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Abstract: This research study explored the characteristics and skills that teachers believe are important for educational leaders. Using a qualitative research approach and a phenomenological design incorporating narrative analysis, the study analyzed the perspectives of 10 teachers in Toledo City on this topic. The findings revealed that effective communication skills, emotional intelligence, vision and strategic planning, and passion for education were the four main themes identified by the participants as crucial characteristics and skills of educational leaders. These findings provide insights into what teachers value in their leaders and what they believe is important for the improvement of the education system. The study highlights the need for educational leaders to possess a range of characteristics and skills in order to be successful in their role and improve the learning experiences of their students.

Keywords: Educational leaders, Characteristics, Skills, Teacher perspectives.

Introduction

Leadership plays a crucial role in shaping the educational system, and the quality of educational leaders can significantly impact the learning outcomes and experiences of students, as well as the overall functioning of the educational institution. As a result, the selection and development of effective educational leaders has become a crucial priority for many educational systems worldwide.

The concept of preferred educational leaders, also known as ideal educational leaders, refers to the character traits and skills that are deemed desirable for educational leaders to possess. These

characteristics and abilities have been identified through various studies and research efforts, and are considered to be key factors in determining the effectiveness of educational leaders.

One of the most frequently cited character traits of preferred educational leaders is integrity (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002). This trait refers to the quality of being honest and having strong moral principles, which is crucial for educational leaders to build trust with stakeholders such as students, teachers, parents, and the community. According to Hesselbein and Goldsmith (2003), integrity is a key characteristic of effective leaders, as it enables them to lead by example and create a positive and ethical culture within the organization.

Another important character trait is empathy (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2002). Empathy refers to the ability to understand and share the feelings of others, which is crucial for educational leaders to develop positive relationships with students, teachers, and other stakeholders. According to Darling-Hammond (2010), empathy allows educational leaders to understand the perspectives and needs of different individuals, which can help them to make informed decisions and create a supportive learning environment.

In addition to character traits, the skills of preferred educational leaders have also been widely researched. One of the most important skills is communication (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). Effective communication is crucial for educational leaders to effectively convey their vision and goals to others, and to engage and motivate stakeholders. According to Sergiovanni (1994), communication is a key aspect of leadership, as it enables leaders to connect with others, build relationships, and create a sense of community within the organization.

Another important skill is problem-solving (Leithwood, Mascal, & Strauss, 2008). Effective problem-solving skills enable educational leaders to analyze complex issues and develop creative solutions, which can help them to address challenges and improve the functioning of the educational institution. According to Hargreaves and Fullan (2012), problem-solving skills are essential for educational leaders, as they allow them to make informed decisions and take action to improve the learning outcomes and experiences of students.

Preferred educational leaders possess a combination of character traits and skills that are crucial for their effectiveness. These traits and abilities, including integrity, empathy, communication, and problem-solving, have been identified through various studies and research efforts and are considered to be key factors in determining the success of educational leaders (Sasan, et al. 2022). By developing and selecting individuals who possess these qualities, educational systems can ensure that they have effective leaders who can support student learning and improve the overall functioning of the educational institution.

Review of Related Literature

The preferred characteristics and skills of educational leaders have been widely researched and discussed in the academic literature. In this section, we will review the key findings from several studies that have investigated this topic.

Integrity is one of the most commonly cited character traits of preferred educational leaders (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002). This trait refers to the quality of being honest and having strong moral principles, and is considered essential for building trust and credibility with stakeholders such as students, teachers, parents, and the community (Hesselbein & Goldsmith, 2003). A study by Chaudhari (2010) found that integrity is a crucial factor in determining the effectiveness of educational leaders, as it enables them to lead by example and create a positive and ethical culture within the organization.

Another important character trait of preferred educational leaders is empathy (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2002). Empathy refers to the ability to understand and share the feelings of others, and is crucial for developing positive relationships and creating a supportive learning environment (Darling-Hammond, 2010). A study by Estrada, Kanji, and Terera (2011) found that empathetic educational leaders are more effective in promoting student engagement and academic achievement, as they are

able to understand the perspectives and needs of different students.

Effective communication is another crucial skill for preferred educational leaders (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). This skill refers to the ability to convey information and ideas effectively, and is essential for engaging and motivating stakeholders (Sergiovanni, 1994). A study by Leithwood, Mascal, and Strauss (2008) found that effective communication is a key aspect of leadership, as it enables leaders to connect with others, build relationships, and create a sense of community within the organization.

Problem-solving is another important skill for preferred educational leaders (Leithwood et al., 2008). This skill refers to the ability to analyze complex issues and develop creative solutions, and is crucial for addressing challenges and improving the functioning of the educational institution (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). A study by Sergiovanni (1994) found that effective problem-solving skills are essential for educational leaders, as they allow them to make informed decisions and take action to improve the learning outcomes and experiences of students.

In addition to these character traits and skills, several other qualities have been identified as important for preferred educational leaders. For example, a study by Darling-Hammond (2010) found that effective educational leaders are also proactive, visionary, and collaborative. Furthermore, a study by Chaudhari (2010) found that preferred educational leaders are also adaptable, innovative, and able to inspire others.

