

# Pedagogical Leadership in School A Qualitative Study

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## Abstract

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*The concept of pedagogical leadership in school is relatively new that has emerged in the early 1980s and has not received much attention in the modern India. Since school is a people-based organisation, the quality of relationships among stakeholders is significant in determining the effectiveness of its functioning. The role of the principal or school head as an effective pedagogical leader improves the quality of teachers' pedagogic styles and the engagement of students in the teaching-learning process. In this study, the two Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalayas, one located in Chandigarh and the other in Niwarsi, Kurukshetra, were randomly selected. The case study method was followed to study the quality of education. The findings of the study are useful for policymakers and Principals to develop a capacity-building programme for Principals.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Since its independence, India has made an unprecedented quantitative expansion of education facilities at all levels. We had 1.4 lakh schools in India in the year 1950–51 at the time of independence. However, according to the UDISE+ data, as per the academic year 2018–19, India

has more than 10.83 lakh schools (UDISE+, 2019–20). At the United Nations Conference, 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were developed for the years 2015–2030, replacing the eight Millennium Development Goals. The idea was to establish a set of global objectives related to the political, social, and

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economic problems that the humanity is currently facing. Of these 17 SDGs, which we are planning to attain by 2030, Goal 4 aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. Thus, 'quality of education' is a significant concern even in the global forum. Likewise, in modern India, one of the major concerns of Indian Education is to improve the quality for which there have been enormous innovations and interventions since the time of independence.

These include the Mid-day Meal Scheme, Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation, innovative teacher education programmes, special attention to Early Childhood Care and Education, and different kinds of schools under organisations like Kendriya Vidyalayas, Navodayas, Sarvodayas, Rajkiya Pratibha Vikas Vidyalayas, Nayugs, Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas, Ashram Schools, Eklavya Model Schools, etc.

We cannot deny the role of stakeholders in improving the quality of education. Stakeholders, such as policymakers, school heads, teachers, parents, administrators, etc., are a part and parcel of the process of expansion of quality and quantity of education. Out of all the stakeholders, this paper highlights the head teacher/principal's role as a pedagogical leader in improving the quality of education. The principal of a school has a massive role in the development of schools, for which they have many

managerial responsibilities related to infrastructure, stock, facilities and management of staff. They are the ones who facilitate the implementation of policy and initiatives proposed by the government organisations or autonomous bodies.

Further, they also contribute in guiding teachers to regulate and enhance the performance of learners, which is the main focus of pedagogical leadership. The concept of pedagogical leadership of a principal in a school is a relatively new concept that emerged in the early 1980s and has not been explored much in the modern Indian context. We can even see the evidences of the traces of leadership in educational administration in our ancient texts, where *Acharyas* brought together knowledge, tradition and practices to run an effective educational process through various teaching-learning strategies. This study emerged as the result of a need to develop an in-depth understanding of the contributions of principals of secondary schools. We aim to determine how they perceive their role as pedagogical leaders for providing pedagogical support to the teachers in their school to improve the teaching-learning process.

The objectives of the study to:

- Assess the principals' understanding of their role as a pedagogical leader.
- Identify pedagogical support principals provide to teachers to improve classroom teaching processes.

- Explore the issues and challenges faced by principals while facilitating as pedagogical leaders.
- Examine the effectiveness of the principal's pedagogical support from the teacher's perspective in improving the teaching-learning process.

The following are the research questions:

- What is the level of awareness of a principal as a pedagogical leader in the school?
- How is the school's principal providing pedagogical support to teachers for improving student learning outcomes?
- How are the school improvement strategies planned and implemented by the principal effectively?
- What problems and constraints in school improvement are experienced by the school principals?
- How do teachers perceive the pedagogical support of the principals in improving their teaching process?
- To what extent are the parents satisfied with the teachers' behaviour with them and their wards/children?

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Heikka and Suhonen (2019) conducted a research on Distributed Pedagogical Leadership functions in Early Childhood Education (ECE).

