

## Leading For Learning: Transforming schools in the Indian Context

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### Introduction

Research evidence about the nature and effects of successful school leadership for student learning justifies the claim that leadership is second only to classroom instruction among the many school related factors that contribute to student learning. Research further reveals that the effect of leadership is more pronounced in schools that are in difficult circumstances. Research studies on turn around schools categorically emphasize the intervention of a powerful leader who can navigate and negotiate the challenging contexts to lead schools and improve student learning. These evidences support the belief that leadership is the key to school improvement and in bringing about an improvement in student achievement. With the current changing expectations from schools wherein there is a renewed thrust on improving the quality of education, the role of a school head as an instructional leader demands attention. This leadership brief provides the theoretical underpinnings of *leadership for learning* followed by a brief review of global literature on leadership for improving student learning. The article discusses the education policy thrust areas on the role of leadership for improving student learning in the Indian school context and provides focus areas of professional development for school heads in order to improve student learning.

### Conceptualization of "Leading for Learning"

Research in the area of leadership for improving learning has led to the development of a series of conceptual framework on school leadership and

student learning under 'instructional leadership' (Hallinger and Wang 2015), 'leadership for learning' (Hallinger 2009), 'leadership focused learning' (Knapp 2014), 'learning leadership' (Spillane 2013), 'pedagogical leadership' (González 2013; Bolívar 2013), etc although the term 'leadership for learning' is the most valid nowadays. Conceptualisation of leadership for learning is illustrated in Figure-1.

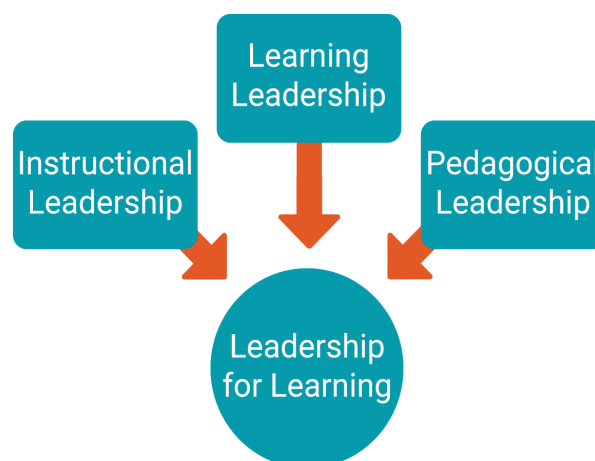


Figure-1: Conceptualizations of leadership for learning

For Hallinger (2009; 2011) and Hallinger and Wang (2015), the term 'leadership for learning' is constructed from the concept of instructional and transformational leadership, two styles of leadership with two distinct approaches. Hallinger (2011), in a synthesis of the conceptualizations provided by leadership researchers on school leadership and student learning highlights that leadership is enacted within an organizational and environmental context and that leadership is both shaped by and responds to the constraints and opportunities inherent in the school organization and its environmental context (Leithwood et al., 2010; Mulford & Silins, 2009). Secondly, the exercise

of leadership is moderated by the personal characteristics of the leaders which include their beliefs, personal values, knowledge and experience. Third, leadership does not directly influence student learning, rather, the impact is mediated by school level processes and conditions (Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Leithwood et al., 2010) wherein the conditions and processes include school values, personal values and beliefs, school culture, work processes and people.

### Leadership dimensions for improving student learning

Robinson et al., (2008) meta-analysis provides information on where the school leaders should apply their focus in order to develop their schools capacity to produce a positive impact on student learning. The research revealed the leadership dimensions, functions and their impact on student learning. The leadership dimensions mentioned by the research study as significant are provided in the Figure- 2 below.



Figure-2: Leadership dimensions significant for improving student learning

The study revealed that that the principal's support for and participation in the professional learning of staff produced the largest effect size on learning outcomes of students. This was followed by setting goals, expectations and planning, coordinating and evaluating teaching and the curriculum. Research by Hill et al (1995) observed that educational leadership leading to improved student learning is mediated by social climate of the school which includes teacher student interactions, and teacher attitudes. The studies by Bosker et al (2000) found that educational leadership indirectly affected student outcomes through teachers job satisfaction, teachers achievement orientation and evaluation and feedback practices. Grissom, Egalite and Lindsay (2021) in a systematic study of how principals influence students learning outcomes concluded that leaders engage in instructionally focused interactions with teachers; facilitate a productive climate; facilitate collaboration and professional learning communities; manage personnel and resources strategically, apply management skills for data usage; strategic thinking; resource allocation etc. These studies overall confirm that school leadership is related to school organization and culture, as well as to teacher behavior and classroom practices and these factors are in turn related to student achievement.

