

**ARE THE PRINCIPALS OF HIGHER SECONDARY EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS
INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERS?**

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Abstract

Teaching and learning are what everyone should focus on in any institution. This should not only be with teachers, academic coordinators, heads of the departments, and members of internal quality assurance cell but also of Principals and Vice Principals, and they should exhibit an exceptionally high level of detailed knowledge about the craft of teaching. Principals as instructional leaders should be aware of the latest pedagogical practices, their effectiveness and should encourage and facilitate the implementation of such practices in the institutions. People should get expected support in solving problems of instructional practice from their peers and supervisors, and problems in design or implementation of instruction should be shared and discussed (even with supervisors) rather than hidden from view. The Principals are no more mere administrators; they should be taking crucial decisions about the instructional process and are accountable for the quality of instruction. Here arises the need of grooming the Principals of higher secondary educational institutions differently and Instructional Leadership Program is the answer to this.

Key words: *Instructional Leadership, Institutional Effectiveness, Higher Education*

Introduction: It has often been said that the Principal of any educational institution wears many hats being manager, administrator, instructional leader and curriculum leader at different points in a day. It is a balancing act of having to juggle between these various roles. Often times, more attention is accorded to managerial and administrative tasks and that of the instructional leader is relegated to others in the administrative hierarchy even though the core business of any educational institution is teaching and learning.

The idea that Principals should serve as instructional leaders—not just as generic managers—in their schools is widely subscribed to among educators. In practice, though, few principals act as genuine instructional leaders. Their days are filled with activities of management, scheduling, reporting, and handling relations with parents and community, dealing with the multiple crises and special situations that are inevitable in Educational institutions. Most Principals spend relatively little time in classrooms and even less analyzing instruction with teachers. They may arrange time for teachers' meetings and professional development, but they rarely provide intellectual leadership for development and innovations in teaching skill. Teaching and learning are what everyone should talk about in any institution. This should not only be with teachers, academic coordinators, heads of the departments, and members of internal quality assurance cell but also of Principals and Vice Principals, and they should exhibit an exceptionally high level of detailed knowledge about the craft of teaching. Even more important should be a culture of learning and mutual dependency among staff at all levels. People should get expected support in solving problems of instructional practice from their peers and supervisors, and problems in design or implementation of instruction should be shared and discussed (even with supervisors) rather than hidden from view. It is assumed that Principals, like teachers, need to learn continuously to lead their institutions. "He/She is a learner," should be a phrase used to describe individuals who are thought to be doing well in their roles as institutional leaders, even if they are new to the position and not yet experts in the many aspects of institutional functions.

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What is Instructional Leadership?: The role of 'instructional leader' by educational leaders is a relatively new concept that emerged in the early 1980's which called for a shift of emphasis from

principals being managers or administrators to instructional or academic leaders. This shift was influenced largely by research which found that effective educational institutions usually had principals who stressed the importance of instructional leadership (Brookover and Lezotte, 1982). Later, in the first half of the 90s, “attention to instructional leadership seemed to waver, displaced by discussions of educational institution-based management and facilitative leadership” (Lashway, 2002). Recently, instructional leadership has made a comeback with increasing importance placed on academic standards and the need for to be accountable for institutions.

Inherent in the concept of an instructional leader is the notion that learning should be given top priority while everything else revolves around the enhancement of learning which undeniably is characteristic of any educational endeavor. Hence to have credibility as an instructional leader, the Principal should also be a practicing teacher.

Instructional leaders need to know what is going on in the classroom; an opportunity ‘to walk the factory floor’. Many a time, Principals are not in touch with what is going on at the classroom level and are unable to appreciate some of the problems teachers and students encounter. The tendency is to address instructional issues from the perspective when they were teachers. Principals need to work closely with students, developing teaching techniques and methods as a means for understanding teacher perspectives and for establishing a base on which to make curricular decisions. Also, a teaching principal strengthens the belief that "the sole purpose of the school is to serve the educational needs of students" (Harden, 1988). Whitaker (1997) identified four skills essential for instructional leadership:

1. First, they need to be **resource providers**. It is not enough for Principals to know the strengths and weaknesses of their faculty but also recognize that teachers desire to be acknowledged and appreciated for a job well done.
2. Secondly, they need to be an **instructional resource**. Teachers count on their Principals as resources of information on current trends and effective instructional practices. Instructional leaders are tuned-in to issues relating to curriculum, effective pedagogical strategies and assessment.
3. Thirdly, they need to be good **communicators**. Effective instructional leaders need to communicate essential beliefs regarding learning such as the conviction that all children can learn and no child should be left behind.

