

# Role of School Leadership for Ensuring Learning Outcomes

## A Review

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### Abstract

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*Effective leadership for the learning and transformation of school systems is a fast-evolving field of study in the domains of educational research. One of the most important aspects of this study is how leadership affects high-quality education. A growing number of academics are examining student learning outcomes in relation to school culture and environment using the influence of school leadership as a solid theoretical framework. This study examines various school leadership models in this regard. Additionally, it provides an overview of popular leadership styles for fostering learning, such as distributive, participatory, transformational, and instructional leadership. The article continues to discuss the qualities of good school leadership, and the evaluation follows with a discussion of how school leadership impacts student performance. It further organises and contrasts the well-known leadership models that are now grabbing the attention of the academic community in order to uncover the successful aspects of leadership models for boosting students' learning outcomes in a variety of circumstances. Despite the significant number of publications and their diversity, the current analysis discovers a disconnect between various school leadership strategies and effective student learning results. The purpose of identifying some research gaps within the more general topic of leadership for learning is to inspire fresh perspectives and ideas in the field of school leadership that may be useful in filling these gaps.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Murphy et al. (2007) asserts that improving organisational performance requires competent leadership. This assertion lays its basis, established on the profound vision, setting, and specified goals of the school (Hallinger and Murphy, 1986).

Effective school leadership is necessary to create a learning-friendly culture and environment in the classroom that transforms instruction into learning outcomes for all students. Through the literature, researchers have covered a range of leadership strategies, such as distributive, participative, transformational, and instructional leadership. These strategies have developed in a range of challenging situations for the overall growth of institutions. In instructional leadership, teaching-learning processes are given more focus, whereas transformational leadership places a more specific and wide-ranging emphasis on capacity-building for individual and institutional changes. These two approaches of leadership are combined in an action term 'leadership for learning' (Leithwood et al., 2006). Leadership for learning focuses entirely on students' learning and transforming classrooms and schools to support learning (Gurr and Day, 2014). Despite the fact that there is a plethora of data on school leadership and efficacy, managing an efficient school with a focus on outcomes involves a distinct

set of responsibilities (Muijs et al., 2010). However, Krüger et al. (2007) emphasised the need to comprehend the mechanisms through which school leaders are strengthening the performance and improvement of schools. As a result, the broader aim of this study is to examine school leadership approaches to determine the extent to which leadership parameters influence quality education and learning outcomes.

## THE STUDY DESIGN

This study employed a methodical evaluation of the literature that concentrated on studies highlighting leadership for learning. More than fifty papers published in international and national journals have been reviewed for this article under different major heads i.e., instructional leadership, leadership for learning, leading teaching-learning, leading school transformation, and transformational leadership.

## FOUR POPULAR TYPOLOGIES OF SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

Bush and Glover (2003) describe school leadership, as an effective process that drives individual and organisational goals and objectives while identifying and addressing the school's needs, aspirations, and challenges. Moreover, Day et al. (2016) claimed that a school's capacity to improve its overall progress and maintain its effectiveness over time is primarily determined by how school leaders

conceptualise the school's needs and diagnose how to fulfil those needs and how they use various combinations and accumulations of context and time-sensitive interventions to express, reinforce, and sustain clearly stated, organisationally shared educational values. Thus, the leadership of the school encourages a teaching and learning atmosphere that is beneficial to students' overall learning and development (Mythili, 2020). The importance of leadership in a school is viewed by both teachers and students as being second to that of education and learning in the classroom (Leithwood et al., 2004). Robinson et al. (2009) elaborated additionally their view, as it helps in setting goals and expectations, strategically allocating resources, organising, coordinating, assessing instructional processes, and providing a positive learning atmosphere. From the literature, the paper identified four popular models of school leadership which have a great contribution to the progress of schooling, such as, (i) Instructional, (ii) Transformational, (iii) Distributive, and (iv) Participative.

