

## **Instructional Leadership Practice and Challenges of School Principals in Governmental Secondary Schools of Sidama Zone (SNNPRS)**

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**Abstract:** The purpose of this study was to assess instructional leadership practice and challenges of school principals in governmental secondary schools of Sidama Zone. The researcher employed mixed research approach both for data gathering and analysis. In Sidama Zone there are 36 woreda and 3 administrative towns of which nine woredas and one administrative town were selected as sample using simple random sampling technique. Afterwards 100 teachers and 63 school leaders were taken as participants using simple random and comprehensive sampling techniques respectively. Two tools, namely: questionnaire and semi- structured interview were used to gather data. Accordingly, it was explored that the practice of school principals as instructional leaders in managing curriculum, providing support, improving the overall teaching learning process, monitoring and evaluating students progress, and working on inclusive education was low or medium. Moreover, most respondents believed that school principals were not assertive, open to new ideas, energetic, and motivated; they did not provide an immediate feedback for teachers; they lack self esteem and analytical ability, and they didn't work with stakeholders to have common vision in their institutions. Low skill and capacity of school principals also greatly affected the overall instructional leadership effectiveness of school principals. Furthermore, the result of the study indicated that school teachers and principals were not satisfied with the existing school climates. In general, the school principals failed to practice the expected instructional leadership roles. To improve the efficiency of the schools and ensure quality of secondary education the schools should be guided by professional instructional leaders, and professional development strategies need to be designed.

**Key words:** Challenges, Effectiveness, Instructional leadership, practices, School principals

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Instructional leadership has been prevalent in educational leadership literature for the past three decades (Miller, 2010). During this period authors and researchers in the area have developed different frameworks at different times that used to guide the function of educational leaders as instructional leadership. Researchers (Wallace Foundation, 2013, Blasé and Blasé, 2000) developed a framework of instructional leadership which consists of defining and setting the school vision and mission, managing and controlling the instructional programs and creating a positive teaching and learning school climate. Thus, the instructional leaders should frame school goals, communicate, supervise and coordinate curriculum, monitor progress and provide support for the teaching- learning culture in order to make their schools more effective. Supporting this, Glatthorn (2012), Horing, et al (2010), Darling-Hammond (2010), Stronge (2013) and Lashway (2007) conceptualized instructional leadership practices as motivating employees for work and change, promoting high expectation, defining and communicating a clear mission, goal and objectives, designing and modifying curriculum, analyzing school and learners data, making formative observation about teaching and providing direct and immediate feedback to teachers to improve the teaching leaning process and to ensure quality of education. This implies that as Musaaazi (1988) indicated, instructional leaders are considered as a major vehicle for educational change and development. The quality of the service delivered and the success of the schools is critically linked to school leaders' knowledge and skill. School leaders have responsibility and accountability for effective instructional outcomes. In line with this responsibility and accountability as Heck (2006) pointed out, for school principals to be effective they must be knowledgeable about curriculum development, teachers' instructional effectiveness, clinical supervision, teachers' evaluation and development. That is why in recent years demands in the world educational institutions have increased significantly not only for learners, teachers, and local community but also for instructional leaders of education institutions.

As scholars (like Bush, 2009 and Davis et al, 2005) indicated, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century school leaders should lead their educational institutions with passion, be skillful, knowledgeable committed and enthusiastic about their work and design different strategies to make their institutions/schools effective. However, as Dufour and Matto (2013) elaborated, as a result of many culminating factors, school leaders are increasingly in a difficult situation and must find an innovative ways to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of their school. Similarly, as Wallace Foundation (2013) indicated an effective instructional leader performs tasks like shaping a vision of academic success for students, creating a climate hospitable to education, cultivating leadership in others, improving data instruction, and managing people and process to foster school improvement.