4. Finally, they need to create a ***visible presence***. Leading the instructional program of a school means a commitment to living and breathing a vision of success in teaching and learning. This includes focusing on learning objectives, modeling behaviors of learning, and designing programs and activities on instruction.

Generally, principals do not see themselves as instructional leaders and many are of the belief that anything that has to do with teaching and learning is best assigned to teachers. In some cases, principals feel inadequate to initiate and develop instructional programmes given the assortment of subject areas taught with each having its own pedagogical uniqueness. For example, teaching reading is different from teaching science and would it be fair to expect the principal to be knowledgeable about strategies for each of the subject areas. Despite these apprehensions, proponents of the idea that the principal should be an leader, is gaining serious attention. If that be the case then the principal needs to have up-to-date knowledge on three areas of education, namely; curriculum, instruction and assessment.

Need & Significance of the Study: Instructional leadership and its direct or indirect effects on student achievement, teacher job performance and job satisfaction has been a popular area of study by researchers in the field of educational leadership (Leithwood, 2005). The accountability requirements of government policies have placed significant pressures upon public educational leadership, from the national level to state level institutions down to the higher education level to school site Principal. Thus, these pressures have caused further interest in instructional leadership and its impact on certain variables related to institutional effectiveness including student achievement, teacher job performance and job satisfaction (Timer, 2003).

According to Harris, Cavanagh, Reynolds, and Giddings (2004), contemporary views of educational leadership are increasingly focused on two aspects of the role of school Principals: the effective qualities of school leaders and the attention given to pedagogy within the institution of higher education. Harris et al. states that effective leadership of teacher instruction and student learning is contingent on the professional orientation of the Principal.

Scope of the Study: This study attempts to throw light on the highly neglected area of Instructional Leadership in Institutes of Higher Education in Mumbai.

The study seeks to achieve the following

objectives: 1. To conduct a SWOC of higher secondary education institutions; 2. To conduct the need analysis for training the leaders of higher secondary education institutions by assessing ‘*what is missing*’. In pursuit of the objectives, the following

Research Questions were raised: 1. What *is* working for the leaders of higher secondary education institutions? 2. What is *not* working for the leaders of higher secondary education institutions? 3. What are the *challenges* faced by the leaders of higher secondary education institutions? 4. What is *missing* in the higher secondary education institutions?

Mr Bhaskar Natarajan and Ms Tina Roy, the research team members, met Principals, Vice Principals and Supervisors of the following educational Institutions and interviewed them for 30 minutes each. This report is a compilation and our interpretation of these notes.

The researchers asked same set of questions to elicit a pattern and also to ‘make-sense’ of the ‘reality’ as experienced by the participants of this engagement.

The Participant Schools in the Study

DATE	INSTITUTION	TIMING
15.10.2013	S M Shetty School & Junior College	12.30 pm – 2.15 pm
18.10.2013	Michael High School & Junior College	10.30 am – 12.30 pm
21.10.2013	Maharshi Dayanand College of Arts, Science & Commerce	12.00 pm – 2.00 pm
22.10.2013	New English High School and Junior College	10.30 am – 12.30 pm
23.10.2013	S K Somaiya Vinay Mandir Junior College	11.00 am – 1.45 pm
	S K Somaiya College of Science & Commerce	2.30 pm
24.10.2013	Datta Meghe World Academy	11.00 am – 1.00 pm
25.10.2013	S M Shetty Junior College	11.30 am – 1.45 pm

The following set of questions was used as broad guidelines to drive the discussion deeper in a confidential manner. The responses were documented for future reference (see the attachment for more information)

