

*Full Length Research Paper*

# Perceptions about instructional leadership: The perspectives of a principal and teachers of Birakat Primary School in focus

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Educational change and reform initiatives currently prevailing at global, national, and local levels seem to require school systems and school leaders to be instructionally focused. A focus on instructional leadership seems to entail, among other things, restructuring of the schools' instructional leadership system in a way that can actively respond to the call for promoting quality teaching and learning, and thereby enhancing the efforts in addressing quality education for all. Accordingly, the purpose of this study was to explain and describe the differences between principal's and teachers' perceptions and understandings of instructional leadership at Birakat Primary School. Questionnaires and interviews were used with the principal, along with two teachers from the 1st cycle grades and two teachers from the 2nd cycle grades. The collected data were analyzed qualitatively and aggregated to examine the respondents' perceptions on instructional leadership. The findings revealed a few differences between the principal's and teachers' perceptions. There was no consensus on the time frame a principal should spend on instructional leadership; none of the teachers chose the same time frame as the principal did. Another difference was with the definition of instructional leadership. Teachers focused on personal characteristics to define an instructional leader, whereas the principal defined instructional leadership focusing on the activities he has to accomplish in enhancing instruction. A third difference was observed on the impact of the instructional leader on a school. In this regard, the principal focused on establishing school culture where by the school community develops shared belief that students' learning is the first priority of the school, whereas the teachers emphasized the professional or supervisory support teachers must get from the principal. The implications of these findings seemed to indicate the need for school educators to engage in clear communication and continuous professional dialogue about the responsibilities of the principal. Also, the policies and procedures need to be put in place to provide the necessary professional development for enhancing both principals' and teachers' orientations of how to effectively and efficiently lead the teaching-learning at schools so that the targets for providing quality education for all would likely be reachable.

**Key words:** Culture, instruction, leadership, perception.

## INTRODUCTION

With the Ethiopian governance structure that has been assumed to pave the way for responsive decentralization of the education system, the Ministry of Education (MOE)

is given powers and duties to initiate policies and laws; the Regional Education Bureaus (REBs) are expected to devise respective regional policies including granting

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autonomy and accountability to the respective localities; and the Woreda (district) Education Offices (WEOs) are assumed to support and enhance the autonomous operations of schools. In strengthening the focus given to leading educational institutions or schools, Article 3.8 of the 1994 Ethiopian Education and Training Policy specifically promised that educational management will be professional, and educational institutions will be autonomous in their internal administration. Moreover, it has been indicated in the policy that institutional autonomy should include designing and implementing of education and training programs with the necessary involvement of concerned stakeholders who are expected to take part at the different levels of the decentralized educational management system. One rationale stated for decentralization was to bring about accountability and decision-making close to the schools (MOE, 2006). This has paved the way to formally recognize the professionalism, expertise and competence of those who work in individual schools, particularly principals, to make decisions in improving the quality of teaching and learning. In general, all the assertions specified in the respective subsection of article 3.8 seem to demonstrate the commitment of the Ethiopian government in that educational institutions should be led by professionals who have the necessary orientations in how to deal with issues of quality teaching and learning.

Besides a directive that clearly delineates the management and organization of education, strategies for community participation, and financial management was produced in 2002 by the Ethiopian Government. The directive states the roles and responsibilities of the different parties from the Ministry down to the schools for each of the above functional areas. Included in the document were roles and responsibilities of the executive bodies such as the Ministry, Regional Education Bureaus, Zonal Education Offices, Woreda Education Offices, and schools. Also included in the same document were the roles and responsibilities of supervisors, principals, teachers and students in promoting the quality of teaching and learning in their respective schools (MOE, 2002).

Three Education Sector Development Programs (ESDPs) running from 1997 to 2010 (i.e., ESDP I, 1997-2001; ESDP II, 2002-2005; ESDP III, 2006-2010) were also set as strategies for facilitating the implementation of the education policy. All the three ESDPs have identified educational leadership/management as one strategy for implementing the policy. ESDP III, particularly, focuses on improving quality at all levels, and it seems to attach this call for quality to educational leadership effectiveness (MOE, 2007), which in fact has also been given due emphasis in the recently designed and introduced ESDP IV.

