



ORIGINAL PAPER

The Role of the School Principal in Increasing Students' Success

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Abstract

Increasing students' success in school has recently become an issue that arouses interest to all relevant factors in education. Students' success depends not only on themselves, but also on other factors, especially the principal of the school, whose supporting and communicating role significantly affects the success of students. The principal is the one who with his leading role creates better conditions and opportunities for students' freedom of choice. The principal's reward for students' success and their achievements increases considerably the motivation and the sense of self-confidence on students, thus creating prerequisites for the best achievements of students. The commitment of the school principal in increasing school's success consists of supporting the initiatives, cooperation, communication and constant motivation of students and teachers. The principal is the key to success in students' achievement. The purpose of this study is to understand the role of the school principal in increasing students' success from teachers and school principal's perceptions. For this study, we used quantitative methods combined with the qualitative and semi-structured interviews, and the techniques used for the implementation of research were: semi-structured questionnaire, recordings with multimedia tools and a structured questionnaire surveys. The results show that the principal of the school collaborates with teachers and students, and supports them in increasing success at school, but not at satisfactory level. From the results we can conclude that if the school principal increases his cooperation and supports teachers and students, students' success will be in a greater level.

Keywords: *role of the school principal, increasing success, teachers' perceptions*

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Introduction

A great attention is being paid to the issue of leadership and management in pre-university education in Kosovo by the MEST (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology), which has issued a new administrative instruction on the criteria for selecting the school principal and vice-principal. Also the public University of Prishtina and other private Universities have oriented their programs in education leadership and management, thus committing themselves to raise the quality of education through training the cadres for leadership and more efficient management in pre-university education. Local and international non-governmental organizations also provide educational leadership training in order for school principals to be more qualitative. Leadership does not mean being just a leader and everything else will be done itself. The leader should be an agent of changes, the one who cooperates with the others in order to achieve the required goal. Leadership is not inherited. It is achieved through learning. According to Malik (2001), "Leadership is not inherited". This paper presents information related to the role of school principals in theoretical and empirical terms. Based on the results obtained from interviews, surveys, and the literature review, we strongly believe that this research gives sufficient information to reflect the role of the school principal in increasing students' success.

The new mission of the school principal

The new mission of the school principal can only be achieved if we list things in a way which enable us to go forward with the means we have and with reasonable steps, which in itself will involve our work, teachers work and students' work in enriching the culture of the school. The principals as school leaders should initiate changes and plan school development with the aim of preparing students for carrying out difficult tasks in knowledge-based society. The school vision must be formulated by the school principal jointly with all parties involved, so that everyone is motivated in its realization by working together in providing the best possible education for students. The principal should also prepare a list of priorities and innovations every year in order to change the school image and culture, thus bringing freshness to the students, so they will not feel inferior with the students from other countries and will not feel monotonous of their school. The school principal under the American system of education "represents a leader whose main role is to carry this mission to the staff, parents and students. He is the hard worker, the one who come the first at school and the last one that leaves it. He is the one who resolves all issues; he is the best informed. The principal supports and inspires success, quality and order, contacts the teachers, observes the implementation of the curriculum, gives advice, possesses ideas, vision, and encourages excellence and support towards the development of teachers and students" (Jashari, 2010b: 223).

The school principal's role

The principal is an eminent and influential person in the educational process. His/her task is very responsible and his/her role is to motivate teachers, lead them, manage and evaluate the whole learning and teaching process. The principal in cooperation with teachers, students and parents should make concrete and long-term plans in order to increase the success of students and the quality of education. Apart from that, s/he should familiarize them with new systems and new technologies that contribute in increasing the quality in education. This for traditional principals seems almost difficult to be accepted, because they do not find changes as something positive, whilst they keep more defensive

