Chapter 15

The Impact of School Leadership and Professional Development on Professional Commitment: A Hierarchical Linear Modeling Approach

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ABSTRACT

This study used hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) approach to investigate the impact of school leadership, professional development, gender and teaching experience on professional commitment with a sample of 396 elementary and secondary school teachers and administrators from Kenya. The HLM results indicate significant differences among schools ($\chi^2 (49) = 218.92$, $p<0.001$), with an intra-class correlation of 0.3183 indicating that 31.83% of variance in professional commitment was among schools. When professional development and school leadership were used as level 2 predictor variables with no level 1 predictors, the school variability dropped from 4.73584 to 3.30865 indicating that 30.14% of variance in school professional commitment was due to school leadership and professional development ($\chi^2 (47) = 161.67$, $p<0.001$). Further, the reliability of the sample means in any school for the true mean school professional commitment was 0.703.

INTRODUCTION

The face of education is always changing. Those who enter the field have many challenges that affect them daily. These challenges lead to educators feeling overwhelmed and frustrated, which in turn affects their personal and professional lives. Individuals who enter the educational arena do so because of their love for education. According to Darling-Hammond (2001), thirty percent of novice teachers exit the profession prior to their fifth year. Is this due in part to job stress or lack...
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of professional commitment and or school leadership issues? With federal mandates, such as the No Child Left Behind Act (2002), requirements for recertification, class sizes, student behaviors, low salaries, outdated materials, and lack of administrative support, one may expect to find a correlation between job stress and burnout rates.

In the United States, school districts hire approximately 230,000 teachers each year (Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 2003). But, retaining teachers is a far larger problem than training new ones – and a key to solving teachers ‘shortages’ is dealing with the major problem of exodus of new teachers from the profession, with more than 30% leaving within five years (Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 2003). The National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future (NCTAF) reports that as many as 46% of new teachers leave the education profession after five years (2003). This revolving door of new teacher attrition results in costs to teaching and learning that involves hiring and training new personnel; costs to school culture and climate as large numbers of faculty leave every year; and costs related to student learning as children, particularly those in high-needs schools, are constantly exposed to novice practitioners who do not remain long enough to develop teaching expertise. Ingersoll and Smith (2004), state High rates of teacher turnover can inhibit the development and maintenance of a stable and reliable learning community. Research also indicates that lack of community involvement in school activities may have a negative effect on teacher retention, thus creating a vicious cycle.

School improvement goes hand in hand with student achievement and that most of these improvements are in direct line with the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2002) legislation, which requires schools to demonstrate Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) as well as utilize learning methods that are validated by scientific research. Regardless of school level, primary or secondary school, the canons espoused in NCLB (NCLB Mandates) cut across schools, school districts, states, and nation and even internationally for every learning institution strive to ensure that there is quality learning that follows clearly stipulated scientific research methods for assessing teaching, learning and learners’ outcomes. How each school level deals with the mandates of NCLB as well as the demands of public pressure to improve student performance goes hand in hand with school leadership and teacher professional commitment that this study seeks to explore.

FRAMEWORK

Skilled leaders are effective visionaries and empower teachers and staff to openly share and execute that vision (Kelley, Thornton, & Daugherty, 2005). The responsibilities of today’s school leaders are much more complex and require hard work and compassion. The job of school leader necessitates them to have a high level of trust in their staff and for the teachers to trust them and among themselves while being professionally committed. Research shows that the greatest single ingredient to the success of an educational organization is school leadership (Rosborg, 2003). According to Hoy (2003), collegial principal leadership is significant in building trust with teachers thus improving professional commitment. Leaders, who create openness with staff, treat them as colleagues, are friendly and understanding, and who establish reasonable standards and expectations are respected by their teachers and gain their trust. O’Donnell & White (2005) affirm effective instructional leaders (principals) must create environments where trust is felt and taking a risk can occur with high levels of comfort.

It is imperative school leaders take time and effort in developing and maintaining trust, as well as demonstrating it themselves. A study completed by Youngs and King (2002) found that effective school principals could sustain high levels of capacity by establishing trust, creating structures that promote teacher learning and either (a) con-