More importantly, with an informed interest in promoting the quality of general education, the Ethiopian Government also devised a General Education Quality

Improvement Program (GEQIP) in 2007 which was being effected in the years 2008/9 to 2012/13 (MOE, 2007). This effort of the Ethiopian Government is consistent with Kruger's (1996) concern that quality teaching and learning is a schools' primary task, and the excellence of a school should be measured against the quality of the teaching and learning that the students experience in the schools. The GEQIP document, hence, infuses a strong commitment that a school organization should be geared mainly to provide quality education possible.

As has already been emphasized in the literature on education and leadership (Elmore, 2000), the primary purpose of education is centered on students' learning and achievement. The principal has the pivotal role of providing leadership for the school and its wider community. In this regard, it has been consistently noted in the existing literature that the principal's role in the school is a complex one, a role that has many duties and responsibilities. One role is being an instructional leader, in charge of leading or supervising the teaching and learning process, to help the teachers improve their teaching. Improved teaching will result in higher students' achievement. The principal, as a leader, is a key in creating a school environment in which instructional leadership can thrive. Blasé and Blasé's (2004) research on instructional leadership emphasized that a primary element of successful instructional leadership was leading the instructional component of the school. In addition, Glanz (2006) mentioned that principals must pay attention to their role as instructional leader, which is paramount to positively affecting teaching and learning. That is, engaging teachers in instructional dialogue and meaningful supervision and striving to encourage sound teaching and learning is essential. According to Glanz, the ultimate goal of instructional leadership was to improve teaching, and meaningful supervision became the instrument to assist teachers in developing and growing in their professional knowledge, skills, and abilities.

The principal's unique role in the school is that they have an influence on students' achievement. Hallinger and Heck (1996) found the indirect effects of the principal's role resulted from internal school processes such as academic expectations, school mission, students' opportunity to learn, instructional organization, and academic learning time. All of the indirect effects had the greatest impact on students' achievements. Creating a collaborative working environment provides an opportunity for teachers' skills and abilities to grow and develop, which is enhanced through the direction of an effective leader. Thus, an effective leader, as defined by Kouzes and Posner (2003), is one who can challenge the process, inspire a vision, enable others to act, model the way, and encourage the heart.

Instructional leadership is one form of effective leadership (Hallinger, 2003). An instructional leader's role consists of communicating the school mission and goals,

providing supervision of the teachers in order to develop their skills and abilities, providing professional development opportunities, and creating school, which exudes collaboration, trust, and empowerment (Blasé and Blasé, 1999a). The result of principals incorporating instructional leadership principles into their role is that they create a school that works as a collaborative unit with a focus on enhancing students' achievement and creating active learners.

Blasé and Blasé (1999a) asked approximately 800 teachers about what principal's behaviors they believed improved teaching and learning, and created a model of effective instructional leadership behavior. Their research focused mainly on the principal's instructional leadership, especially in the area of supervision, and stressed that principals need to develop good communication skills and collaborative relationships, and to promote personal growth through staff development and reflection. That is, these authors seemed to understand and advocate the importance of instructional leadership in promoting students' achievement through teachers.

McEwan (1994) also provided a simplified perspective of the key qualities or behaviors needed to be a good instructional leader. The leader needs to have vision and a knowledge base, be willing to take risks and put in long hours, be willing to change and grow constantly, thrive on change and ambiguity, and empower others. These authors' explanation on instructional leadership can be summarized as "one who can challenge the process, inspire a vision, enable others to act, model the way, and encourage the heart" (Kouzes and Posner, 2003).