1. What is your vision for your (junior) college?

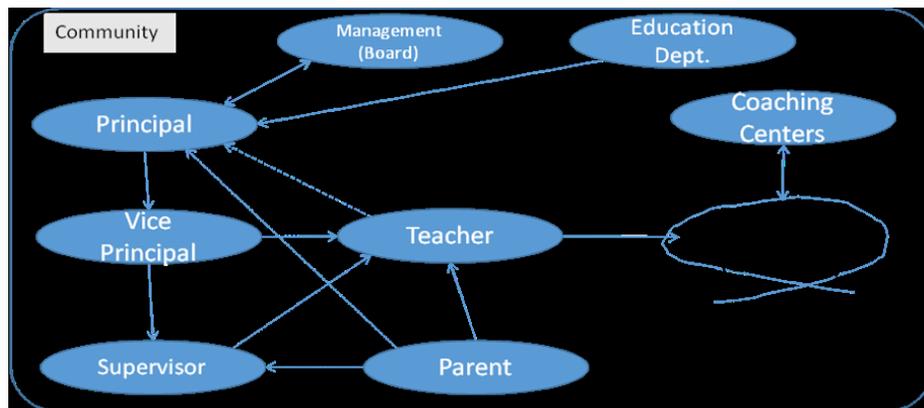
2. On a scale of 1 – 5 (1 being ‘Highly Dissatisfied’ to 5 being ‘Highly Satisfied’), how would you rate your satisfaction in your journey to accomplish this vision?
3. What is 'working well' that’s helping this journey?
4. What should you 'do differently' to improve this rating and take this closer to 5?
5. Any specific comment / remarks on the competencies / skills sets that would help you in this effort to take this satisfaction score to the next level?

Additional Questions (to deepen the understanding)

1. What is your performance management system for teachers and students?
2. What incentive plans do you have to reward and recognize teachers?
3. Questions related to – Basic intro about themselves, demography related, Community around the college, student attitudes etc.

As we observed the system as an ‘onlooker’, the above configuration emerged.

Higher Secondary Education Ecosystem (As-Is)*



(*Courtesy: Mr Bhaskar Natarajan and Ms Tina Roy, the research team members)

The different types of arrows are used to indicate the following:

→ The arrows indicate the direction of relationship between the entities.

↔ The bidirectional arrow indicates the strong relationship and influence between the entities

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is working: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Team work between Principal and leaders – Management support – Freedom and flexibility offered by Mgmt. to Principal and Leadership team – Open Communication between Principal and Leaders* – Distributed Leadership* – Positive Reinforcement and recognition schemes * 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is NOT working: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Comparison between Aided and unaided operating under the same roof influences stakeholder attitudes and decisions* – Parents are viewed as demanding and difficult stakeholder group* – Shortfall in Resources, lack of support from Govt. leading to ‘doing more with less’ – Adolescent students appear to teachers as ‘lacking in discipline and value system’
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Challenges: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Lack of Goal orientation, Vision alignment and student-centricity amongst instructional Staff – Shortage of Leadership Skills – Lack of effective communication, conflict resolution and trust building mechanisms – Lack of good incentive schemes to motivate Teaching and non teaching staff – Inertia to leverage ‘Change’ using ‘out-of-the-box’ solutions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is missing#: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Efficient use of time (8 out of 10 interviews were either started late with too much of waiting time, rescheduled or interrupted) – Empowering Culture • Open and Effective communication • Lack of delegation and trust • Lack of collaboration and presence of unhealthy conflicts amongst /between teachers and leadership team. • Lack of assessment and Feedback mechanism

Implications of these findings for the ‘Instructional Leadership Workshop’

1. Bringing back ‘Focus’ on ‘*Student Achievement*’ from ‘*teaching*’



2. Shifting the role of a ‘Principal’ to that of a ‘Principal Teacher’
3. Fostering a ‘Coaching Culture’ to enable ‘Student Achievement’
4. Developing and Promoting a positive School learning Climate

Conclusion: The Principals of higher secondary institutions need to be coached to become ‘instructional leaders’ so that they are able to implement the latest trends in pedagogy in the form of active learning strategies, development of higher order thinking skills (HOTS) and experiment with flipped classroom, blended learning strategies and such other ICT supported teaching-learning strategies. The researcher is keen to study the impact of training the principals and their teachers on student achievement and student engagement in learning.

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