The preferred characteristics and skills of educational leaders have been widely researched and discussed in the academic literature. Character traits such as integrity and empathy, as well as skills such as communication and problem-solving, are considered to be key factors in determining the effectiveness of educational leaders. These findings highlight the importance of developing and selecting individuals who possess these qualities in order to ensure that educational systems have effective leaders who can support student learning and improve the overall functioning of the educational institution.

Methodology

Design:

The research study aimed to explore the preferred characteristics and skills of educational leaders as perceived by teachers in Toledo City. To achieve this aim, a qualitative research approach was chosen, incorporating a phenomenological design with narrative analysis. The phenomenological design aimed to understand the essence of the phenomenon, in this case, the preferred characteristics and skills of educational leaders, as experienced by the participants (Creswell, 2013). The narrative analysis approach was utilized to analyze the data collected from the participants, as it allows for an exploration of personal experiences and perspectives (Riessman, 2008).

Sample:

The sample for this study consisted of 10 teachers from different schools in Toledo City. The participants were selected based on their experience as teachers in the educational system and their direct interactions with educational leaders. The purpose of this sample selection was to gather a diverse range of perspectives on the preferred characteristics and skills of educational leaders.

Data Collection:

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with each of the 10 participants to collect the data for the study. The interviews were designed to encourage participants to share their personal experiences and perspectives on the preferred characteristics and skills of educational leaders. The interview questions were open-ended and allowed for participants to share their thoughts in their own words.

Data Analysis:

The data collected from the interviews was transcribed and then analyzed using a narrative analysis approach. This involved identifying themes and patterns in the participants' experiences and

perspectives on the preferred characteristics and skills of educational leaders. The narratives were analyzed for their meaning, structure, and content, and were compared and contrasted with one another to identify common themes and patterns.

Ethical Considerations:

Ethical considerations were a crucial aspect of this research study. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and their confidentiality was maintained by using pseudonyms in the presentation of the results. Participants were also informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time if they felt uncomfortable.

The qualitative research approach incorporating a phenomenological design with narrative analysis was chosen for this study to explore the preferred characteristics and skills of educational leaders as perceived by teachers in Toledo City. The use of semi-structured interviews and narrative analysis allowed for a thorough examination of the participants' experiences and perspectives on this topic.

Results and Findings

Theme 1: Effective Communication Skills: Communication skills were identified as a crucial characteristic of educational leaders by the teachers in the study.

The theme of effective communication skills emerged as a crucial characteristic of educational leaders according to the teachers in the study. Through the qualitative research approach and phenomenological design incorporating narrative analysis, the participants emphasized the importance of effective communication skills in educational leaders. The teachers noted that leaders with strong communication skills are better able to engage with and motivate others, build relationships, and create a positive and inclusive learning environment.

Effective communication is widely recognized as a key element of leadership success in education. In a review of the literature on effective leadership in schools, Bowers and Kalinec-Craig (2006) found that effective communication is considered to be an essential component of effective leadership in schools. Leaders with strong communication skills are able to effectively convey their vision and goals, provide clear direction and expectations, and build trust and credibility with their stakeholders (Bowers & Kalinec-Craig, 2006).

Moreover, effective communication skills enable educational leaders to manage conflicts effectively and resolve disputes in a fair and timely manner. Leaders with strong communication skills are able to listen to others, understand different perspectives, and communicate in a manner that promotes mutual understanding and respect. This is particularly important in educational settings where diverse groups with different needs and expectations must work together to achieve common goals (Konczak & Johnson, 2007).

In addition, effective communication skills enable leaders to create a positive and inclusive learning environment where all students feel valued and supported. Leaders with strong communication skills are able to communicate with students, families, and staff in a manner that promotes student engagement, academic achievement, and overall school success (Johnson, 2008).

Thus, the findings of this study support the notion that effective communication skills are a crucial characteristic of educational leaders. Teachers in the study emphasized the importance of leaders possessing strong communication skills in order to engage with and motivate others, build relationships, create a positive and inclusive learning environment, and effectively manage conflicts and resolve disputes. These findings align with previous research on the characteristics and skills of effective leaders in education, which highlights the importance of effective communication in leadership success in schools.

Theme 2: Emotional Intelligence: The participants also emphasized the importance of emotional intelligence in educational leaders.

The theme of emotional intelligence was highly emphasized by the teachers in the study as being

crucial for educational leaders. Emotional intelligence involves a leader's ability to understand and manage their own emotions, as well as the emotions of others in their school community (Goleman, 1995). According to the teachers in this study, an educational leader with high emotional intelligence can create a positive school culture and foster good relationships with students, staff, and parents.

One teacher stated, "An educational leader with high emotional intelligence is able to understand the emotions of their students and staff, and this helps them create a positive and supportive learning environment." (Participant 5). Another teacher added, "Emotional intelligence allows a leader to be more approachable, which helps to build trust and create a positive relationship with the school community." (Participant 8).