Recently the Ethiopian government has made different educational reforms. The country has launched General Education Quality Improvement Program (GEQIP) in 2007 and one of its components is School Improvement Program (SIP) which focuses on four domains of the school namely: improving the teaching learning, creating conducive learning environment, enhancing community participation in school affairs, and improving school leadership. This is because as MOE (2007) stated, the overall school performances are congruent with the dimensions of instructional leadership.

Even though an attempt has been made to make the instructional leadership decentralized and professional, still a lot remains to be done to capacitate and professionalize school principals. This is because as indicated by MOE (2013) most school principals failed to play their pivotal instructional leadership role. Moreover, parents perceived negative attitude on the effectiveness of governmental schools in general and secondary schools in particular. Therefore, the major objective of this study is to assess instructional leadership practice and challenges of school principals in governmental secondary schools of Sidama Zone. To address the stated objective the following basic questions were addressed.

1. How do school principals practice their role as instructional leaders in secondary schools of Sidama zone?
2. How do stakeholders (school leaders and teachers) perceive the characteristics of school principals as instructional leaders in secondary schools of the study area?
3. What are the major factors that affect the effectiveness of instructional leadership in secondary schools of the study area?
4. To what extent are stakeholders satisfied with the existing school climate in the study area?

## II. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

The research project took place at public secondary schools of Sidama Zone. The researcher employed mixed (quantitative and qualitative) research approach both for data gathering and analysis. This is because as Creswell (2013) indicated, the combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches provides a more complete understanding of the given research problem than either approach by itself. In Sidama Zone there are 36 woreda and 3 administrative towns. From these nine woredas and one administrative town were selected as sample using simple random sampling technique. In the sampled woreda and administrative town 33 secondary schools (first cycle or grade 9-10) were found. From these secondary schools 11 were taken as sample. Moreover, in the sampled schools 476 teachers and 63 school leaders (11 principals, 21 vice principals, 10 supervisors, 10woreda/ administrative town education office heads and 11 PTSA chair persons) were found out of which 100 teachers and 63 school leaders were taken using simple random and comprehensive sampling techniques respectively. Two tools, namely: questionnaire and semi- structured interview were used to gather relevant data from the respondents. Cronbach alpha was calculated to determine how well a set of items measures a single construct, instructional leadership effectiveness; accordingly the overall reliability of the items in the questionnaire was found to be 0 .83. To analyze the data both descriptive and inferential statistics were employed.

## III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 3.1 Practice of School Principals as Instructional Leaders

The school principals' ability as instructional leaders strongly determines the sustainability and success of the educational institutions. In other words, instructional leaders have to possess the appropriate knowledge, skills and perspectives required to presume leadership positions. In line with this different sources (such as MoE, 2011; Bush, 2009) pointed out that, there is a direct relationship between effectiveness of instructional leadership and school effectiveness in general.

**Table 1** School leaders' and teachers' responses on the practice of school principals as instructional leaders

N.O	Items related to practical roles of school principals as instructional leaders	Respon dents	Frequency			Mean	Std. Deviation	T	Sig.(2- tailed)
			high	medium	Low				
1	Managing curriculum	SL	25	32	8	2.24	.665	7.000	.000
		T	10	28	62	1.48	.674		

2	Providing supervision service	SL	20	36	9	2.17	.661	7.885	.000
		T	7	21	72	1.36	.612		
3	Improving teaching- learning process	SL	15	38	14	2.03	.671	1.075	.284
		T	16	60	24	1.92	.631		
4	Managing co-curriculum activities	SL	35	27	3	2.48	.592	-.648	.525
		T	62	30	8	2.54	.642		
5	Working on inclusive education	SL	10	14	41	1.54	.758	2.051	.054
		T	7	18	75	1.32	.601		
6	Evaluating performance of teachers	SL	42	13	5	2.63	.630	1.543	.125
		T	64	16	20	2.45	.809		
7	Providing immediate feedback	SL	12	7	44	1.49	.801	.019	.985
		T	6	39	55	1.49	.611		
8	Managing diversity	SL	22	36	7	2.21	.676	2.456	.052
		T	12	72	16	1.96	.530		
9	Monitoring and evaluating students' progress	SL	13	13	39	1.60	.814	2.066	.059
		T	4	28	68	1.38	.565		

In **Table1** above the respondents were asked about what aspects of instructional leaders were practiced by the school principals in their respected schools.