Evidently, if principals want to succeed as instructional leaders, they will have to put more effort into the following personal qualities and behaviors: incorporating reflective conversations; focusing on instructional improvement; supervision; development of curriculum; and developing relationships conducive to creating a positive climate. Leithwood (2005) synthesized the research from seven countries regarding their participants' understanding of successful principal leadership. Accordingly, five countries reported as the following qualities were necessary: skilled communication, cognitive flexibility, willingness to listen carefully, open-mindedness, and creative problem solving. According to Cross and Rice (2000), a principal who wants to be an instructional leader must have a vision and commitment to high students' achievement, high expectations, development of a trusting working environment, effective communication, and the courage to seek assistance.

Blasé and Blasé (2004) also found that the lack of instructional leadership frequently resulted in a loss of teachers' respect for the principal and poor performances by teachers, especially among those who had become exhausted. Therefore, the effects of a school leader who is an instructional leader will have a positive influence on the culture of the school, which, in turn, affects teachers' and students' outcomes. Principals' lack of time dedicated

to instructional leadership is due to the complexity of the principal's role that involves understanding the historical context, purpose, function, personal qualities, and behaviors of instructional leaders.

The purpose for this research was to gain insight into instructional leadership through describing one school principal's role and perception of instructional leadership, and the same school's teachers' perceptions and understandings of instructional leadership. The study helped to provide an explanation of the existing role of instructional leadership within the context of a school. The knowledge gained through describing the principal's and teachers' perceptions and understanding of instructional leaders may allow the principal to develop the role as instructional leader within the school. Hallinger et al. (1996) found that elementary school principals who are perceived by teachers as strong instructional leaders promote student achievement through their influence on the learning climate. Accordingly, the following were the research questions to be addressed.

- i. What is the principal's perception of the role of instructional leaders?
- ii. What are teachers' perceptions of the principal's role as an instructional leader?
- iii. What differences and similarities do exist between the perceptions of the principal and teachers on instructional leadership?

## METHODOLOGY

### Research design

The research questions developed on the topic of instructional leadership guided this study towards qualitative research in the form of a case study. Denzin and Lincoln (1998) stated that "qualitative" implies an emphasis on processes and meanings rather than focusing on quantity or frequency. Qualitative research emphasizes the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry. Therefore, qualitative research can be defined as an inquiry process based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explores a social or human problem. The research builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting (Creswell, 1998).

For the purpose of this research, a case study was defined as an investigation into a principal's and teachers' perspectives on instructional leadership in a primary school. The fundamental reason for focusing the research on the perception of principals and teachers was because of the notion that perception matters on the actual practice of the task. The perception difference between principal and teachers is very likely to affect the practice of instructional leadership at schools. That is, if a desired instructional leadership culture or practice is to flourish in the school contexts, principals and teachers need to have a shared understanding on the respective instructional leadership roles of teachers and principals.

A case study was done in order to shed light on a phenomenon, which is a process, event, person, or other item of interest to the researcher (Creswell, 1998). That is, the purpose of using a case

study was to produce detailed description, to develop possible explanation, and to evaluate the phenomenon being studied. Accordingly, the case study provided an in-depth analysis of the phenomenon. Therefore, the case was to provide a detailed description and understanding of the different perceptions on the concepts of instructional leadership in a primary school.

## Participants

The case study utilized purposeful sampling, which Patton (2002) defined as the rationale for selecting information rich for study in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry. Patton (2002) provided a variety of purposeful sampling strategies for selecting information-rich cases; however, the sampling strategy utilized in this case study was the convenience sampling. Convenience sampling approach means cases that are selected simply because they are available and easy to study (Gall et al., 2007). The sample was convenience because the school was located close to the researcher's families' residence, which allowed ease of contact with the participants.

Birakat Primary School was selected based on the principals' willingness to participate in the study. It is one of the primary schools found in Mecha Woreda and serves students of the rural areas. The school is located about 21 kms away to the East of Merawi town, and about 54 kms to the South-east of Bahirdar City, the capital city of Amhara regional State. The school is located in a very strategic place where rural students from the fourth directions of the Woreda get access for schooling, though the infrastructure and school facilities are still scanty.