### **INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP AND ITS EFFECTS**

Learning-centered leadership with an emphasis on instruction in the classroom is the primary goal of instructional leadership, which is primarily concerned with students' academic development. The goals of instructional leadership include

establishing clear learning objectives, developing a plan to implement the curriculum, and assessing the efficiency of the teachers. This leadership strategy emphasises the significance of raising the standard of classroom teaching and the school leader's initiatives to support better student learning outcomes (Day, et al., 2016). In a school setting, instructional leadership focuses on three things: (i) establishing goals; (ii) supervising curriculum delivery; and (iii) supporting a healthy teaching environment (Hallinger, 2003). Maintaining a supportive learning environment in the classroom requires careful management of the instructional program, curriculum coordination, oversight and assessment of teacher performance, and observation of student growth (Hallinger and Murphy, 1985). According to studies on the effectiveness of instructional leadership, it can influence students' academic achievements, particularly by working on teacher development, working conditions for teachers, and school culture and ethos (Shatzer et al., 2014). Given that instructional leadership mostly comprises the principal's responsibilities for planning and managing education in schools, the principal outlines and communicates the school's goals to other staff members. Therefore, it can be claimed that this approach is a top-down approach of managing schools (Nedelcu, 2013). Leithwood (1994), asserts that instructional

leadership images are stale because their focus is 'heavily classroom-oriented' and they don't consider 'second-order changes' in the growth of an organizations.

### **TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND ITS EFFECTS**

Transformational school leadership attempts to develop the school's cultural atmosphere and boost its capacity for creativity, rather than just improving curriculum and instruction. Supporting educational advancement both inside and outside of an organisation is the goal of transformational leadership (Hallinger and Heck, 1998). Schools are urged to establish a vision and culture towards improved classroom instructions, and teacher development to improve the whole educational system. Shatzer et al. (2014) emphasised four critical aspects of transformational leadership: inspiring motivation, individualising consideration, idealising influence, and stimulating the intellect to enhance the overall quality of schooling for a more robust school system. It's critical to increase employee performance, establish a vision and goals, comprehend and develop people, restructure the organisation, and oversee the classroom instructions (Leithwood, Harris, and Hopkins, 2008). According to Yang (2014), transformational leadership is constructive for the overall school's growth since it allows the school to address difficulties effectively

and achieve various degrees of improvement at different stages. As a result, at each step of the school's development, the principal must focus on the requirements of the students. Although transformational leadership has been shown to improve student results (Leithwood, 1994), but it does have two key drawbacks. First, it could be used to manipulate or influence teachers who are expected to follow the leader's 'vision' and goals. Second, instead of setting up school-level vision and goals, transformational leadership strategies may be used to ensure adherence to centrally established policies.

### **PARTICIPATIVE LEADERSHIP AND ITS EFFECTS**

A successful model for leadership in a school setting is participative leadership because it promotes positive relationships among staff members and lessens the burden on school administrators (Sergiovanni, 1984). As per the participative leadership model, an organisation's decision-making processes are the organisation's central focus (Leithwood et al., 2004). In its normative paradigm, participation is based on the following: (i) participation will improve the effectiveness of schools; (ii) democratic principles support participation in a site-based administration context; and (iii) any legitimate stakeholder may participate in leadership. In participative leadership context shared leadership roles and

responsibilities will lead to reduced leadership costs if leadership density is deemed a credible replacement for principal leadership (Sergiovanni, 1984). The participative leadership model is popular as it is based on the notions of democratic values. Still, there is a lack of literature on its successful implementation in the school context, specifically for the improvements in learning outcomes. Despite the current emphasis on individual leaders, according to Harris (2004), in the complicated and rapidly changing world that schools are a part of in the twenty-first century, democratic/participative leadership is essential.

### **DISTRIBUTED LEADERSHIP AND ITS EFFECTS**

Decoupling distributed leadership from lines of authority is a critical first step in understanding it because it provides a novel and significant theoretical framework through which school leadership can be reconstructed and rethought. Distributed leadership, as Harris (2004) emphasises, entails acquiring knowledge throughout the organisation as opposed to pursuing expertise just through official positions or functions. Successful school leaders understand the limitations of a centralised management model, and change to a decentralised management model that is “distributed through collaborative and joint working as it equate with maximising human