The research was carried out in a medium-sized town in Finland between 2016 and 2018. This research collected the data via six semi-structured theme interviews and written documents from the participants. This small-scale study aimed at identifying the functions of distributed pedagogical leadership through the interdependence of leadership enactments by the Centre Directors and ECE teachers. Data on the perceptions of six ECE professionals, two ECE Centre Directors, two ECE teachers and two child care nurses on distributed pedagogical leadership were collected via individual interviews and written documents. The study concluded that for a real-world function of ECE, there was a need for shared visions, goals, and values constructed between the staff. Interdependence between the staff and the leadership is significant for pedagogical development. The teachers valued the space of guidance and reflection in enhancing their pedagogical practices. Operational structure and cultural ethos are significant for the system's functioning. Enhancing efficient and participative decision-making within centres to increase interdependence built the decisions about pedagogy, pedagogical development and interventions from the community.

Similarly, Fonsen and Soukainen (2019) conducted a research titled Sustainable Pedagogical Leadership in Finnish Early Childhood

Education (ECE): An Evaluation by ECE Professionals'. The research aimed to investigate how ECE professionals evaluate their Leadership. The context of the study was a development project called Sustainable Leadership in ECE conducted in two municipalities in Finland. The project aimed to investigate and create a sustainable structure for ECE leadership to strengthen pedagogical leadership. The participants comprised 110 ECE professionals, including experts, directors, teachers, and nurses. The research was based on responses to an electronic questionnaire about the quality of ECE leadership built around six themes: Leadership of the organisation, Human resource management, Structure of the organisation, Pedagogical leadership, Knowledge management and well-being, and Leadership of self. The results indicate that only in the pedagogical leadership theme, there were statistically significant differences between the groups of professionals. Having high professional status and being highly qualified seem to enhance the ability of professionals to reflect critically on pedagogical leadership and to have more demanding attitudes about the quality of pedagogical leadership.

Seiser (2020) conducted a research titled 'Exploring Enhanced Pedagogical Leadership: An action research study involving Swedish Principals'. This action research

reports about the principals' pedagogical leadership and what happens when the school principals explore pedagogical leading. Principals tried out different pedagogical leading actions in their schools. The results showed that these actions were significant in the improvement work and brought about several substantial changes in their leading pedagogical practices.

Aung (2018) conducted a study titled 'Pedagogical Leadership in Myanmar: An Exploratory Study'. The research aims to explore the practices and experiences of the current Myanmar secondary school principals concerning embracing pedagogical leadership to adopt new educational changes. The findings revealed that High School Principals focused on the development of the whole child as the primary responsibility, that is, to attend both academic and non-academic functions. In contrast, staff development is a secondary concern. It also claimed that a supportive school community could allow them to focus on both primary and secondary concerns. In this, there were imbalances in the inception of pedagogical leadership indicated in the priorities of school principals.

Marak (2013) conducted a study titled 'A Study of Educational Leadership among Secondary School Teachers in South Garo Hills District of Meghalaya'. The study aimed to find out the leadership in education among secondary school teachers

in South Garo Hills district of Meghalaya. The findings of the study indicated that half of the teachers secondary school in South Garo Hills district of Meghalaya were having high educational leadership. Further, no significant difference was found between male and female teachers. But male teachers were having slightly higher educational leadership than the female counterparts. Also, there was no significant difference observed between rural and urban teachers. But rural teachers were at slightly higher level in educational leadership than the urban teachers. The trained secondary school teachers were having higher educational leadership than the untrained teachers.

Gafoor and Ali (2009) conducted a study titled 'Existing Knowledge Base and Perspectives of Principals on Weaker Links in Educational Leadership Preparation in Kerala' to study the perspectives of Principals on the strengths and weaknesses in Educational Leadership Programmes. The results of the study indicated that the school administrators lacked the ability of planning, controlling, effectively communicating with and providing motivation to teachers. They failed to maintain a balance between observing the official rules along with instilling confidence in their colleagues and also, failed to express creative criticism harmoniously and in providing humanitarian consideration to colleagues. Content analysis revealed that there was not enough accumulated body of

knowledge and practice to foster the competencies expected from an educational leader for realising the current visions on education in the local context of Kerala.

