2.1. The influence of school leaders on student's achievement

Strong leadership from principals, teachers, or integrated teams is important in initiating and maintaining the improvement processes. Effective school improvement requires strong and empowered school leadership (Griffith, 1999). Student's achievement is primarily influenced by a good leadership and supportive atmosphere (Cheryan, 2014). Purkey and Smith (1985) identified school leadership as one of the major factors in improving an academic performance. They conclude that school leadership has an indirect effect, through school climate, on students' achievement. School leaders also influence student achievement indirectly through establishing school goals, setting high expectations, organizing classrooms, allocating resources, promoting a positive and orderly learning environment, and communicating with school staff, parents, and community groups (Dou, Devos & Valcke, 2016). Several studies from school improvement research, such as setting national goals in terms of school improvement and strong leadership in steering and empowering school improvement efforts, have been important. National goal setting in terms of student outcomes which were reflected in the national curriculum and school text books was a key factor that influenced effective school improvement (Leithwood, Jantzy & Hopkins, 2006; Sun, Creemers & Jong, 2007).

2.2. The importance of instructional leadership in creating student's achievement

Instructional leadership is a broad construct that claims effective leaders are those who focus mainly on teacher instruction and student learning. Although there are differences among researchers about the particular indicators of instructional leadership, the theoretical foundation is somewhat uniform (Slater, 2011). Strong instructional leadership has been consistently described as an indispensable factor in creating an effective student achievement (Bush, 2015). Scheerens (2012) summarized instructional leadership as having

four main tenants. First, instructional leadership focuses primarily on the role of a principal in developing, directing, and supervising. Secondly, instructional leaders are more hands-on with their teachers in order to improve teaching and learning processes. Third, instructional leaders are goal-oriented. Lastly, instructional leaders establish high expectations and standards for teachers and students.

The importance of instructional leadership in creating students' success and achievements has been supported by several studies. Cotton (2003), for instance, discovered that principals who were knowledgeable and actively involved in instructional programs, had higher numbers of achieving students than those who managed only the non-instructional aspects of their schools. In this case, instructional programs refer to the clarity of instructional goals, decision making, choice of instructional strategies, uses of instructional time and classroom interactions (Huang, Hochbein & Simons, 2018). Excellent instructional leaders are very important, and are vital part of effective schools in bringing about high standards of student achievement (Diamond & Spillane, 2016). Effective instructional leaders know how to create collaboration, establish visions and develop trust in school communities.

School leaders are expected to lead curriculum design, recognize the essentials of sound instructional practices, and coach or guide teachers professionally. School leaders are also expected to participate parents, teachers, students and community members in decision-making processes so that they may develop a sense of ownership (Berhane, Ephrem & Gaikar, 2021). In doing so, school leaders must develop a vision of learning, build a positive school culture, and implement instructional programs which are conducive to learning. This approach is, however, time intensive and required high-level leadership skills (Cheryan, 2014), and therefore, school leaders must manage the varied needs of the staff, such as facilities, budgeting, technology, security and public relations. Successful school principals as an instructional leaders know how to lift

academic results (Berhane, Ephrem & Gaikar, 2021).

Effective school leaders also pay a considerable attention to indicators of students' achievement, such as test results (Huang, Hochbein & Simons, 2018). School leaders bring about higher student achievement through setting clear and high expectation (Yammarino, 2013), effective communication, and forming school culture and climate of learning (Day, 2004). When school leaders execute their leadership functions well, student achievement increases exponentially (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). A strong knowledge of school improvement and instructional support is essential to a successful school. Bush (2015) stresses the importance of principals' knowledge about research-based instructional practices in order to provide guidance and leadership for a successful instructional delivery. A school leader without instructional know-how can do little to improve teaching (Slater, 2011).

2.3. School leadership behaviors that impact student's achievement

Leadership behavior influences teachers' professional commitment, norms of collegiality, collaboration, and joint work among community partnerships (Dou, Devos & Valcke, 2016). Edmonds (1979) argued that school leadership behavior is critical in determining the quality of education and students' achievement. Similarly, Cotton (2003) discovered the following types of leadership behaviors that have a significant impact on student achievement:

- The establishment of a clear vision, goal, and high expectations
- Interactions and cordial relationships with relevant stakeholders
- Developing a school culture which is conducive to teaching and learning
- Providing instructional leadership through discussions of instructional issues
- Monitoring progress and using student progress data for program improvements.