At a staff meeting, all teachers from Birakat Primary School were invited to take part in the research. Each teacher was provided with the background, process, and procedure for the study. In addition, the teachers received a brief explanation of the purpose and significance of the research. Potential participants were told that: the school division, the school, and the participants would remain anonymous; and the data collected would be confidential. They were told that at any given point during the interview, for whatever reason, they can terminate the interview. They also signed a consent form to acknowledge their rights and the purpose of the research in writing.

The sampling strategy for selecting the teacher-participants for the study was a quota sampling. Quota sampling allowed the researcher to include parameter(s) for selecting the sample (Tuckman, 1994), and in this case study the parameter was the grade level being taught (1st cycle and 2nd cycle) by participants. Of the four participants selected, two taught in the 1st cycle grades and two taught in the 2nd cycle grades. Each selected participant received the survey and the set of interview questions that pertained to the topic of instructional leadership.

## DATA COLLECTION

The data collection for this case study utilized multiple sources. According to Yin (2003), multiple source is defined as the opportunity to use different research strategies to gather data, such as experiments, surveys, observations, and interviews. Yin also noted that using multiple sources provides a broad range of data, which may be more accurate and convincing. In this case study, a questionnaire, and an interview were used.

**Questionnaire method:** Questionnaires can be defined as written forms that ask exact questions of all individuals in the sample group, and which respondents can answer at their own

convenience (Gall et al., 2007). The reason for using a questionnaire was to gather personal and professional information about the individuals involved in the sample. Tuckman (1994) noted that questionnaires provide self-reported data from the participant. As Gall et al. observed, a "questionnaire cannot probe deeply into respondents' beliefs, attitudes, and inner experience" (p. 228). Questionnaires allow for a quick and simple way to gather information, which does not need in-depth explanation.

The questionnaire consisted of mainly fill-in-the-blank responses, checklists, rankings, and open-ended questions. The fill-in-the-blanks and checklists provided nominal data that have the advantage of being less biased and allowing for greater flexibility; however, it is also difficult to score (Tuckman, 1994). The ranking-response items are difficult to complete and they force discrimination, but provide easy-to-score ordinal data (Tuckman, 1994). The open-ended questions were asked so participants could provide specific explanations of concepts, such as instructional leadership.

The questions developed for this survey were a combination of the researcher's own questions, and questions developed by Bedard (2005), who carried out a similar study on the concept of instructional leadership. Bedard's research focused on the instructional knowledge and skills of administrators, research that surveyed both administrators and teachers. The principal's questionnaire had 8 questions, 4 of which were adapted from Bedard's questions. The teachers' questionnaire consisted of 6 questions, 3 of which were questions adapted from Bedard's (2005) work. So, two different questionnaires were administered to the sample group on a one-to-one basis. Both the principal's and teachers' questionnaires took approximately 15 to 20 min to complete.

**Interview method:** An interview can be defined as the verbal questions asked by the interviewer and verbal responses provided by the interviewee (Gall et al., 2007). According to these authors, the strategy for data collection for the interview utilized the standardized open-ended interview, which involves a predetermined sequence and wording of questions of the same set of questions to be asked to each respondent. According to Patton (1990), the reason for asking the exact questions was to reduce the influence the interviewer may have had on the semi-structured interviewee.

Patton (1990) also stated that the purpose of qualitative interviewing in evaluation is to understand how program staff and participants view the program, to learn their terminology and judgments, and capture the complexities of their individual perceptions and experiences. Patton also noted the strength of the open-ended questions allowed for the interviewees to provide their own thoughts, words and insights. Therefore, the face-to-face interview process for this study provided a comprehensive explanation of each individual's perspective and understanding of the research question and the sub-questions.

Like that of the questionnaire items, the interview items were also partly developed by the researcher and partly adapted from Bedard's (2005). In this regard, careful attempts were made in adapting and refining the researcher's questions as well as the questions tailored from Bedard's (2005) study for both the principal and teachers interview questions. The principal's interview questions consisted of 11 questions; 9 questions had been developed from the research question, and 2 questions were adapted from pre-existing questions developed by Bedard's (2005) study of instructional leadership. The questions generated for the principal sought the principal's perceptions and understandings of the role as instructional leader, the barriers to the principal's job, and supports the principal needs to be an effective instructional leader. There were 11 open-ended questions for the teachers, 9 of which were developed from the research questions, and 2 questions developed

by Bedard (2005). Teachers' questions focused on their perceptions and understandings of the principal as instructional leader, the principal's strengths and weaknesses, and barriers to the development of teachers' skills and abilities.