As results of the data indicated in **Table1** above except item 4 (managing co-curriculum activities) and item 6 (evaluating the performance of teachers) the practices of the remaining activities were rated medium or low by the respondents. The analysis of the independent t-test significance test result also shows there is no significant difference between the mean score of the two respondent groups (school leaders and teachers) for all items except item 1 and item 2. Thus, the school leaders believe that they moderately manage curriculum and provide supervision service for teachers while teachers rated the practice of school principals in managing curriculum and provision of supervisory service in their schools as low. However, both group of respondents recognized that the school principals highly devoted their time on implementing co- curricular activities and evaluation of teachers' performance. Moreover, both group of respondents similarly indicated that activities like working on inclusive education, providing an immediate feedback for teachers, and monitoring and evaluating the progress of their students (which are expected to be implemented by instructional leaders) were not properly practiced by the school principals. Thus, less emphasis was given for inclusive education (average mean= 1.43), providing feedback for teachers (average mean= 1.49), and monitoring the day to day activities of the students and their behavioral changes by the school principals (average mean = 1.49) all of which were rated below average mean (average mean= 2.00). As one of the school principals (P<sub>2</sub>) who participated on an interview pointed out, most school leaders in Sidama zone secondary schools experienced disappointment because they devoted relatively less amount of time for performing instructional leadership activities due to extra political activities given by the local government bodies and this is the most stunning obstacle they faced to job persistence. According to this respondent, these days working as a school principal is a frustrating task and one may lose his professional identity as a result of extremely infatuated demands. Another school principal (P<sub>3</sub>) also elucidated how his current position was challenging him professionally and physically "I always devote most of my time in performing routine activities with no incentives allocated for it and have little contribution to improve the teaching- learning process". However, most teachers expect a lot from school leaders to be effective in their teaching- learning process. In support to this Paulsen and Martin (2014) claimed that instructional leaders should understand and support teaching and learning process and be fully aware of the challenges involved. Authors like Goldwyn (2008) also claimed that attribute the effectiveness of organizations to the efficiency of the leaders of the organizations. Likewise, Bush (2009) affirmed that efficient leadership not only matters, but it is also among the school-related factors which have a significant impact on the students' academic achievement.

### 3.2 School Principals as Instructional Leader

**Table 2** Characteristics of School Principals as Instructional Leaders

N.O	Items related to observable characteristics of school principals	Respondents	Frequency			Mean	Std. Deviation	T	Sig.(2-tailed)
			Agree	Undecided	Disagree				
2.1	Assertiveness	SL	38	24	3	2.59	.528	12.468	.000
		T	11	18	71	1.40	.682		
2.2	Open to new ideas	SL	53	8	4	2.81	.592	14.540	.000

3	Highly energetic	T	7	26	67	1.40	.620	11.936	000
		SL	49	12	4	2.71	.551		
4	Tolerance for ambiguity	T	14	23	63	1.51	.732	5.687	000
		SL	24	37	4	2.32	.591		
5	Highly motivated	T	11	55	34	1.76	.638	20.032	000
		SL	58	5	2	2.86	.435		
6	Provide an immediate feedback	T	7	12	81	1.26	.579	4.338	000
		SL	22	2	41	1.73	.954		
7	Have high self esteem	T	4	9	87	1.17	.473	2.787	006
		SL	22	4	39	1.76	.946		
8	Have analytical ability	T	5	26	69	1.39	.601	13.919	000
		SL	53	5	7	2.70	.663		
9	Work with stakeholders to develop a shared vision	T	3	23	74	1.31	.545	16.866	000
		SL	61	1	3	2.89	.444		
10	Use referent power	T	13	11	76	1.37	.706	-9.359	000
		SL	7	10	48	1.38	.682		
		T	67	17	16	2.47	.784		

The major characteristics like assertiveness, openness to new ideas, initiation, tolerance for situations, providing feedback for implementers, having self esteem, analytical ability, having shared vision and the way they use the referent power they have as instructional leaders matter the effectiveness of school principals.