Studies demonstrate that particular leadership styles of school leaders could have a positive impact on teaching and learning environments which leads to student performance and academic achievements (Berhane, Ephrem & Gaikar, 2021). The same researchers also stated that leadership behaviors contribute to an increased student achievement. The success in achieving high student performance can determine how leadership responsibilities are distributed throughout a school (Cheryan, 2014).

2.4. School leadership practices that impact student's achievement

Leadership practices refer to social processes in which members of a group or an organization influences the internal and external events to bring about desired outcomes, shared orientation, collaboration activities, individual motivation and abilities (Yammarino, 2013). The best leadership practice is characterized by defining a goal and directing a school's effort toward its realization. The leader's best practices most importantly exhibit a sense of direction and determination to succeed. Students' achievement is, then, primarily influenced by good leadership practices, such as supportive atmosphere and collaborative team work. (Gurr et al, 2005) conclude that improvements in schools' performance were achieved by a principal working through teams and involving a wide array of stakeholders in decision making.

Leadership practices are necessary to facilitate academic achievements, effective instructional leadership, intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation, and idealized influence (Dou, Devos & Valcke, 2016). School leaders are expected to know the most effective techniques for improving classroom instructional practices so as to increase students' achievements. Yammarino (2013) summarizes the responsibilities of an effective principal that promote the best professional practice: confronting shoddy or inappropriate practices, celebrating outstanding work of both students and staff, and providing professional development opportunities.

Successful principals aggressively lead improvement in curriculum, instruction and student achievement. Eberts and Stone (1988) stated that a principal's effect on student achievement results from his/her interactions with teachers. Instructional leaders develop and communicate school goals, coordinate and supervise the school curriculum, monitor and evaluate student progress, and provide incentives to teachers and students (Hallinger, 2003; Ovando & Ramirez, 2007). As instructional leaders, principals need to be active and collaboratively involved with curriculum improvement, teacher development, data-driven decision making and engaging teachers in open conversations about teaching practices.

3. Research methodology and design

The study is quantitative and qualitative in nature to explore the role of school principals in students' achievement. A key strength of quantitative and qualitative methods is the ability to give the researcher a comprehensive perspective of the phenomenon under study (Babbie, 2007). The qualitative method serves in understanding of actions, beliefs, decisions and behaviors that cannot be easily detected by quantitative methods. The design used in the study was descriptive analysis. Descriptive research seeks to find answers to questions through the analysis of variable relationship. Fraenkel and Wallen (2000) describe descriptive analysis as a method that involves asking questions a large group of participants about a particular issue. Descriptive design was meticulously selected for the study because it allows quick data collection at a comparatively cheaper cost (Creswell, 2009).

3.1. Study area, Sample and Sampling Technique

The study was conducted in junior secondary schools in Changchun city, China. The city was chosen based on the proximity to the researchers. The sub-provincial city of Changchun has a population of 7.5 million and direct jurisdiction over six districts. The target

population of the study were principals and teachers at four junior secondary schools. The total population consisted of two schools with 5 principals and 78 teachers.

3.2. Instruments of data collection

The data were collected through questionnaires, interviews and document analysis guide.

The questionnaires were administered to principals and teachers. The teachers' questionnaires were related to principals' role (behavior and practices) that impact students' achievement, whereas the principals' questionnaires were about the sample schools and the principals' practices that affect student achievement. Semi-structured interviews were also conducted with principals, which is face-to-face interviews of approximately forty-five minutes long. The interviews were guided by an interview protocol consisting of five open-ended questions that designed to elicit narratives from the participants about the methods and skills they employ to improve academic performance. All the interviews were digitally recorded, secured in an encrypted drive, transcribed and reviewed by the researchers to ensure transcription accuracy. The authors also employed document analysis method. Relevant school documents such as, schemes of work, teachers' logbook, lesson books, attendance registers and academic records of students were observed and evaluated to obtain additional information about the role of principals on students' performance.