capacity within the organisation and assist capacity building within schools, which contributes to school improvement” (Harris, 2004). A distributed leadership model in a school setting does not involve individuals managing other individuals but rather is an emerging property of groups or networks in which they emphasise expert opinions by engaging a large number of individuals in leadership activities (Bernett et al., 2003). According to Silins and Mulford (2002), when leadership resources are made available to the whole school community and teachers are given the authority to take decisions that are significant to them, then only student outcomes are more likely to improve. It was discovered that excellent academic achievement among children was connected with schools that encouraged instructors to share leadership roles (Louis and Marks, 1996). There is more evidence that diffused leadership throughout a school staff is more likely to result in positive student outcomes than a top-down leadership approach (Bell et al., 2002). Therefore, it can be said that distributed leadership can positively affect student engagement and school development capacity if it is well-designed and implemented (Day et al., 2009; Hallinger and Heck, 2010). Additionally, distributed leadership can be one of the most effective forces for long-term school improvement since it results from networks and groups of people

combining their expertise (Harris and Spillane, 2008).

### **FROM A COMPARATIVE LENS**

The instructional and transformational school leadership models are the most widely studied and effective when it comes to enhancing schools. Studies have indicated that the instructional leadership paradigm has a greater influence on student outcomes than transformational leadership because it lays more attention on the calibre of the teachers and the instructional processes in the classroom. It emphasises on improving classroom instruction and learning and views the primary responsibility of leaders as supporting greater learning outcomes for students (Day et al., 2016). Robinson et al. (2009) found that the original goal of transformational leadership was to improve staff connections, and that this decreases the likelihood that it will produce excellent student outcomes. Instructional leadership is primarily concerned with enhancing these procedures because teaching and learning are the schools' primary functions. On the other hand, transformational leadership has traditionally placed an emphasis on inspiration and vision, focusing on creating institutions and attitudes which improve the standard of instruction, strategising goals, fostering

employee growth, and redesigning organisations.

For instructional leadership, maintaining a constant focus on teaching-learning is essential. But it places more emphasis on direction than on influence. In contrast, the transformational leadership model focuses on facilitating greater motivation and commitment among stakeholders and establishes a path to achieve the organisation's goal. In case of participative leadership, it emphasises the necessity of a collaborative approach, but it lacks a specific leadership method (Bush, and Glover, 2003). Despite being extensively distributed, it has a higher impact on students, and overall school outcomes, proving that it is more likely to improve leadership capacity this way rather than relying solely on individual leadership (Leithwood et al., 2006). Thus, in contrast to popular leadership models, many researchers advocate integrating diverse theories to better understand leadership and its effects on students' achievements rather than adopting a linear approach. As Marks and Printy (2003) stated, while a single model of school leadership is not sufficient for overall school progress, an integrated leadership model can fulfil specific school goals. The effective traits of school principalship as leadership for learning can thus be associated with an integrated aspect of instructional, transformational, participative, and distributed leadership.



**Table1**  
**Comparing Four Popular Leadership Models**

<b>Instructional</b>	<b>Transformational</b>	<b>Participative</b>	<b>Distributed</b>
The primary goal of schools is to improve efficient instructional strategies for quality classroom learning.	It is less likely to significantly impact student results because it initially focused on staff connections and capacity development.	It emphasises the significance of teamwork, and it does not represent a unique leadership style.	Assist schools in growing capacity, adding to school improvement and optimising the organisation's human capability.
Keep teaching-learning as a constant focus, but one that is more concerned with the direction of impact than the influence process.	Provides a foundation for articulating and working toward the institution's or organisation's vision.	A helpful approach to building a good relationship among the staff together and in easing the responsibility of school heads.	Sharing leadership resources throughout the school community and empowering teachers to make a difference in the classroom will likely improve student outcomes.
The alignment of school ethos and culture, as well as the shaping of school goals, to increase the quality of educational outcomes.	By fostering individual and organisational learning, it focuses on improving the teaching-learning environment and aids in creating a school culture and vision.	In the framework of site-based management, participation will boost school performance since democratic ideals justify it.	

**SCHOOL LEADERSHIP AND ITS IMPACT ON STUDENTS' LEARNING OUTCOMES**

School leadership matters from the perspectives of when and where it is most needed for students' academic success. It indirectly impacts the learning of pupils and it is always disseminated throughout the organisation as

leadership using influential power and appreciation (Hallinger and Heck, 1998). According to Leithwood et al. (2006), school leadership has a significant impact on students' learning outcomes since it is second only to classroom teaching and learning in importance. Additionally, Witziers et al. (2003) also argued

that this impact can be seen in changes to school organisation and its culture, teachers' performances, and instructional methods. The school principal, who acts as the institution's head, has a significant amount of influence to affect the ambience of an institution, including the mindsets of the faculty and staff, the academic progress of students, and other factors (Waters et al., 2003).