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attitude towards changes. They do not make long-term plans. They do not prefer the implementation of new methods and the introduction of technology in practice. They see it as an obstacle rather than a help. For the school principal to be successful and influential in increasing students' success, s/he should focus on creating a motivation to the staff so that they work effectively. Apart from that, s/he should contribute to the professional development of teachers in creating an environment where staff and students are motivated to work harder and mobilize the staff to plan and implement changes that lead to better teaching and higher standards, etc. (Ligacaj, 2015). For school principals who are confident in their role and want to make changes, this role is obviously complex and meaningful. Chapter 7 and 8 of the book 'The New Meaning of Changes in Education' which deals with the reforms in education conveys a very good message for school principals. This based on the study that was carried out in the schools whose students have had greater success in school when they had three good teachers during three academic years, whereas for school principals, it is even easier to have three good teachers within a day or year, if they encourage teachers toward professional development (Fullan, 2001: 228). To better elaborate this study, we will focus on a few questions: Where should substantial changes in the schools of Kosovo be done? Who should encourage and support these developments in schools? One should analyze the results, the fruits of the steps that consist with the objectives of changes, goals and projects, and reforms to be initiated. The philosophical composition of the idea of development has to do with the attempt of its progress, the effects of working with students, or said in another way, what must we do in order for our children to acquire knowledge more effectively. To achieve this, we must mention the areas where changes should be made. This should be done in these areas: The development of working conditions, improvement and their progress; Construction of new mission of principals and teachers, and development planning to achieve academic success. All these preparations should be done and lead by the principal. The American sociology of education about the successes of principals in schools bases on the philosophy that: "No one should ask permission to make ones school better and more successful."

What do authors say about the role of school principal

Regarding principal's role and image, authors have written several books. According to Devetaku and Mehmet (2013), "The principal provides all students with a qualitative education through equal access to school, through various curricular and extracurricular activities, and by providing a good and safe environment to learn and teach, thus involving students in all processes that are of great importance and interest to them." A group of authors also claim that, "It should be noted that the principal is the key person at school, since with a strong leader in teaching, the one who plans and organizes the staff pedagogically and directs all the school processes, a school with a low level can be transformed into a school with high progress" (Hyseni, Mita, Salihaj, Pupovci, 2003: 7). Fullan (2001) claims that, "The principal is a goalkeeper of changes." Regarding school management, one of the greatest experts in this field, Jashari in his book writes, "The management primarily deals with the school principal and management structures, but he is dedicated to all employees and represents a part of the whole culture and has a great impact on every teacher and student" (Jashari, 2005). The role of the school principal comes into consideration in some aspects and segments, among which we highlight: "process management (efficiency, forecasting and planning), management

projects, designing programs, financial management, school equipment, quality management: teaching methods, students' success and progress" (Murati, 2009: 51).

According to Jonier (2004), successful leaders admit that people of school are the most important ones. To achieve changes, the leaders must believe that people are the most important asset of the organization. In order for changes to take place in schools, the leader creates a better environment; therefore, a leader constantly scans the environment, where changes must occur (Pejza, 1985). Besides, Maxwell, 2006 links the changing of the organization with the change of the leader, where he states that, 'If you change the leader, you have changed the organization... Change means development.' (Maxwell, 2006) Effective principals strive against lack of coherence. (Bruk, 1988, cited by Fullan, 2001).

The school principal's skills

Leading issues in educational system in the Republic of Kosovo are discussed, and are in constant observation of the public opinion. It is known that the biggest critics of the school and school principals including teachers are parents. Once, parents directed their complaints to the minister or the municipality. Today, complaints are mostly done through communication technologies, mobile phones and electronic mail. This allows easy access to the media and public opinion on the work and leadership of the school. But we are interested in another aspect of talent for leadership, critical assessment of its talent and training. For Schools and MEST in Kosovo, this issue seems to be secondary. This is noticeable after taking responsibilities in primary and secondary education from the municipalities of Kosovo on February 20, 2008. Now we have a situation where the responsibilities are divided and as one of the foreign authors says, nor centralization nor decentralization have success. Centralization has excessive control, decentralization creates chaos. Leaders lose their way when they take the responsibility themselves. But leadership should not only be developed to the principal, but to all teachers and students too. But, actually, the leadership development and organizational design should be a leader's crucial skill. The ability to lead a change reflects the most precious gift of him. (Fullan, 2001).

Individual features of the school principal

The school principals are not like the leaders of other organizations, such as the leader or the manager of a farm, a car workshop, or nursing home, where sometimes the leader is guided by routine. Education theorists hold the opinions that: the leader - the school principal is a leader because he articulates the reality. He is one of the community, family, has his own biography, knows well the district, and he is a visionary; s/he creates the vision, sees farther than others, plans the future; s/he knows, has the duty and commitment to communicate with the school district, community, municipality, ministry; s/he motivates, inspires and guides towards achieving and realizing the vision; the leader deals with the important work, leads with valuables staff, and includes them in leadership too. The leader has followers, followers follow him/her, but good principal listens and learns carefully many things from them, because in this way he listens to their demands" (Jashari, 2010a).