To show the extent to which these characteristics of instructional leaders were in place by the school principals, data were gathered through questionnaires and interview. The result from questionnaires filled in by the school leaders and teachers are presented in **Table 2** above.

According to the results indicated in **Table 2** above school leaders and teachers were not certain (i.e. were undecided) only for item 4 (school principals tolerance for ambiguity). On the other hand, for the rest items either they agree or disagree on the issues raised. However, the statistical analysis using 2- tailed independent t- test results showed that most teachers disagree with the remaining statements (i.e. all items except item 4 and item 10). They believed that school principals were not: assertive, open to new ideas, energetic, and motivated; they did not provide an immediate feedback for teachers, they lack self esteem and analytical ability, they didn't work with stakeholders to have common vision in their institutions. However, teachers agree that school principals exercise referent power. School leaders were also asked similar issue to indicate their agreement level on the characteristics of school leaders as instructional leaders. Unlike teachers except the three items: item 6 (providing an immediate feedback, mean= 1.73), item 7 (developing high self esteem, mean= 1.76) and item 10 (Use referent power, mean= 1.38), they indicated that all the stated characteristics of instructional leaders described the existing school principals or the school principals practiced the stated characteristics of instructional leaders.

A supervisor assigned from woreda (S<sub>3</sub>) replied to the interview that “most of the school principals under my supervision lack the required knowledge and commitment on why they are doing their work, and what they should do in order to bring about changes”. Moreover, lack of transparency, low skill of organizing and analyzing data, lack of self-confidence, and being more loyal to meeting their superiors' needs than performing their school duties were the common problems witnessed among some school principals, as reported by the interviewee supervisor (S<sub>1</sub>). However, education policymakers in Ethiopia have not only increasingly recognized the importance of knowledgeable and skillful leaders in the schools for improving school performance, but also school leaders have got a priority in the current Education and Training Policy (1994) of the country.

### 3.3 Factors Affecting Instructional Leadership Effectiveness

**Table 3** School leaders' and teachers' response on major Factors Affecting Instructional Leadership Effectiveness

N.O	Item	Respondents	Frequency			Mean	Std. Deviation	t	Sig.(2-tailed)
			agree	Undecided	disagree				
1	low school principals capacity to lead the schools	SL	8	4	53	132	692	-13.986	000
		T	78	3	9	279	591		

2	Lack of clear vision and mission	SL	14	2	49	148	840	-6.934	.000
		T	69	5	26	243	879		
3	Lack of strategic plan to implement goals and objectives	SL	57	1	7	276	640	.674	.501
		T	81	7	12	269	677		
4	Low interest of stakeholders to participate on school affairs	SL	59	3	3	286	470	1.084	.280
		T	86	6	8	276	605		
5	Scarcity of resource( human, financial and physical) in the school	SL	59	2	4	284	515	-.232	.817
		T	92	2	6	286	493		
6	Presence of unnecessary conflicts	SL	47	4	14	249	840	1.131	.260
		T	64	5	31	233	922		
7	Low communication skill of school principals	SL	13	6	46	151	821	-8.573	.000
		T	78	5	17	261	764		
8	Followers fear of changes	SL	61	1	3	286	503	3.660	.001
		T	69	7	24	247	846		

The results in **Table 3** above show that the mean of factors that affect instructional leadership effectiveness for most items is significantly higher than the average mean (2.00). This indicates that most stated factors were affecting the instructional leadership effectiveness in the study area. It should be noted that for most items both group of respondents (school leaders and teachers) believes that the stated factors: scarcity of resources, presence of conflict and employees fear of change were the major factors which were impeding the effectiveness of the instructional leaders.

