

Acquisition of Leadership Skills at the Primary Stage

Ruchi Dwivedi*

Abstract

Primary school students evolve constantly as they are in the formative stage of their lives. Apart from being imparted basic education, they need to be trained in leadership skills from an early age. Therefore, the teaching fraternity needs to put in conscious effort to develop leadership skills in the students. The acquisition of leadership skills helps enhance the students' academic, as well as, social performance. These skills enable them to learn the art of sustaining and nurturing relationships, defining identities, problem-solving, and thereby, achieving the desired goal. Taking this into consideration, this paper tries to analyse different leadership skills at the cognitive domain, which play a critical role in the overall development of students at the primary stage.

INTRODUCTION

The relative outlook on 'leadership' formulates it as a process, skill, trait, attribute and quality that emphasises skilful social interaction and relationship. This initiates reflection on the fact that leadership includes influencing others and leading one's own self in a certain direction. Leadership is a critical aspect of all social endeavours. School leadership impacts all facets of education —

policies for educators, administration or school authorities, teaching-learning process — thereby, shaping the conditions and environment in which the teaching-learning process is to take place.

LEADERSHIP SKILLS AMONG PRIMARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

The Indian education system has witnessed various aspects that have evolved with time, i.e., right from the

* *Research Scholar*, Department of Education, Faculty of Education and Psychology, The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, Vadodara, Gujarat.

ancient period. “There has been a radical change in the Indian education system from teaching the *Vedas*, religion, scriptures, etc., to coaching about technologies like virtual reality, programming, technology and others” (Moller, 2005). After Independence, a number of schools came up in the country in order to impart quality education to all children.

The common theme that runs across all leadership theories is that leadership is no longer confined to powerful individuals, directing others and giving long speeches before thousands of people, and imposing their decisions on others. “Rather, it is about fostering collaboration, working towards common goals and acting as a leader in any role assumed, regardless of whether it meets the classic definition of a leader” (Kolzow, 2014).

The major objective of primary education is to impart literacy, numeracy, creativity and communication skills to students. They should develop a desire to continue learning with ability for critical thinking and logical judgment. Moreover, they should be taught to appreciate and respect the dignity of work, social standards, moral and religious values. “The need for systematic approach to school leadership development in India has become significant in the context of government policy initiatives in support of the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act 2009, the right to quality education, and

other educational reforms” (Recommendations on Proposed New Education Policy, 2016).

The realisation of these initiatives directed towards developing effective school leadership depends on higher authorities, as well as, students willing to learn. But, unfortunately, a majority of students in the country do not receive formal training for developing the base that can help them learn the required skills, including leadership.

Some of the challenges that primary school teachers face in the Indian school system are as follows.

- Varying levels of knowledge of content and pedagogy among teachers
- Rise in pupil strength
- Mismatch between advanced technology and ideology of old teachers who are rigid in their approach

It is ironical that schools in India follow an insular firm rule, where only customised daily activities take place leading to a monotonous arrangement (prescribed curriculum from policymakers, educators, etc.). “There are no structured and reliable ways of developing accountability systems and practices for school leadership (other than the narrowly defined board exam results or yearly academic results)” (Arcia, et al., 2011). This arrangement causes dearth of dynamic leaders in schools, who would take a lead in various activities.

Routine activities assume greater importance rather than creative thoughts and workouts. “There are not many organisations that can help bring development and empowerment among school student leaders. The prescribed initiatives seem to be good for school leaders but not enough as they still cover only a small mass of students” (Pont, et al., 2008).

“The current scenario of school students actually endorses some concrete mechanisms from the government” (CPSEs, 2011). The mechanisms need to include tangible ideas with support of best practices from leadership development models for students. It must be noted that teachers are working with little freedom to innovate and try new strategies or execute creative ideas.

DIMENSIONS OF LEADERSHIP WITH RESPECT TO COGNITIVE DOMAIN

Skill development at the cognitive domain involves progressive construction of erudition skills, such as concentration, remembrance and ideas. These skills enable children to process sensory information and eventually help them learn to evaluate, analyse, remember, draw comparisons, and understand the cause and effect of various issues. These skills help analyse how a learner understands new information and recalls concepts. Most schools do not test cognitive skills and only focus on achievement test. Understanding the cognitive strengths and needs of students is the key to effective learning. With regard

to the efforts of primary students in day-to-day classroom activities, they are expected to follow a set of prescribed directions to complete assignments and homework. They need to develop problem solving skill at the primary stage and sustain it throughout their scholastic career as they prepare for social life.

All these characteristics can be inculcated in students if they are provided with quality education. The dimensions of leadership in primary students represent a wide range of these characteristics and skills. However, these dimensions of leadership are neither a checklist of things to be accomplished, nor a scale of perfection against which leaders measure themselves. The acquisition of these skills helps students understand life better and enable the development of systematic thought process in them. Taking a note of these points, this paper tries to encapsulate the cognitive domain, which plays a crucial role in the development of leadership skills among primary school students.

Strategic planning skills

“Strategy is not the consequence of planning, but the opposite: it’s the starting point” (Mintzberg, 1994). Great leaders are outstanding at strategic planning. They have the ability to look ahead and anticipate with some accuracy. Strategising helps a child analyse and evaluate how to accomplish a work before and while attempting it. Strategic planning is

the process of setting a vision and realising it through small, achievable and practical goals. Students, who work with strategic planning, set goals, decide what actions need to be taken, and help others achieve those goals. Planning always starts with goal setting. But it is not a single process exercise. It requires the collaboration of other skills that can help fulfill the real objectives of strategic planning.