Each of the five participants was interviewed from approximately 40 min to an hour. With the permission of the interviewee, an audio-recording was used in order to record the information collected as accurately as possible. As Lincoln and Guba (1985) noted, recorded data allow researchers to have complete records of the participants' answers to the questions. Following the initial interview, all participants were told that they might be contacted for further explanation, clarification, and additional questions if need be. The conversations were transcribed and each participant was given a copy of the transcript to review, revise, and delete any part if necessary. When participants received their transcripts, they were asked to go through each of the questions to determine whether the participants had more information to add to any of the previous responses. The purpose of going over their responses was to make sure that the participants had ample opportunity to review their initial responses. The process of going over the questions with them and giving time to review their transcripts was to ensure that the information they provided was as accurate and reliable as possible.

### Data analysis

Patton (1990) noted that the purpose of classifying qualitative data for content analysis is to facilitate the search for patterns and themes within a particular setting or across cases. Themes were defined as an inference that a feature of a case is salient and characteristic of the case (Gall et al., 2007). Patton (2002) also noted that themes take a more categorical or topical form. The approach used to analyze the data was deductive analysis, which involves identifying themes and patterns prior to data collection and then searching through the data for instances of them (Gall et al., 2007). Deductive analysis was chosen to describe the important dimensions of the differences between a principal's and teachers' perceptions of instructional leadership. The data collected from the questionnaires and interviews done by the principal and teachers were compared and contrasted with each other, and to the themes of instructional leadership as defined in the research questions.

The data collected from the principal were analyzed and coded into common patterns, themes, generalizations, and categories. The same process was applied to the teachers' responses, with an additional comparison among the teachers' responses to identify similarities and differences in perceptions. Finally, the principal's responses were compared to the teachers' responses to find the commonalities and differences in perceptions as related to the patterns, themes, and research questions. The process was to identify themes that are "salient, characteristic features in a case" (Gall et al., 2007: 452). This process was conducted manually and did not rely on a computer program to find the constructs, patterns and themes.

## DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

As was summarized from the results collected using both instruments, teachers based their perceptions of instructional leadership on the principal's personal and professional characteristics. The principal had to model a love of learning and carrying out actions that made a positive learning environment. The teachers emphasized the importance of the principal establishing all professional

aspects of the school. This is in line with Elmore's (2000) notion that a principal must support teachers so that teachers could do their work well. Also, the teachers mentioned the importance of colleagues and central office supporting their principal so that the principal could function effectively. As to Elmore, the impact of instructional leadership on the school would result in all staff working collaboratively for the betterment of all students.

As the summary of principal's responses regarding his perception of instructional leadership confirmed, the focus was on having high expectations for all students to learn, which was accomplished through the principal demonstrating the idea that student learning was the most important thing going on in the school. Thus, personal characteristics such as compassion, empathy, and being able to support teachers personally and professionally, assisted the principal in developing relationships with teachers. According to the principal, instructional leadership set the culture of the school, which should yield an environment conducive to learning. In this regard, Kruger (1992) noted that the principal must organize all aspects of the school, but the teachers must also be part of the process through collaboration. Accordingly, the principal reflected that all teachers must be professional in that they must know what they are doing; and hence, the principal fostered the teachers' use of their professional knowledge. The principal also believed that all staff members must be informed of what was happening in the school to minimize clashes, which interfere with instruction and daily routines.

### Thematic comparison between the teachers' and principal's data

In the final data-analysis process, the themes of instructional leadership were presented thematically. The thematic comparison, therefore, provided an aggregated summary of the principal's and teachers' responses.