According to Robinson et al. (2008), schools that emphasise interpersonal relationships, work culture, and teaching-learning processes are more likely to influence students' overall learning outcomes. In promoting student achievement, instructional leadership rather than transformational is more beneficial. On students' academic success, school heads have a big influence. Principals may have a more powerful influence on student's academic achievements in their schools than the environment in which the school is located. Achieving greater student achievement results from the principal's actions to keep track of students' academic performance, safeguard instructional time, and offer rewards for learning and teaching (Shatzer et al., 2014).

According to Marks and Printy (2003), an integrated style of leadership that incorporates

both transformational and instructional leadership strategies has a more positive impact on a school's success as measured by the effectiveness of its pedagogy and student accomplishment. To improve overall school performance, both in terms of classroom instruction and capacity-building, instructional and transformational leadership approaches should be implemented. Leaders also can influence the environment in which teaching-learning takes place to help improve student's learning outcomes, along with helping teachers and staff members build their capacity for professional growth and transformation.

To improve students' overall achievements, school principals must focus intensely on instruction and learning and work collaboratively to define school goals and vision (Cruickshank, 2017). Strong leadership approaches are discussed in the study "Successful school leadership: What it is and how it promotes pupil learning" by Leithwood et al. (2006). Taking these assertions into account, school leadership is ranked second in terms of influencing student learning. However, rather than dictating school leadership, basic practises that all leaders must follow are less important than how leaders use them.



**Table 2**  
**Contributational Relationship of Popular Models of**  
**School Leadership for Learning Outcomes**

<b>Leadership styles</b>	<b>Leadership indicators</b>	<b>Leadership for learning</b>
<b>Instructional leadership</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Instructional programme</li> <li>• Mission</li> <li>• School learning climate</li> <li>• Organisational conditions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Instructional programme</li> <li>• Curricular programme</li> <li>• Assessment programme</li> <li>• Vision for learning</li> <li>• Learning communities, team-oriented environments, and a diverse set of leadership sources</li> <li>• Resources appropriation, distribution and use</li> <li>• School culture and environment context</li> <li>• Acclamation</li> </ul>
<b>Transformational leadership</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visions and goals</li> <li>• Staffs' attitude in the pursuit of goals</li> <li>• Bottom-up approaches of shared leadership</li> </ul>	
<b>Distributed leadership</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The leadership approach focused on team and group work</li> <li>• Stress is given on organisational learning</li> <li>• Collaborative approach responsive to the context</li> </ul>	
<b>Participative leadership</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We are working together with a transparent chain of command. A leader empowers their followers and includes them in decision-making</li> </ul>	

*(The table is based on Daniels et al., 2019; Aas and Brandmo, 2016; Harris and De Flaminis, 2016; Thompson and Glasø, 2015; Sun and Leithwood, 2012; and Hallinger, 2011)*

Leadership takes into account the environment in which they operate; in schools it indirectly enhances teaching and learning via resilience and perseverance. Five leadership practices that influence student learning are defined by Robinson et al. (2008) that are: teachers should set objectives and expectations; organise and plan their teaching-learning activities; encourage themselves and others to participate in professional development activities; and maintain a calm and encouraging environment.

Leadership, according to Hallinger (2005), is a process of reciprocal interaction in which instructional leaders establish the goals for the school and coordinate the culture and policies of the institution to have an impact on the standard of educational outcomes. In response, it urges instructional leadership to concentrate on raising the standard of in-class teaching and learning. Beyond student learning, school leadership has a positive influence on developing an environment that will enhance the overall school quality. School leadership indirectly affects student learning by setting the required conditions for teaching and learning. A school's leadership methods must be culturally appropriate and contextually flexible to benefit students, teachers, and the school (Mythili, 2020).