3.3. Methods of data analysis

The quantitative data collected from questionnaires were analyzed by the use of basic descriptive statistical techniques (frequencies and percentages), and presented in the form of tables. Frequencies and percentages can easily be interpreted and communicated to readers (John, 2017). On the other hand, qualitative data obtained from the semi-structured interview were presented and tabulated.

3.4. Validity and reliability of the instruments

It was necessary to validate the instruments that were employed to collect data so that the research findings could be reliable. In order to validate the questionnaires and interviews questions, a pilot study was conducted at one secondary school and accordingly the research questions were modified and constructed again.

Fraenkel and Wallen (2000) observed that reliability measures the degree of accuracy and generates similar data when used by independent researchers. To remove possible errors, every instrument should be tested before it is formally administered (John, 2017).

4. Results and Discussion

Schools	2017		2018		2019		2020	
	No of students	Average score	No of students	Average score	No of students	Average score	No of students	Average score
School one	274	83.21	262	86.64	272	91.22	254	96.49
School two	365	89.18	441	88.93	317	85.49	390	94.67

The documents obtained from the sample schools (as indicated in table-1) show that the average student achievement has been increasing consistently over the years from 2017 to 2020. The researchers looked into instructional leadership along with principals' behavior and practices to find out the reason behind a consistent student achievement increment over the years.

Leadership behavior of a school leader has a significant impact on creating more effective schools that can lead to higher level of student achievements (Hayet & Barbara, 2016). The finding indicated that schools perform high as the principals put more emphasis on academic management, teacher autonomy, student assessment and teachers work, structure time, teacher assistance and implementing teacher's ideas. The results are presented below in table-2

4.1. Leadership behaviors and practices of a principal in regards to curriculum and classroom instruction

N/S	Always		Often		Occasionally		Seldom		Never	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	f	%	f	%
B1	53	67.9	24	30.8	1	1.3				
B2	37	47.4	35	44.9	4	5.1	2	2.6		
B3	37	47.4	31	39.7	7	9	2	2.6	1	1.3
B4	30	38.5	43	58.1	3	3.8	2	2.6		
B5	50	64.1	26	33.3	2	2.6				
B6	48	61.5	26	33.3	3	3.8	1	1.3		

B1- academic management

B5- assistance to the teachers

B2- supporting teacher autonomy

B6- implementing teacher's ideas

B3- assessment on students and teachers work

The above table shows that as principals focus more on academic management, teacher autonomy, assessment, structure time, and

B4- structure time

implementing teacher's ideas, student performance incremented significantly. Generally, the findings show that focusing on curriculum implementation and classroom instruction brings about better academic performance.

4.2. Principal's leadership practice

Table-3: *Leadership practices*

N/S	Always		Often		Occasionally		Seldom		Never	
	<i>F</i>	%	<i>F</i>	%	<i>F</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
P1	47	60.3	27	34.6	4	5.1				
P2	38	48.7	34	33.1	4	5.1	2	2.6		
P3	27	34.6	35	44.9	13	13.7	3	3.8		
P4	20	25.6	32	41	22	28.2	4	5.1		
P5	39	50	32	41	5	6.4	2	2.6		
P6	33	42.3	36	46.2	5	6.4	4	5.1		
P7	43	55.1	26	33.3	4	5.1	4	5.1	1	1.3

P1- team work

P2- improvement of students' grades

P3- encourage cooperation

P4- making school decision

P5- share information together

P6- problem solving

P7- student's achievement target

The study also discovered that principals encourage teacher-parent teamwork on regular school meetings, and participate them in decision making and keeping everyone informed about student achievement. Similarly, the study reveals that principals establish strong lines of communication among teachers, students and parents to improve student achievement.