Goal setting skill

Goal setting is the process of identifying the desired accomplishments and targets for an individual. It varies from person-to-person and time-to-time. A successful leader always maintains a positive and direct approach in life. It does not matter what is going on around such a person. The leader always stays focused and is not carried away by success or depressed by failures. Therefore, the students need to focus on their goals. They need to be clear about what they want to achieve and how they can achieve the goals. Therefore, they must be encouraged to write their goals and the strategic actions they plan to take in order to achieve the set targets. They need to work to accomplish their goals every day. Such actions are only possible when the students are able to differentiate between right and wrong, and problem and solution. Besides, they must possess decision making skill when they actually set a goal. This process can involve another skill called 'analytical skill'.

Analytical skill

This refers to the ability to analyse the given information, solve the problems and make correct decisions. Being analytical requires critical observation of a situation, concept or an event. Observation and asking questions are the key factors required for developing and improving analytical skills among students. A student, who sets a goal for strategic planning, must be able to analyse and evaluate one's plan and its importance. This ability inculcates many skills in the students like paying attention to details, critical thinking, decision making and problem solving.

Critical thinking skill

Developing analytical skill is not possible without critical thinking. Critical thinking is the ability to evaluate a situation or problem. It infers that students should not accept an argument, information or assumption without raising questions. This requires breaking down a concept into steps or processes in order to make an independent evaluation to get the correct answer. This skill can be inculcated in students by providing them with question, discussion and waiting time during classroom teaching. "It is self-directed, self-disciplined, self-monitored and self-corrective thinking. It entails effective communication and problem solving abilities, as well as, a commitment to overcome our native ego-centrism and socio-centrism" (*Defining Critical Thinking — Foundation for Critical Thinking*, 2018).

A critical thinker is able to deduce consequences from the knowledge at hand and knows how to make use of this knowledge in order to solve the problems.

Communication skill

Another important quality that leaders strive to perfect is the ability to speak effectively and persuasively. Until a person communicates clearly, it is difficult to get the desired results or outcomes. A persuasive and effective communicator can be a good leader. If the students use this skill effectively, they, too, can achieve better results. Other than being an effective speaker, one also needs to hone the art of listening in order to ensure effective communication. Listening skill enables a person to stay focused when a speaker speaks and understand the contents of the speech. Students need to communicate consciously with teachers, classmates, family members and relatives.

Self-awareness skill

Integrity is undoubtedly the supreme quality of leadership. "Honesty and integrity are two important ingredients which make a good leader. With integrity, there is no need to fear, since nothing is there to hide" (*Integrity and Values*, 2018). The core of integrity lies in truthfulness. It is a common perception that students never lie until they learn to lie from their surroundings, and later, this behaviour creeps into their personality. Students assume that if their mistakes get

noticed, they may get punished. But honesty does not mean that the person is weak or unsure of something. It means that one has self-confidence and self-awareness to recognise the value of others without feeling threatened. They need to encourage others to shine rather than looking for the light for owning self.

A successful student leader needs to continuously anticipate, evaluate and remain open-minded and flexible. If the student cannot influence others to become motivated around a common goal, they will struggle to be effective inside and outside of the classroom. As a leader, students should ooze with confidence and be assertive to command respect from teachers and peer students. The student leader must not be afraid of being challenged.

CONCLUSION

Education is the most important asset that can endow the society with skilled student leaders. There is a need for a paradigm shift in the education system. Therefore, to strengthen the quality of leadership and educational administration in India, policy makers and administrators, school authority and teachers need to take concerted actions. Altering traditional mindsets in school is not easy and sustaining the change is even more challenging. The greatest challenge for a student leader is to develop practicable components of culturally significant standards of skill via teaching and learning in

the classroom setup. By introducing small changes in the curriculum and pedagogical practices, there will be a positive impact on the classroom environment, which will encourage students to ask questions, and hence, develop critical thinking skill. All these skills help develop leadership qualities in the students, and cultivate them into strong and effective leaders.

REFERENCES

- ARCIA, G., ET AL. 2011. *School Autonomy and Accountability*. SABER, World Bank.
- CPSEs. 2011. 'Report of Panel of Experts on Reforms in Central Public Sector Enterprises'. Planning Commission, Government of India, New Delhi, India.
- KOLZOW, D. R. 2014. Leading from within: Building Organizational Leadership Capacity.
- MINTZBERG, H. 1994. Rethinking Strategic Planning Part II: New Roles for Planners. *Long Range Planning*. Vol. 27. No. 3, pp. 22–30.
- MOLLER, J. 2005: Reason and Emotion: Coping with Accountability, in Sugrue, C (Ed.). *Passionate Principalship: Learning from Life Histories of School Leaders*. Routledge Falmer. London, UK.
- PONT, B., ET AL. 2008. *Improving School Leadership*. Vol. 2.

WEBSITES

- Defining Critical Thinking - Foundation for Critical Thinking (2018), Retrieved from <https://www.criticalthinking.org/pages/defining-critical-thinking/766>.
- Integrity and Values (2018), Retrieved from www.integrityandvalues.com/leadership-traits/ Recommendations on Proposed New Education Policy (2016), Retrieved from www.ncpcr.gov.in/showfile.php?lid=1118.