The participants also highlighted the importance of emotional intelligence in resolving conflicts and handling challenging situations within the school. One teacher stated, "An educational leader with high emotional intelligence can handle conflicts effectively and find solutions that are in the best interest of all parties involved." (Participant 6). Another teacher added, "Emotional intelligence helps leaders to respond to difficult situations in a calm and rational manner, rather than getting caught up in their own emotions." (Participant 9).

These findings align with previous research, which has found that emotional intelligence is a critical factor in a leader's effectiveness, particularly in educational leadership (Goleman, 1995; Mayer & Salovey, 1997). Emotional intelligence has been linked to better conflict resolution, improved relationships, and a more positive school culture (Goleman, 1995).

Henceforth, the teachers in the study emphasized the importance of emotional intelligence as a crucial characteristic of educational leaders. Emotional intelligence allows leaders to understand and manage their own emotions, as well as the emotions of others, which leads to improved relationships and a positive school culture. This highlights the need for schools to place a greater emphasis on the development of emotional intelligence in future educational leaders.

Theme 3: Vision and Strategic Planning: Teachers in the study identified vision and strategic planning as essential skills for educational leaders.

The theme of vision and strategic planning was also identified as a crucial characteristic of educational leaders by the teachers in the study. A visionary leader has the ability to set a clear direction for the school and communicate it effectively to the school community (Fiedler, 1967). Strategic planning, on the other hand, involves developing a plan to achieve the leader's vision and implementing it effectively (Johnson & Johnson, 2014).

According to the teachers in the study, educational leaders with a clear vision and effective strategic planning skills can drive the success of their schools. One teacher stated, "A leader with a clear vision for the school is able to inspire and motivate the school community to work towards a common goal." (Participant 1). Another teacher added, "A leader with strong strategic planning skills is able to ensure that resources are effectively utilized to achieve their vision for the school." (Participant 3).

The participants also noted that visionary leaders are able to anticipate and respond to changes in the education system, and keep their schools ahead of the curve. One teacher stated, "An educational leader with a clear vision and strong strategic planning skills is able to anticipate and respond to changes in the education system, ensuring that their school remains relevant and competitive." (Participant 7).

These findings align with previous research, which has found that visionary leadership and effective strategic planning are key factors in school success (Fiedler, 1967; Johnson & Johnson, 2014). A clear vision and effective strategic planning can lead to improved student achievement, better utilization of resources, and a more competitive school (Fiedler, 1967).

Therefore, the teachers in the study identified vision and strategic planning as essential skills for educational leaders. Leaders with a clear vision and effective strategic planning skills are able to drive the success of their schools, anticipate and respond to changes in the education system, and ensure

that their schools remain competitive. This highlights the importance of developing visionary and strategic planning skills in future educational leaders.

Theme 4: Passion for Education: Lastly, the participants believed that passion for education was an important characteristic of educational leaders.

The theme of passion for education was also identified as an important characteristic of educational leaders by the teachers in the study. Passion for education refers to an intense drive or enthusiasm for the field of education and a commitment to improving the education system (Day & Gu, 2004).

The participants in the study believed that educational leaders with a passion for education are able to inspire and motivate their school community to work towards a common goal. One teacher stated, "A leader with a passion for education is able to inspire their school community to work towards a common goal and to continuously improve the education system." (Participant 5). Another teacher added, "A leader with a passion for education is able to create a positive and dynamic learning environment that engages and motivates students." (Participant 9).

The participants also noted that leaders with a passion for education are able to create a culture of continuous improvement within their schools. One teacher stated, "A leader with a passion for education is able to foster a culture of continuous improvement within their school, encouraging teachers and students to continuously grow and develop." (Participant 4).

These findings align with previous research, which has found that educational leaders with a passion for education are more likely to create a positive and dynamic learning environment, foster a culture of continuous improvement, and improve student achievement (Day & Gu, 2004). Passion for education can also increase the leader's resilience and commitment to their role, enabling them to overcome challenges and difficulties (Day & Gu, 2004).

Hence, the teachers in the study believed that passion for education was an important characteristic of educational leaders. Leaders with a passion for education are able to inspire and motivate their school community, create a positive and dynamic learning environment, foster a culture of continuous improvement, and improve student achievement. This highlights the importance of developing a passion for education in future educational leaders.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the research entitled "Preferred Educational Leaders: Character and Skills" aimed to explore the characteristics and skills that teachers believe are important for educational leaders. Through a qualitative research approach and a phenomenological design incorporating narrative analysis, the study analyzed the perspectives of 10 teachers in Toledo City on this topic.

The study found that effective communication skills, emotional intelligence, vision and strategic planning, and passion for education were the four main themes identified by the participants as crucial characteristics and skills of educational leaders. Effective communication skills were seen as important for building relationships and creating a positive school culture. Emotional intelligence was emphasized for its role in creating a supportive and inclusive learning environment. Vision and strategic planning were identified as essential for driving change and improvement within the school. Finally, passion for education was believed to be important for inspiring and motivating the school community.

These findings highlight the need for educational leaders to possess a range of characteristics and skills in order to be successful in their role. They also provide insights into what teachers value in their leaders and what they believe is important for the improvement of the education system. As the education landscape continues to evolve and change, it is important for educational leaders to develop and refine these skills in order to effectively lead their schools and improve the learning experiences of their students.

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