Differences between the manager and the school principal

According to Cuban (1988), Bolman and Deal (1997), the scientific theory and the practice describe the difference between leadership and management as follows: the

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leader influences the others toward action, performance and the achievement of the desired success; the management is used effectively for the organization of daily school life; the leader is enthusiastic, charismatic, and visionary; the manager has the power, the highest position, and the ability to reward and punish. With leadership we understand the way how activities and the work of an institution, enterprise, organization, school, or party is organized. With management, in this context, we understand the action that the leader undertakes in his/her organization and management (Murati, 2009: 21).

How can the school principal be a good leader?

The principal is responsible for everything that takes place in school, starting from the application of laws, the quality of the development in the educational process, cooperation with teachers, students and the community. Thus, the school principal is responsible for all activities in the school, and especially on him/her depend the success or failure of the school. The principal should cooperate and coordinate activities with the higher authorities, as MEST, the office for inspection, and parents and community. An important role in this cooperation plays the teacher, because he is the leading partner. Without the teacher, the principal would be like "a bird without wings". So, one of the main factors is building the right relationship between the principal and teachers (Laska, 2009: 12).

Leadership styles

Fullan, 2001 in his book, 'The new meaning of changes in education' emphasizes that Goleman (2000), after analyzing the data from 3871 businesses of the Hay / McBer, has come across six types of leadership, out of which two have negative influence and the other four have positive influence in creating a favorable climate and educational achievements for students: the first style of leadership is done unwillingly ("requires order implementation or "do as I say"), other kind of leadership ("mobilizes people toward a vision, or "Come with me") (Goleman, 2000) cited by Fullan (2001); the second style of leadership has been defined as a style of performing activities together at schools ("creates harmony and builds emotional connection, or "people above all") (Goleman, 2000) cited by Fullan (2001). The third style is the style of leadership that maintains the principles in practice ("toughen the dealing through participation, or "what do you think") (Goleman, 2000) cited by Fullan (2001). Another style appoints the development of workflow management ("sets high standards of work, or "do as I do, at this very moment"). (Goleman, 2000) cited by Fullan (2001). The last style is the style where the leader is able to guide and prepare the relevant factors for work in the future ("prepares people for the future, or "try it") (Goleman, 2000) cited by Fullan (2001). Of these six styles of leadership, Goleman considered that two style one and four have negative effect in the creation of a climate at school.

The school principal's role in communication and cooperation

In the following analysis we will discuss the school principal's role in communication and cooperation with the School Council, Students Council and Parents Council. The school goals are achieved through the communication between the school principal and the school staff. But, this is also done by taking into consideration their opinions on certain decisions. In order to have a better leadership and management, communication is considered as one of the main factors. The school principal through communication with the School Council, Students Council and Parents Council increases

the quality of work system. One of the key elements which enhance trust and respect is achieved through regular meetings between the principal, School Council, Students Council, school staff and parents. The achievement of goals set by the school for a better school management, for improving the quality of teaching and learning, and for increasing students' success cannot be achieved only if the school principal maintains this intention, but this can only be achieved if this is everyone's goal and through effective communication. Further, effective communication increases the responsibilities by working together; reduces errors, since the information are transmitted within the group on a routine basis; avoids mistakes, because mistakes can be detected more easily by talking about projects, teaching, etc.; distributes the responsibility to more people; promotes cooperation with the school staff, thus increasing the willingness to take responsibility; supports students; establishes partnership between parents and school - school is not anymore a "black box"; creates a new culture of communication in the school; helps to understand different visions, views, and opinions. Communication is very important not only for the educational process, but also for everyday school activities. It contributes in resolving disputes, conflicts and different issues at school. The school principal's contribution in counseling teachers and students to solve problems can be reached through several steps. These steps are: Stop, Look, Listen and Respond (Figure 1). Figure 2 shows the steps to be followed by the school principal while assisting teachers and students solving their problems.

Figure 1. The school principal's contribution in counseling teachers and students (several steps: Stop, Look, Listen and Respond)

STOP	When a teacher/student says something, stop and pay him/her attention! Paying attention, even briefly, drives the speaker to realize that you are listening to them and they are important.
LOOK	Make eye contact with the ones you communicate. This may require you to decline in their level. A facial expression can encourage children to share their feelings and concerns.
LISTEN	Pay attention to what people with whom you communicate say, thus listening to them! Listen carefully to what children actually say, and also what you are trying to say! Facial expressions and body language give enough information about the words you hear.
RESPOND	Once you stopped, looked and listened, it is time to respond depending on what the student said.