### Instructional leadership

The instructional leadership comparison began with the teachers' and principal's perspectives of the portion of time a principal should spend on the role of instructional leader, and then compared the participants' perceptions of what the most important responsibilities of a principal are. Hence, the sub-themes of instructional leadership were then compared.

### *Portion of time a principal should spend on instructional leadership*

Instructional leadership is one of many roles and responsibilities a principal has in a school (Hallinger and Heck,

1996). All participants were asked to identify what portion of time a principal should spend on instructional leadership; however, it became apparent that none of the teachers' identified the same portion of time as the principal did. Also, it was necessary to note that teachers responses to how much time a principal should spend on instructional leadership was not affected or influenced by the grade level (1st cycle or 2nd cycle) taught by teachers.

According to the data, the principal's belief was that 10 to 30% of his time should be spent on instructional leadership, which differed from all teachers. Three of the four teachers believed that principals should spend at least 70% of their time on instructional leadership. These responses were congruent with the Elmore's (2000) concern that the first priority of principals' leadership is leading the instruction to which other activities become secondary. The fourth teacher was on the other end of the scale, rating the amount of time a principal should spend on instructional leadership at less than 10%. Perhaps, the fourth respondent may have some confusion with the role of principals in monitoring the teaching and learning process; otherwise, there is no doubt that the principal should spend the majority of his time on instructional matters.

### ***Perceptions of most important responsibilities of a principal***

In addition to the portion of time a principal should spend on instructional leadership, principals have many different responsibilities within a school. The principal and teachers were asked to rank which six responsibilities were the most important for a principal. Both the principal and teachers chose the four most important principal's responsibilities. These responsibilities are listed in the order of importance: visible presence, establishing school goals in collaboration with parents and staff, managerial duties, and discipline problems. Also, the principal and one of the teachers ranked these four responsibilities in the exact same order. Four of the five participants chose visible presence as the most important responsibility. Three of the five chose establishing school goals in collaboration with parents and staff as the next most important responsibility. An interesting point was that the two 1st cycle teachers chose exactly the same six responsibilities, but did not rank these responsibilities in the same order.

The difference between the principal's and the teachers' responses was that the principal believed that providing staff with new instructional ideas and strategies was part of the six most important responsibilities. From the teachers' responses, three of the four teachers mentioned the importance of the principal organizing staff meetings to allow instructional leadership to happen. Two (T1 & T4)

teachers noted the necessity of a principal providing coaching for teachers. The remaining responsibilities of providing collaboration time for teachers and explaining to parents what was happening in the school and classroom, only received one ranking each as the most important duty.

The final aspect of the ranking which needs to be addressed was almost all the responsibilities chosen by the principal and teachers dealt with instructional leadership, with the exception of discipline problems and managerial duties. These rankings suggest that teachers are not fully aware of which responsibilities fall under the realm of instructional leadership. In order to gain a better understanding of the principal's and teachers' perceptions of instructional leadership, a comparison of the following sub-themes was undertaken: definition of instructional leadership, the characteristics of an instructional leader, the principal's function as instructional leader, and the impact of instructional leadership on the school.

### ***Definition of instructional leadership: comparison of perceptions***

Based on the similarities and differences between the principal's and the teachers' definitions of instructional leadership, the principal's and teachers' definitions were similar in the following areas: professional growth, resources, team building or, the philosophy of the principal towards education, and the leadership role of the principal. The differences between the principal's and teachers' definitions of instructional leadership had the principal focusing more on instruction, whereas the teachers noted the personal qualities of the principal and his plans for the school. The essential part of both definitions emphasized teachers' professional growth, which was a necessary element of instructional leadership. The principal focused on enhancing teachers' instructional abilities. However, the teachers focused on how the principal's personal characteristics guided teachers to their own professional growth.