As part of their good leadership practice, the principals also involve teachers in academic discussion matters thorough open conversation. All teachers are given enough time to offer their suggestions as to how they can improve their knowledge and skills of teaching in order to boost student achievement. One principal, for instance, stated that I work hard to ensure that there are regular staff meetings to solve teacher's classroom problems and make sure no problem left without being solved. Similarly, two principals from the study, approach

Effective principals demonstrate the best leadership practice to improve students' grades

(Huang, Hochbein & Simons, 2018). The findings show that principals in the sample schools demonstrate good leadership practices, such as team work, cooperation, school decision making, sharing information and problem solving to improve students' grade.

teachers privately; once an academic problem has occurred to a teacher, then the principal set a time to meet with the individual teacher and conduct a discussion privately. Some studies show that successful principals are visible, knowledgeable, and are positive promoters of programs and faculty through two-way of communications (Day, 2007). The majority of the principals believe that discussing academic matters with teachers provide greater opportunities, not only for the schools, but also to teachers to learn from one another at regular staff meetings.

4.3. School leader's role to influence students' achievement

Principals influence student achievement indirectly through establishing school goals, setting high student and staff expectations, organizing classrooms, allocating resources, promoting a positive and orderly learning environment, and communicating with school staff, parents, and community groups rather than directly through training teachers to better instruct, visiting classrooms, and making frequent teacher evaluations (Griffith, 1999)

The findings from the study indicate that principals as school leaders influence students' achievement through developing, directing and supervising the instruction. In the study, the principals state that their primary goal is to

improve instruction and create a climate of excellence so that students can achieve well.

One principal said, “I normally spend a large percentage of my time focusing on improving teachers’ skills, make sure no student fails and drop out, and also I put many efforts to compete top schools within the city.”

Teachers were asked to appraise principals in terms of setting learning goal, guiding student learning, checking students’ work, monitoring, classroom supervision and improving teaching skills. The finding is summarized in the table below.

Table-4: School leader’s role to influence students’ achievement

N/S	Always		Often		Occasionally		Seldom		Never	
	<i>F</i>	%	<i>F</i>	%	<i>F</i>	%	<i>F</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
R1	51	65.4	24	30.8	2	2.6	1	1.3		
R2	46	59	29	37.2	2	2.6	1	1.3		
R3	42	53.8	31	39.7	2	2.6	2	2.6	1	1.3
R4	37	47.4	36	46.2	3	3.8	2	2.6		
R5	37	47.4	36	46.2	4	4.1	1	1.3		
R6	48	61.5	23	29.5	3	3.8	2	2.6	2	2.6

R1- pays attention on weak students.

R2- guiding student learning

R3- checking students’ work

R4- monitoring students’ discipline

R5- classroom supervision

R6- improving teaching skills

Table-4 shows that principals influence school performance through setting learning goals, guiding student learning, checking students’ work, monitoring students’ discipline, classroom supervision and improving teaching skills. Teaching and learning are also enhanced when student behavior is under control, when there is collaboration among teachers, and a positive and supportive disciplinary climate (Ma & Willms, 2004).

4.4. Importance of instructional leadership in creating students’ achievement

A principal must establish a monitoring system that allows them to identify effective versus ineffective practices in curriculum, instruction, assessment and evaluation to impact student achievement (Huang, Hochbein & Simons, 2018). To do so however, principals must have or seek out knowledge of the best practices in the field. In the study, teachers were asked to offer or share their opinions and experiences about the impact of instructional leadership by a principal on student performance in their schools. The teachers believe that principals are expected to exhibit effective instructional leadership by leading in the design of curriculum, sound instructional practices and coaching or guiding teachers in the process of instruction delivery.

Table-4: importance of instructional leadership in creating students’ achievement

N/S	Always		Often		Occasionally		Seldom		Never	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>F</i>	%	<i>F</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
I1	45	57.7	29	37.2	1	1.3	3	3.8		
I2	38	48.7	37	47.4	1	1.3	2	2.6		
I3	44	56.4	29	37.2	4	5.1	1	1.3		
I4	43	55.1	29	37.2	5	6.4	1	1.3		
I5	40	51.3	34	43.6	3	3.8	1	1.3		
I6	37	47.4	31	39.7	6	7.7	2	2.6	2	2.6

I1- establish clear learning environment

I2- evaluate teaching

I3- make sure syllabus are covered

I4- emphasis on curriculum development

I5- coordinating curriculum

I6- setting learning goal

The above table shows that principals play a satisfactory instructional leadership practice to impact student's achievement positively. It is evident that students perform better as principals focus on curriculum development, coordination of curriculum, setting learning goal, establish a clear learning environment, evaluate teaching and make sure syllabus are covered (Diamond & Spillane, 2016). From the findings, it has been revealed that all the principals have similar instructional leadership practices and approaches in impacting student achievement and at providing guidance to teachers regarding effective instructional practice in classrooms. Principals also organize and develop programs that are mainly teacher-oriented trainings about curriculum implementation and instructional practices, such as curricular content, instructional strategies, uses of instructional time, grouping and classroom interactions. One principal, for instance, stated, "In my school all teachers are given equal chances to attend trainings for professional growth and various educational seminars so as to bring about effective instructional practices in my school."