**FACTORS INFLUENCING LEARNING OUTCOMES**

Leadership for learning describes school leaders' actions to achieve the best learning outcomes, specifically in the context of students' achievements (Hallinger, 2011). It is an approach to leadership that integrates the elements of significant leadership models. Leithwood et al. (2004) highlight four influential factors contributing to leadership for learning outcomes: setting direction, leading others, restructuring the organisation, and improving the instructional program. As it is the process of active participation of an entire school community, further, Robinson et al. (2007) also contended five influencing factors to consider: setting objectives and

**Table 3**  
**Influence of Leadership Styles on Learning Outcomes**

Leadership styles	Influences	Learning Outcomes
Instructional leadership	Curriculum planning and quality instruction	Increased retention of subject matter content, effective teaching-learning, promotes more teacher-student interactions.
Transformational leadership	Effective communication and maintaining sound internal and external relations	Promotes better leadership and communication skills with more critical thinking/problem-solving ability.
Distributed leadership	Defining the mission and vision	Stronger connection with others.
Participative leadership	Organisational culture, trust, and collaboration	Develops values among stakeholders.
Integrated leadership	Recognizing and awarding successes and accomplishments	More resilience. Better pro-environmental behaviours.

standards, judicious resource allocation, organising, supervising, and assessing the teaching-learning process, encouraging taking part in teachers' professional development, and maintaining a supportive and orderly environment. Moreover, it primarily focuses on learning for students and for teachers to achieve the highest learning outcomes by the schools; therefore, Shannon and Bergeson (2009) has extended nine influential factors which directly or indirectly contribute to the best learning outcomes: a focused goal that everyone shares, with great expectations for all learners, strong school leadership for elevated levels of cooperation and communication, state-aligned curriculum, instruction, and assessment, regular supervision of teaching-learning, focused capacity building for professional development, a supportive learning culture, and community engagement.

## FINDINGS

The result of the findings of the review suggests that different models of school leadership are essential factors that significantly impact students' learning outcomes. Still, it has considerable effects on students' academic achievement through the different leadership approaches of school principals (Kythreotis et al., 2010). First, this research emphasises the importance of the leadership style of school principals in influencing students' academic development. Second, one category of studies identified direct impacts while

others found indirect effects, the disagreement between the different researchers is exacerbated by the direct impact of this aspect on student achievement. Third, the different leadership approaches of principals should be given more consideration. Because different leadership approaches influence students' learning outcomes in different ways; in this context, the one-to-one direct relationship between principals and students should be given more emphasis to achieve more successful learning outcomes (Kythreotis et al., 2010). Furthermore, the specific leadership practices in which they engage greatly impact students' learning outcomes. Additionally, most research was centered on the school principals' instructional leadership style because it directly affects the teaching-learning process. However, an integrated transformational and instructional leadership strategy is more effective for enhancing learning outcomes and advancing a school progress (Bush and Glover, 2003). It is easier to influence student outcomes and school performance when integrated leadership blends the transformational and instructional leadership strategies. It can help students perform better by affecting the settings in which teaching and learning take place and enhancing the capacity for professional growth and change (Shatzer et al., 2014).

## CONCLUSION

According to a majority of studies, school leadership is just as important

to the overall performance of the school as well as classroom teaching and learning, despite having a smaller direct or indirect impact on students' learning outcomes. Even though no one leadership approach or strategy will be perfect for ensuring the advancement of all schools and the academic success of all students, school leaders should make sure they have a good understanding of the unique characteristics of their institution before choosing the approaches and strategies they will employ (Cruickshank, 2017). In this context, Robinson et al. (2008) extended their view, when leadership in school concentrates on teaching-learning, teacher development, and how they strive to influence the teaching practices that matter—these areas are more inclined to result in a beneficial effect on learners' academic performance, and well-being. Consequently, school leaders looking

to boost their student's academic performance may find the integrated leadership style advantageous. An integral part of the transformational model is the vision for the school, which cannot exist independently of its context; an integrated leadership model begins with a contingent approach. The foundation for communicating and acting toward this vision is then provided by transformational leadership. As part of a transformative strategy, instructional leadership defines the significant priorities of a learning organisation in broad terms (Bush and Glover, 2003). As a result, leadership models that are more closely related to teaching and learning are more likely to benefit students' learning outcomes (Robinson, 2008). Thus, leadership style, school culture, and classroom culture all influence students' learning behaviour (Kythreotis et al., 2010).

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