Figure 2. The school principal's contribution in counseling teachers and students (upcoming steps)

Paraphrase	What you hear makes the speakers feel that they are clearly heard and the feelings they expressed are acceptable.
Give examples	When appropriate, ask questions that will push the student to think for a solution or the upcoming step. "How can you assure us that you will not forget your homework again?", "What have you learned from this experience?," "How would you change this if you did this again?", "What do you like most in your writing? Tell us why?"

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How would the communication and cooperation be effective

One of the most important ways of effective communication is achieved through active listening. If the teacher listens actively to his/her students, students will feel that they should focus in learning. School principal's assistance in counseling teachers and students in solving their problems can be achieved through several steps. These steps are: Stop, Look, Listen and Respond, as discussed earlier in this study. Good cooperation: increases teachers and students' support for teaching and learning; supports the school principal and school staff to achieve a higher quality; creates opportunity for new teaching and learning, such as, in practical aspects in institutions; helps in financing and organizing excursions, and developing teaching and learning materials; creates a new school culture and school profile; gives students the opportunity to learn more about their skills, and plan their professional career; meets the requirements of the education legislation (especially in the context of decentralization). The positive relationship between the school principal and the staff can be achieved only if effective communication and cooperation between them exists. This communication contributes to better intentions and efforts of the school. Apart from that, it contributes to a better quality of teaching and learning, to a better students' performance, school culture, a better school managing, inclusion, health, and safety. But, the main and the most important actors of the school in communication and cooperation are teachers, because teachers are the agents of changes. According to Fullan, teaching and learning is the heart of a school. In modern schools, teachers maintain different functions, such as, they are teaching experts, educators and motivators, leaders and managers of the educational processes, supporters, children's educational partners, consultants, evaluators, etc. This means that we are dealing with very important school actors. (Mattheis *et al.*, 2012: 6-13).

The school principal supervision in educational process

The first one to supervise and control classes is the school principal. This is his/her primary task. Any negligence in this respect is a disadvantage in educational process of the school, and also a disadvantage of the authority of the school principal. Some principals think they have no obligation to carry out this very important task. The principal's supervision in classes should reach the following objectives: First, s/he should know the school, teachers, students, school authorities; Secondly, s/he should recognize the broader opinion, parents, higher education staff, media, etc.; Through supervision of educational process, the principal should know: Whether and how the curriculum was implemented; teaching methods; the discipline of students and teachers; what hinders the progress of teaching in general and in particular; how the evaluation process on students is done and what methods and forms are practiced, etc. After the supervision, comes a significant stage, which is the principal's discussion with the teacher over the course of supervised classes, where the positive and negative sides should be highlighted. (Gashi, 2003).

Data analysis

Microsoft Excel was used for the questionnaires, whereas interviews were taped, transcribed and printed.

Results

These interviews were realized with two school principals in two different municipalities of Kosova, in Gjilan and Viti, while the questionnaires were conducted

with 40 teachers of these schools. These interviews and questionnaires took place in July 2015.

Quantitative data

In the scale 1 - 5, we have presented the quantitative data of the respondents of our survey. Number 1 is 'I don't agree', number 2 is 'I disagree', number 3 is 'Sometimes I agree', number 4 is 'I agree', and number 5 is 'I completely agree'.

Table 1. Results of the survey carried out with the Gymnasium teachers of "Zene Hajdini" – Gjilan (July 2015)

The school principal is considered as one of the main factors in increasing students' success. However, this cannot be achieved if s/he does not communicate and cooperate effectively with the school staff. The following questions are intended to gather data on the school principal's role in increasing students' success	I completely agree	I agree	Sometimes I agree	I disagree	I don't agree
1. The principal takes into account teachers' views/opinions.	6 30%	5 25%	9 45%		
2. The principal takes into account students' views/opinions.	1 5%	4 20%	15 75%		
3. The principal consults with teachers about success.	12 60%	5 25%	3 15%		
4. The principal consults with students about success.	7 35%	7 35%	6 30%		
5. The principal supports every teachers' initiative regarding the educational process.	16 80%	3 15%	1 5%		
6. The principal supports every students' initiative regarding the educational process.	16 80%	4 20%			
7. The principal communicates and cooperates with teachers.	4 20%	14 70%	2 10%		
8. The principal communicates and cooperates with students.	2 10%	3 15%	15 75%		
9. The principal rewards students for their achievements and successes.	20 100%				
10. The principal motivates students to participate in various school competitions.	17 85%	3 15%			
11. The principal encourages teachers towards professional development.	20 100%				
12. The principal meets teachers and discusses about issues that concern them.	12 60%	6 30%	2 10%		
13. The principal meets students and discusses about issues that concern them.	3 15%	3 15%	14 70%		