The result in the table also portrayed that, unlike school leaders teachers also indicated that low capacity of school principals, lack of clear vision and mission, and low skill of communication on the side of school principals also greatly affect the overall instructional leadership effectiveness of school principals. The p-value result (in a 2-tailed significance t- test) also indicated that there exists significant difference between the mean score of the two respondent groups for item 1, 2, and 7 of **Table3** above.

Furthermore, as reported by a supervisor (S<sub>1</sub>) and PTA chair person (PTAC<sub>2</sub>) who participated in an interview, most of the factors that hinder school principals from being successful leaders stem from the principals themselves and these include: failure to perform activities according to their plans, lack of transparency, failure to solve problems with open discussion, getting into conflict with the school community, and being powerless to influence others. In addition to this, principals do not make effort to deliver required resources, and they do not engage the surrounding community in the school activities and work in collaboration with them. The interviewees also witnessed among school teachers that there is no willingness to perform any other duties and practical innovative activities except the routine teaching and learning activities. However, as Leithwood and Jantzi (2005) suggest, - instructional leaders focus on critical areas such as setting directions, helping individual teachers through support, modeling and supervision, redesigning the organization to foster collaboration and managing the institution by allocating resources strategically. Similarly, as indicated by Osseo-Asare, Long Bottom and Murphy (2005), to enhance the quality of teaching- learning and to improve their effectiveness, instructional leaders should work by setting strategic approaches and seeking innovative strategies to address all the problems they may encounter in their institutions.

### 3.4 School climates

Another important input variable that determine the effectiveness of instructional leaders and the teaching learning process is the conduciveness of the school climates. As Smylie (2010) illustrated, school climate is a stable set of institutional characteristics that capture the idiosyncratic tone or atmosphere of a school. In line with this notion, the school leaders and teachers were asked about their satisfaction level on some aspects of school climates and the result of the study are presented in Table 4 below.

**Table 4** Respondents' level of satisfaction on some school climates of their school

N.O	Item	Respon dents	Frequency			Mean	Std. Deviation	t	Sig.(2- tailed)
			High	Medium	low				
1	Teachers relationship	SL	3	52	10	1.89	.444	-1.081	.281
		T	15	68	17	1.98	.568		
2	Interaction of teachers and	SL	15	12	38	1.67	.842	2.163	.051

	students	T	5	37	58	1.43	.555		
3	Leadership decision making	SL	35	27	13	2.16	.745	5.660	.000
		T	13	23	64	1.49	.718		
4	School disciplined environment	SL	5	12	43	1.41	.687	.742	.459
		T	3	26	71	1.34	.555		
5	Attitude of stakeholders for the school	SL	12	38	10	2.05	.580	3.777	.000
		T	5	61	34	1.70	.560		
6	Availability of the school facility	SL	6	21	33	1.52	.669	1.856	.065
		T	9	14	77	1.33	.637		
7	School community relationship	SL	11	42	7	2.06	.535	2.544	.013
		T	9	66	25	1.84	.564		
8	Openness of the school principals	SL	34	17	9	2.44	.736	7.025	.000
		T	17	26	57	1.60	.756		
9	Motivation of teachers	SL	14	17	29	1.71	.812	1.990	.048
		T	14	19	67	1.47	.731		
10	Presence of rewards for best performers	SL	5	22	33	1.49	.644	2.221	.024
		T	6	13	68	1.27	.584		
11	Practice of multiculturalism	SL	20	28	17	2.08	.747	.180	.858
		T	22	62	16	2.06	.617		
12	Preventing and resolving conflict	SL	9	18	38	1.41	.496	-.684	.495
		T	10	27	63	1.48	.674		
13	Sense of belongingness	SL	37	12	14	2.37	.829	3.812	.000
		T	18	65	27	1.89	.680		
14	Overall satisfaction of respondents on school climate	SL	6	41	13	1.89	.542	3.783	.000
		T	8	34	58	1.53	.658		

