Chapter 5
Principals and Student Achievement: A Comparative Study of Eight Countries

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ABSTRACT

Connections between principal leadership activities, school context, and student achievement are examined within this paper. Data for this quantitative study are from the 2013 Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) and the 2012 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). The eight countries of examination participated in both the TALIS and PISA and the researchers merged datasets, yielding a study sample of 1,301 schools. This paper supports
context-specific view of instructional leadership. When looking across countries, the researchers found different practices were more strongly associated with the academic achievement of students, and suggest that school leaders have a meaningful overall relationship with academic achievement, both directly and indirectly. This study therefore supports prior research about the direct and indirect effects of instructional leadership. Further study, which accounts for differences in family academic resources and school-level opportunities to learn, will better illuminate the connection between instructional leadership practices and academic achievement.

INTRODUCTION

Gaining a better understanding of the specific school leadership practices that best predict student achievement is of international importance, even though the existence of a connection is widely presumed. As Robinson (2010) noted:

There is no doubt that this body of evidence about the links between instructional leadership and student outcomes has been noticed by policymakers. For example, it has informed the development of educational leadership standards in the United States (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2008), the work of the National College of School Leadership in England (Leithwood, Day, Harris, & Hopkins, 2006), and the development of a leadership framework for New Zealand principals (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2008).

As school leaders, principals are often considered central to student success, in terms of enacting organizational practices and translating external policies into terms and conditions that have strong presence in daily interactions between teachers and learners. How specifically might school leadership practices be connected to teachers and students? A (2012) meta-analysis of research studies on principal effectiveness entitled Ripple Effect: A Syntheses of Research on Principal Influence to Inform Performance Evaluation Design was conducted by the American Institute for Research. The framework that emerged from the meta-analysis of more than 20 studies provided a framework for understanding principal effectiveness that included direct and indirect effects of principal practices on student achievement.

The foundation of the ripple effect theory is principal practice. This is informed by principal knowledge and dispositions and can take different forms including traditional manager, supervisor of standards, adaptive leader, instructional leader, and leader of leaders. This behavior has direct effects upon teacher quality, instructional quality, and student achievement, and can be mediated by school conditions and community contexts. There can also be indirect effects of principal practice, which
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