One aspect that both the principal and teachers mentioned as important was that the principal had been an effective teacher prior to becoming a leader. The principal was a master or effective teacher, which meant he had the needed skills, abilities, and knowledge, which for teachers, was important for the principal's credibility. The principal also had a first degree in educational planning and management. Fortunately, this perspective of the respondents was quite congruent with Kruger's (1992) concern that to be a good instructional leader, the principal must first be a good teacher. The second aspect was the principal's ability to provide personal support, thus showing a concern for teachers' well-being. The characteristic that everyone agreed on was the importance of the principal's compassion and empathy.

Additional characteristics that teachers valued in a principal were the principal's ability to be consistent, to be personable, to be respectful, to be fair, and to have good communication skills. A third aspect was for the principal to provide professional support, all of which the principal saw as acknowledging and treating teachers as professionals, not inferiors. Teachers also found professional support was significant because it allowed them to share their strengths and knowledge, foster team work and collaboration, show trust in teachers' judgments, and allowed them to take risks, which ultimately contributed to their professional growth.

Another aspect of the principal's characteristics that both principal and teachers deemed important was the principal's ability to organize all aspects of the school. From the principal's perspective, he believed that leading the school was best accomplished through promoting a collaborative approach with teachers. Teachers concurred by emphasizing the importance of the principal fostering teamwork and collaboration. Also, the teachers mentioned that it was important for the principal to share their vision, establish high expectations, solve problems, make decisions, be flexible, and encourage hard work and success. Most importantly, these perspectives of the participants seemed to reflect McEwan's (1994) concern that creating a school climate conducive to quality teaching-learning is the principals' core instructional leadership activity without which meaningful learning would not take place.

According to participants', the effect of the principal's personal characteristics was to help create an environment conducive to learning by allowing teachers to focus on teaching. Everyone mentioned similar characteristics needed for an individual to be an effective instructional leader. The next section describes the sub-theme of the factors that affect the principal's ability to function effectively as an instructional leader.

### ***Principal's function as instructional leader***

This section identifies the barriers that interfere with a principal's function as instructional leader, and highlights the facilitators that effectively sustain a principal as instructional leader. The barriers that the principal and teachers identified as possibly hindering the function of the principal in the school were different. The barriers the principal identified concerned actual support from the local offices (the Kebele, and Woreda Education Offices) that he needed in order to provide quality resources for his teachers, to arrange conditions to provide professional development for his school, and to give his teachers more time to collaborate with each other. The teachers' perspectives on the barriers were mainly centered on the personal qualities of the principal and the role staff could play in their willingness to support the principal. However,

there was some agreement that the local government setup could be a barrier to the principal. From the principal's perspective, barriers focused on funding, whereas one teacher emphasized the possible lack of guidance from the local education offices in teambuilding and developing leadership skills. The only barrier on which the principal and two teachers agreed completely was the problem of time for teachers to work collaboratively. This finding was also similar to the one conducted by Hallinger (2003) that lack of support from the local district offices, and sometimes the presence of their untimely interventions on principals' tasks were among the top factors affecting principals' instructional leadership effectiveness.

The facilitators that the principal and teachers identified were more closely connected than were the barriers. Both the principal and teachers listed the importance of the personal and professional qualities of the principal, noting that the principal needed to support his teachers professionally with appropriate resources and, in turn, the teachers needed to support their principal by their willingness to cooperate. The main difference was that teachers also included other facilitators such as guidance from local education office, relationships with outside agencies, and adequate time.

Despite the barriers, and acknowledging the facilitators, the primary function on which both the principal and teachers agreed was the principal's need to support the teachers. Teachers' support was given by providing resources and guidance in order for teachers and students to achieve to the best of their abilities, or, as one of the teachers (T4) stated, "the principal assists teachers to become better teachers." The principal also mentioned the importance of his function regarding the community and the implementation of local government initiatives. However, the principal did point out that he must also ensure that the local education office is aware of the specific demands and needs of the school, so that teachers and students could be successful.