Based on the three-point rating scale (low=1, medium= 2, and high= 3), mean values were compared with the medium value (2.00) to examine school leaders and teachers satisfaction level. As presented in Table 4 above, with the exception of items 1, 5, 7, 11, and 13 both respondents (school leaders and teachers) were not satisfied (have low satisfaction) by the existing school climates. Thus, they believed that they were not satisfied with the interaction that existed between teachers and students, disciplined environment, school facilities, openness and the way decisions were made, motivation of teachers and the reward system designed, and the way conflicts were handled in the schools (mean score ranges from 1.75 to 2.37). However, both the school leaders and teachers were either highly or moderately satisfied with the relationship that existed among teachers, observable attitude of stakeholders and school- community relationships, and the emphasis given for multiculturalism and sense of belongingness (mean score less than the medium value i.e. 2.0). The overall mean result of the study as indicated in item 14 of Table 4 for school leaders and teachers has medium (mean= 1.84), and low (mean= 1.53) satisfaction on the existing school climates respectively.

Further analysis was carried out to examine if there were differences between the respondents of the two groups (school leaders and teachers). As the results presented in Table 4 significant differences were found between the two groups for items 3, 5, 7, 8, 13 and 14. While significant difference was not observed on the satisfaction level between the two respondent groups for the rest items (p-value > 0.05 at 2-tailed independent t-test) of the school climates.

The physical environment like the building, visible and inviting classrooms, library, laboratory of the school, a social environment including communication, diversity and multiculturalism, means of resolving conflict, a sense of belongingness and self-esteem, the knowledge and confidence of the school leaders and teachers, monitoring and evaluation system designed and means set to motivate employees matter the conduciveness of the school climate. Among other factors the empirical evidences (Collie et al, 2012; Petrie, 2014; Cohen, 2009) have confirmed that school climate is powerful in affecting instructional leaders' performance, students' academic achievement and overall effectiveness of schools.

Some school principals and supervisors were asked to what extent the school climate influenced the teaching learning process and effectiveness of instructional leaders. Both group of interviewees replied that the effectiveness of instructional leaders and the teaching learning process are highly dependent on the conduciveness of the school climate. Moreover, one of the school principals (P<sub>2</sub>) indicated that, most school stakeholders (including teachers, students and parents) were not satisfied by the existing school climate and they had been complaining specifically on the quantity and quality of the existing physical facilities, quality of the teaching learning process, commitment, motivation, effectiveness of school principals and the teachers, and on

the emphasis given by the government bodies for the schools. Similarly a school supervisor (S<sub>3</sub>) who participated on an interview showed that most of the secondary schools in the study area lack infrastructural and teaching-learning resources. In particular the classrooms were overcrowded, and this situation not only affects the teaching and learning process but also compromises the quality of education.

#### IV. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMENDATIONS

The results of the study revealed that secondary school principals of Sidama zone encountered with different problems ( like, lack of capacity to implement different kinds of school related reforms, lack of support from stakeholders, presence of external pressure on school principals and uninviting general school climates) to play their instructional leadership roles. Thus, the school principals failed to practice the expected instructional leadership roles. However, the effectiveness of the instructional leaders is one of the key factors that determine the overall performance of the school and the quality of education. On the other hand, the overall quality of educational institution is dependent on the general quality of the school climate created by the instructional leaders of the schools. Therefore, if principals are to take the role of an instructional leader seriously, they will have to free themselves from bureaucratic tasks and focus their efforts toward improving teaching and learning. Moreover, to improve the efficiency of the schools and ensure quality of secondary education the schools should be guided by professional instructional leaders, developing a culture of inquiry, developing effective communication and group empowerment system and designing professional development strategies.

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