### **METHODOLOGY**

The study uses a qualitative approach where the focus is to develop an understanding of the research objective in natural settings. The study uses the case study method. The list of ten good-performing Navodaya Vidyalayas in the northern region were provided by Navodaya Vidyalaya Samiti (NVS). Out of them, two schools were randomly selected on merit basis through intensive discussion with the Principals of the schools. One school from Chandigarh region situated at Chandigarh and another from the Jaipur region situated at Niwarsi, Kurukshetra, were selected for the case study. A team comprising of 2-3 experts from the NCERT visited each school for four to five days. The research team conducted an in-depth study on the role of the school principal as a pedagogical leader. The team interacted with the Principal, teachers, students, parents, Librarian, Mess In charge, and other employees of the school to determine the working/functioning of the school. Various tools were used to identify and evaluate how the instructional strategies provided by the Principal assisted and facilitated the aspects of the teaching process. The research team developed an Observation Schedule to observe the

school environment and curricular activities. The research team developed and used a questionnaire to cover basic information on various aspects like infrastructure facilities, human resources, and teaching-learning facilities, including ICT and other resources for the overall development of students. A semi-structured interview schedule was developed to collect information from Principals, teachers, and parents. Focus Group Discussions with students and parents were conducted. Documents like lesson plans, project work, curricular activities, various school records, annual reports, institutional reports, duty master reports, and class inspection tools were reviewed and analysed to collect information related to various aspects of the study. Field notes were taken by the research team while administering various tools in the schools. Data was analysed school-wise narratively and thematically to draw conclusions and implications of the study.

### **DELIMITATION OF THE STUDY**

The sample size is limited to two schools, as the objective was to develop an understanding of the role of Principals as pedagogic leaders in developing a capacity-building programme.

### **FINDINGS**

Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya is a co-educational residential school. These schools are fully financed by the Government of India and Navodaya Vidyalaya Samiti

(NVS)— an autonomous organisation under the Ministry of Education. There are 484 students, 29 teachers, and 17 non-teaching staff in the school in Chandigarh. There are 519 students, 38 teachers, and 17 non-teaching staff in the school in Niwarsi, Kurukshetra.

### **Interaction with the Students**

In their focus group discussion with the team of the NCERT, students in both schools reported that they were satisfied with the school environment and facilities. The team members observed a strong bond between the students and teachers. The students from the school in Chandigarh highlighted that the Principal had taken a keen interest in developing a Social Science Garden in the school, which was very useful for students in understanding various concepts such as the earth's structure, mountains, forms of rivers, etc. The school gave good results in the CBSE examinations. The Principal in Niwarsi, Kurukshetra, has developed a Herbal Garden in the Vidyalaya to make the students aware and familiar about medicinal plants.

Students emphasised that their school is better than other schools in many ways, such as eco-club activities, library as well as readers-club activities, and sports and games activities. The students enrolled for professional courses stated that the students who have passed out were already in high-ranking positions, which inspired them to

dream and work hard. Students from both schools told the team that the school authorities provided ample opportunities to interact and contribute to different programmes. Students reported that credit for all this goes to the Principal and teachers of the school.

### **Interaction with the Teachers**

In their interviews with the team members, teachers reported that they always discussed academic issues with the Principal, who provided guidance to address those issues. The Principal in Chandigarh leads the Subject Committee Meeting with the PGT and TGT teachers, thus providing teachers with space to discuss the subject-related issues. Likewise, the Principal in Niwarsi, Kurukshetra, would organise monthly meetings to improve the quality of education and a monthly subject committee to facilitate teachers and hear their views. Thus, creating a communal working space for the teachers to share and discuss their pedagogical strategies. Since the Principals were heading the subject committee meetings of social sciences in Chandigarh and of sciences in Niwarsi, Kurukshetra, their presence and feedback to improve the courses were helpful for the teachers. The guidance of the Principal from Chandigarh has motivated the teachers to identify the low-achieving students and give more personal attention to them. This attention has helped children very well in improving their performance.

### **Interaction with the Parents**

In their focus group discussion with the NCERT team, the Parents Teacher Council members reported they were pleased with the Principal and teachers' performance and the school's overall environment. The parents from the Chandigarh school further expressed a significant improvement in their children's behaviour and observed that they have become more responsible and self-confident. Children also improved their time-management skills. Meanwhile, parents shared that the opportunity to seek career counselling and guidance in the school in Niwarsi, Kurukshetra, was significant in helping children with their aspirations. The parents in the Council in Niwarsi, Kurukshetra, were also engaged in the process of schooling. Their contributions helped in the development of the infrastructure of the schools, for instance, the fans and hall tiles in the school. Principals were mindful of parents' suggestions and welcomed their participation in school activities.