4.5. Discussion and conclusion

The importance of instructional leadership in creating student's achievement is immense. The role of a principal as an instructional leader promotes teaching and learning in schools, primarily aiming to determine teachers' perspectives about effective instructional practices. Principals encouraged teachers to redesign instructional programs and support a multitude of diverse approaches to teaching and learning. The school principals support teachers by giving them a meaningful opportunities and professional development, which help teachers address emergent needs, learn new strategies and new learning techniques. Principals also encouraged teachers to visit other teachers in other schools to observe about effective teaching skills. In a nutshell, the principals and teachers in study share a common purpose to improve student achievement by creating a positive teaching-learning atmosphere.

Principals are knowledgeable and actively involved in developing instructional programs

that have mainly contributed to the high-achievement of schools. The research findings demonstrated that the roles of school principals have led to the increase of student performance academically. High performing schools demonstrate characteristics of clear, high standards and expectation, effective school leadership, high levels of collaboration and communication, frequent monitoring of learning and teaching, focused professional development, supportive learning environment and high levels of family and community involvement (Shannon & Bylsma, 2002). The study revealed that principal's behavior and practices are the most important factors to influence student's achievement. The study discovered that setting learning goal, guiding student learning, monitoring student discipline, improving teaching skills, developing, directing, supervising, implementing and classroom instruction are the most prevalent principal's behaviors and most practiced to influence the academic performance. The study also revealed that to boost student achievement, the principals put much consideration on academic management to support teacher autonomy. Principals recognized that collaborative networks among teachers is essential for a successful teaching and learning. The findings show that collaborative practices were important in enhancing school improvement and increasing student achievement as the principals created higher levels of student participation in providing extra support for learning and creating a strong connection with parents and communities.

The successfulness of the sample schools is contributed by the closeness of the staff and parents, teamwork and communication. In teamwork, delegation of duties was ensured to make sure that work was done effectively (Cheryan, 2014). The principals also encourage collaborative relationship, participation of staff, utilization of evaluation processes, discussion of success and setbacks, and also, they encourage regular staff meetings where planning and decisions were made jointly to improve student's grades, facilitate sharing of information and problem solving.

4.6. Suggestions and recommendations for future research

While effective principal behaviors and practices have been identified as the most important components for high student achievement, there are also other various factors or variable that could impact student achievement performance. Such factors or variable can either positively or negatively affect student achievement, and thus they should be given equal consideration as school principals aim high for student achievement. For principals to model the way, share the vision, challenge the process and enable others to act, they are expected to be conscious of internal or external factors that may affect student achievement. Internal factors could include issues, such as school's philosophy, culture, mission, staff capacity, resources, curriculum and the like, while external factors could include things, such as parental and community support, political matters and district socio-economic demographics. Besides, principals and teachers could provide students other options or opportunities to apply what they have learned at schools to a real-life experience. Simulations, for instance, provides students experiential and practical knowledge.

The growing knowledge of the leadership practices and instructional role provides implications for future school leader's development, preparation, training, and helps principals do a better job as school leaders. Principals as instructional leaders need to focus on promoting professional growth emphasizing on research and teaching.

Limitation of the study

The study was limited to only two variables: school leadership behavior and practices. Other relevant variables that were not being covered would form the basis for further research. Given that, the study was conducted at Changchun in Jilin Province, and therefore the findings cannot be generalized for the whole secondary schools in the country as the sample size is small. Besides, the student achievement in the study were only limited to the

examination results. Formative evaluation was not put into consideration. Findings from this study may not be generalized to any group other than the principals selected.

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