In general, the main perception of the principal's function, by both the principal and teachers, was the concept of supporting teachers, so that they could do their jobs effectively. The teachers' focus was on the personal and professional characteristics of the principal and the principal's ability to provide support to teachers, whereas the principal was more concerned with organizing programs and resources needed to provide support to his teachers. Also, the teachers did emphasize the importance of the principal being a compassionate and empathetic individual. Both sides underscored the support needed from the principal, so that teachers could do their job effectively. Obviously, different scholars, consistently noted that a successful school is a reflection of a successful principal, and a successful school, among other things is supposed to be characterized by motivated and committed teachers, and a committed and inspiring principal (Blase and Blase, 2004; Elmore, 2000;

Glanz, 2006).

### ***Impact of instructional leadership on the school***

Both the teachers and the principal identified the importance of personal and professional support that was necessary so that both could do their jobs effectively. Further data to be presented showed the impact that instructional leadership had on the school. The principal's viewpoint was that to be an effective principal, the priority as instructional leader must be to establish a positive school culture. According to the principal's view point, a principal affects school culture by having high expectations for all students' achievement; despite students' limitations, they must all achieve success based on their abilities. The principal also noted that if students were to be successful, teachers needed a positive school environment, which would allow teachers to function properly. Therefore, a positive culture created an environment conducive to learning, which was promoted by a principal providing support. The teachers also identified support as a crucial component for a principal to be an effective instructional leader, but also for teachers to do their job properly. In this regard, Kruger (1992) noted that building a sound instructional leadership culture is a foundation for ensuring instructional leadership responsiveness. Hence, it is quite fortunate that both the principal and teachers reflected the need for and the encouraging efforts exerted at the school in building a conducive school culture.

In general, the principal's and teachers' perceptions of instructional leadership provided an understanding of the importance of the principal's leadership role in the school. The main focus for every participant was on receiving support needed for all school members to be effective, and on the importance of the personal characteristics of the principal. The principal's instructional leadership was exhibited by him modeling a love of learning and his focus on improving instruction, so all students could feel success, despite their personal limitations. The principal felt that the principal's major function as instructional leader was to establish school culture by working collaboratively and providing support for teachers, so they could teach effectively. The teachers themselves valued the principal who supported teachers personally and professionally, and who exhibited the necessary knowledge, skills, and abilities to be effective. In addition, teachers believed the principal must be compassionate, empathetic, and passionate about learning. Therefore, the principal's leadership provided the framework for the school to function positively. Further, both the principal and teachers emphasized the importance of creating a positive and supportive working environment, which focused on collaboration, collegiality, and professionalism, all of which were highly emphasized by Elmore (2000) and McEwan (1994) as desired inputs for quality

teaching to take place, and thereby, for enhanced students' achievement to be ensured.

### **REFLECTIONS ON FINDINGS, AND IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE**

The reason for the congruence between the principal's and teachers' perceptions of instructional leadership was due to the professional and personal characteristics of the principal. In their responses, the teachers continually emphasized that an important characteristic and function of an instructional leader was to provide support to the teachers. The principal ensured he was a visible presence in the school, and tried to support his teachers personally and professionally. He reflected as if he created a safe environment for teachers and included them in the decision-making process. He tried to develop collegial relationships with staff through his informal supervisory approach. In addition, when teachers were asked to describe the principal's most important characteristic, they reflected as he was a good leader, who was compassionate, loving, and supportive. Therefore, the principal was perceived by teachers as a good principal. Since the principal provided a supportive environment and treated the teachers as professionals', the participants felt that he provided what they emphasized as important for an instructional leader.

In framing the implications for practice, it seems important to note that the principal's and teachers' perceptions on instructional leadership have provided data on the importance of three types of support required for a principal to be an effective instructional leader: principal supporting teachers; teachers supporting their principal; and the government setup (particularly at Kebele and Woreda levels) supporting their principals and teachers. The data provided by this case study may also provide the opportunity for discussion on about further development of supports for principals so that they can be effective in their instructional leadership roles.

By and large, the success of this school was due to the principal's exposure to management leadership/cultural/organizational theories and he was able to implement instructional leadership because of his knowledge. As a result, it seems sound to recommend to the Ministry of Education that potential principals should be trained in management prior to their appointment

### **Conflict of Interests**

The author have not declared any conflict of interests.

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