### Leadership for learning: a combination of transformational and instructional leadership

Day et al (2016) concluded that successful school leaders combined both transformational and instructional leadership strategies in different ways across different phases of the schools in order to shape school improvement and influence student learning. The study revealed the values possessed by leaders for learning, provided in Figure-3.



Figure-3: Values possessed by school leaders focused on learning

## School Leadership Development for Improving Student Learning and Learning Outcomes in Indian Context

Indigenous research on school leadership has revealed the influence of school leadership in transforming the climate of the school (Chakraborti, 1990), in improving teacher morale (Jayajothi, 1992) and in improving teaching learning process (Brinkmann (2016) while Tyagi (2010) emphasised their role in teacher supervision and in teacher professional development. Diwan (2015) established the role of school heads in improving small schools and sought for empowering the school heads through re-defining their roles and responsibilities and also address issues of autonomy and accountability. Yet, researchers (for example Saravanabhavan et al, 2016) observed that the recruitment, training, roles and responsibilities of school heads in India are still confined to traditional practices. Taking cognisance, the National Educational Policy (2020) while reiterating the need to reduce the gap in learning outcomes and usher in quality within education system, has emphasized that quality concerns can be addressed only through

decentralized initiatives where school leaders, as key agents, can improve student learning and learning outcomes. The policy calls for the need to support school heads to enable them to develop the knowledge, attitude and skills required for leading schools and to improve student learning. Nevertheless school leadership development has been a challenge in India as well as other developing countries, where school leaders whose role has been traditionally administrative to become instructional leaders. This situation engenders a need for preparation of school heads for the role of instructional leaders through well designed capacity development programmes that would support them to make the shift from being administrators to becoming instructional leaders/transformational leaders in their respective schools and within their unique school contexts.

## Leadership for improving learning in Indian context: Areas of focus for capacity building

Applying the policy priority of improving student learning in schools in India, as envisioned by NEP 2020, the school leaders need to be empowered through professional development programmes focusing on thrust areas provided in Figure-4

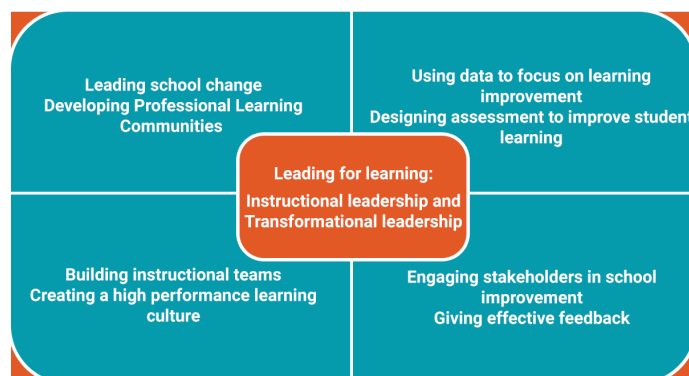


Figure-4: Leadership for improving learning in Indian context: Areas of focus for capacity building

## Conclusion

The policy brief highlights the significance of school leadership for improving student learning and learning outcomes. The article provides the theoretical underpinnings of leadership for learning and identifies certain core leadership domains for the capacity building of school heads in the Indian context that would be instrumental to transform their schools into centers of excellence.

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*The National Centre for School Leadership at the National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration, New Delhi is established by the Department of School Education and Literacy, Ministry of Education, Government of India. The Centre, committed to transforming schools in the country, works in four core areas: Curriculum and Material Development (National Programme Design and Curriculum Framework conceptualized and implemented for the first time in India), Capacity Building (offers variety of face to face and online programmes for current and prospective school leaders), Networking and Institutional Building (School Leadership Academies established in States and UTs as NCSL's extended arms) and Research and Development (practitioner centric and contextual leadership models). The Leadership Brief is one such initiative built on theoretical and empirical underpinnings, deeply rooted in experiential learning to facilitate School Heads and System Administrators to derive learning and apply in their own local context. With a wide range of coverage of themes, the Briefs are envisioned to help academicians, researchers, administrators and institutional heads and practitioners. Each Brief has been reviewed by a committee of experts.*