### **Interaction with the Principals**

The school's Principal at Chandigarh shared with the team members that she took an interest in planning, monitoring, and executing all the academic and administrative activities. She also took the initiative to provide academic guidance to the teachers whenever needed. The Principal said she is striving hard to inculcate values among teachers and students and develop excellence in all areas

through teamwork. She monitored and facilitated all the activities at the school, such as physical training, morning assembly, teaching in the classroom, afternoon remedial and supervised study, coverage of subject-wise and class-wise syllabus, and conducting unit and term tests.

The Principal was not simply an authority figure, but her engagement in mentoring the staff and children helped in the inculcation of values, traditions of excellence, and alliance in the school. Also, the encouragement from the Principal to participate in competitions, of both curricular and co-curricular nature, developed a healthy rapport between students and the Principal. In the Principal's words, the school bagged not only regional toppers in Class XII (2016–17) but also regional and national toppers in Class X (2017–18).

The Principal of the JNV at Niwarsi, Kurukshetra, would invite subject experts and experts in pedagogy from universities and colleges from time to time for the professional growth of teachers. The role of a pedagogic leader motivates the Principal to develop positive relationships between teachers and students. She also advised her teachers to generate a classroom learning environment full of joy and excitement. Such an environment motivates students to work hard to their full potential. When the Principal joined the school, the result of the CBSE board exams was only 70 per cent, but now with the efforts of the team, it has increased

to 77.8 per cent. The credit for increased results goes to the effort by the Principal to invite guest lecturers and experts to empower the teachers in the school.

Additionally, in the school in Niwarsi, Kurukshetra, the Principal coordinated and participated in many exchange programmes. In 2010, she got an opportunity to visit the Associated school of the U.K. During the programme, the Principals of five schools in the U.K., along with 22 students, visited JNV Niwarsi, Kurukshetra. A delegation of 39 countries visited the school. The teams from South Korea, North Korea and Vietnam recorded video of all the school's activities and telecasted the Vedic Mathematics class on one of the famous channels in South Korea. Development of language laboratory, Math Park, and Herbal Garden were among the other initiatives that the Principal conducted. These kinds of spaces for hands on activities facilitated rapport-building among students and fostered collaborative learning.

## **DISCUSSION**

The main objectives of the study were to determine the extent to which the Principals of schools perceived their role as pedagogical leaders and its impact on the pedagogical processes and the quality of education. From the case studies of the two schools, it is clear that the pedagogical leadership of Principals affects all the aspects of teaching-learning processes. The endeavors of the Principals of JNVs



in addressing the learning needs of the students and teaching practices of the teachers in the school are praiseworthy. These Principals have also increased the level of students' academic achievement. Zaretta (2015) says, 'As children enter school, we expect them to be dependent learners. One of the key responsibilities of teachers in the early school years is to help students become independent learners. We expect students to become independent learners by third grade.' However, frequently recreate their school experiences in the classroom. Therefore, we need influential pedagogical leaders in schools who will not only empower teachers to help children become independent learners. According to Gardener, there are multiple pathways to learning. In a teacher-led classroom, only limited learning styles can be accommodated. Nevertheless, in a student-centred classroom, there is space to cater to these multiple learning styles—especially when the Principals are keen on making teaching a reflective process and on making learning more cooperative.

Moreover, collaborative learning and environmental interaction facilitate the process of knowledge construction (Guthrie and Schuermann, 2010). Thus, we need Principals who prefer student-centred learning environments in the schools over teacher-directed classrooms. From both the schools, we observed that the Principals encouraged students to engage in various activities, making

the school a personal space, thus shortening the gap between home and school.

### **CONCLUSION**

Leadership, especially in schools, is about change, as it is a people-based space. The relationship that the leader, i.e., the Principal in this case, has with the teachers, students, parents, non-teaching staff, and other stakeholders, are preliminary in determining the quality of education. Principals, as pedagogic leaders, not only focus on the school's development but also have a role in improving the classroom practices. The Principal's role in implementing the policies and regulating initiatives is significant for the school's growth. The dynamics of the Principal's relationship with the teachers and students make the classroom practices constructive and improve students' learning and teachers' qualities. This study can be further expanded to many public and private schools.

### **IMPLICATION OF THE STUDY**

Based on the findings of the study, the NCERT may develop a training design for capacity building of Principals/ School Heads. The duration of interaction may be of two to three days. Experiences may be provided through self-learning mode. The programmes may be organised on a regional basis in which Principals/ School Heads and SCERT personnel may be invited. Later the programme may be passed on to the SCERTs.

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