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14. The principal consults with teachers about problems and possibilities of solving them.	11 55%	7 35%	2 10%		
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Table 2. Results of the survey carried out with the Gymnasium teachers of "Kuvendi i Lezhës" - Viti (July 2015)

The school principal is considered as one of the main factors in increasing students' success. However, this cannot be achieved if s/he does not communicate and cooperate effectively with the school staff. The following questions are intended to gather data on the school principal's role in increasing students' success	I completely agree	I agree	I sometimes agree, sometimes not	I disagree	I don't agree
1. The principal takes into account teachers' views/opinions.	1 5%	7 35%	6 30%	6 30%	
2. The principal takes into account students' views/opinions.	6 30%	8 40%	6 30%		
3. The principal consults with teachers about success.	2 10%	5 25%	9 45%	4 20%	
4. The principal consults with students about success.	6 30%	7 35%	7 35%		
5. The principal supports every teachers' initiative regarding the educational process.	5 25%	6 30%	9 45%		
6. The principal supports every students' initiative regarding the educational process.	5 25%	8 40%	5 25%	2 10%	
7. The principal communicates and cooperates with teachers.	4 20%	6 30%	7 35%	3 15%	
8. The principal communicates and cooperates with students.	6 30%	10 50%	4 20%		
9. The principal rewards students for their achievements and successes.	7 35%	5 25%	7 35%	1 5%	
10. The principal motivates students to participate in various school	3 15%	7 35%	7 35%	3 15%	
11. The principal encourages teachers towards professional development.	4 20%	3 15%	6 30%	7 35%	
12. The principal meets teachers and discusses about issues that concern	2 10%	5 25%	8 40%	5 25%	
13. The principal meets students and discusses about issues that concern	6 30%	7 35%	5 25%	2 10%	
14. The principal consults with teachers about problems and possibilities of solving them.	2 10%	4 20%	9 40%	5 25%	

From the results obtained through interviews and surveys of two gymnasium schools in the region of Gjilan, we find that the principal plays an important role in increasing students' success. However, it is evident that there exists a lack of cooperation between the principal, teachers and students in order to increase students' success. At the same time, we see that students do not have enough support from the principal to achieve a better success at school. We also find that the level of cooperation between teachers and the school principal in larger cities is better than in smaller ones. The results of the survey reflect that the principals of appropriate profiles have significantly greater role in increasing students' success rather than those of inappropriate profiles.

Qualitative data

From the interviews carried out with school principals it is evident that the role of the principal is very important and influential in increasing students' success. According to them this is achieved if the principal of the school takes into account the views of teachers and students, as well as consults with them in order to increase students' success. He should also support the initiatives and good ideas of teachers and students and communicate and cooperate with them in a good way. The school principal should always reward students for their academic achievements, with symbolic gifts, festival events and motivate them to participate in various school competitions through professional activities, where each teacher gives input in his own field. He should also encourage teachers towards gaining professional development and meet and discuss with teachers and students the problems that concern them. They should also meet with head teachers and head students, and consult with them about the problems and possibilities of solving them. They also say that there should be a special budget in order for students to be more motivated for their academic achievements. On the issue of teachers' training, they say that they did not bring great results, because many teachers have such certificates and were not successful in their professional and implementation in practices. The implementation of new methods in many cases is difficult to be applied even though teachers are efficient. This is due to the large number of students within a class.

Conclusions and recommendations

Based on the results obtained from the study we can conclude that: the school principal takes into account the opinions and views of teachers and students, but not at satisfactory level; they partially consult with teachers and students regarding students' success; they partially support the initiatives of teachers and students regarding educational process; they reward students for their academic achievements with modest prizes; they partially motivate students to participate in various school competitions; they partially encourage teachers towards professional development; they meet teachers and students very rarely in order to discuss the problems they face; training for teachers have a positive impact on their professional development, but they are not sufficiently implemented in practice.

As recommendations, school principals should consider more often students and teachers' views/opinions; they should consult much more with teachers and students thus contribute in increase students' success; they should support teachers' initiatives regarding educational process; they should reward students much more regarding their academic achievements; they should support students much more to participate in various school competitions; they should encourage teachers much more towards professional development and application of new methods; they should meet more often with teachers

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and students and discuss the problems and possibilities of solving them; they should create an environment where staff and students are motivated to work much more; they should create a special budget from MEST, and plan to motivate and reward students for their achievements.

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