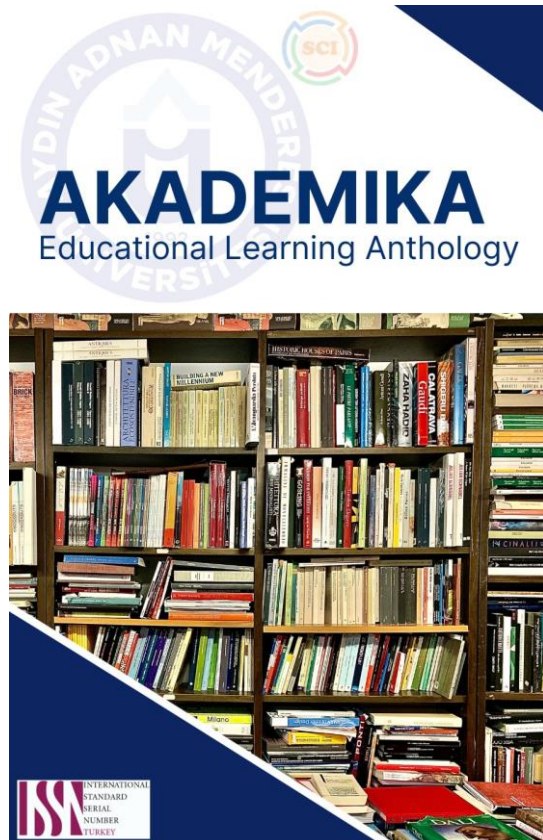


A REVIEW OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP PREPARATION AND PROFESSIONAL ROLES: ARE WE SERVING THE NEEDS OF LEADERSHIP ROLES ALONG THE LEADERSHIP CONTINUUM?



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A Review of Educational Leadership Preparation and Professional Roles: Are We Serving the Needs of Leadership Roles along the Leadership Continuum?

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Abstract

Given the increasing complexity of school and district contexts, it is imperative to cultivate leaders at different points along the leadership continuum. This study employed a quantitative approach and utilized a casual comparative design to investigate the perceptions of program effectiveness among students (N = 408) enrolled in an educational leadership program. The study focused on the period from 2013 to 2020 and specifically explored the perspectives of students in various professional roles within the education sector, such as teachers, instructional coaches, and central office workers. The study's identified issues are as follows: 1. Does a statistically significant disparity exist in students' perceptions regarding the effectiveness of the program coursework in adequately preparing them for educational leadership based on their professional roles? 2. Does a statistically significant disparity exist in students' perceptions regarding the program faculty's facilitation of their learning and personal development based on the professional role of the student? Following the completion of the quantitative survey, the study's findings revealed a diverse range of outcomes. Specifically, instructional coaches expressed higher levels of efficacy, whereas central office staff had lower impressions. Given the diverse range of educational leadership tasks that educational leadership programs encompass, the outcomes of this study have the potential to stimulate more scholarly investigation.

Keywords: *educational leadership, school leadership, university programs, leadership continuum, administration, and supervision*

Introduction

Educational leadership preparation programs play a crucial role in the broader endeavor of enhancing school leadership since these programs are responsible for equipping aspiring leaders with the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively contribute to beneficial educational results. According to Hattie's (2009) research, it was determined that school leaders ranked as the second most influential influence on student accomplishment, following instructors. According to Dolph (2017), it is imperative for school leaders to possess a deep understanding and proficiency in instructional leadership, school culture leadership, and change leadership in order to effectively lead and facilitate successful school improvement initiatives and/or reforms. School leaders play a crucial role in improving student outcomes by employing instructional leadership strategies that facilitate the support and advancement of education (Dolph, 2017; Nettles & Herrington, 2007). To cultivate a school culture that fosters trust and ultimately contributes to the improvement of the school, proficient educational administrators engage in professional development activities alongside teachers, try to comprehend and utilize teachers' individual capabilities, and exhibit strong communication abilities (Hollingworth et al., 2018). To effectively serve as change agents for school improvement, it is imperative for successful school leaders to employ the practice of dispersed leadership. This approach facilitates the establishment of a sense of ownership and consensus among stakeholders as they collaborate in the planning and implementation of improvement initiatives (Dolph, 2017, p. 382). Considering the diverse set of skills and competences required of educational administrators, scholars have conducted a study on the training of school leaders. This investigation focuses on various aspects, including the structure and effectiveness of leadership programs, as well as the satisfaction and impact of such programs (Anderson, 2018).

Discussion

A focus on program enhancements to better equip this cohort to contribute to PK-12 academic outcomes arose in the early 2000s due to the perceived inefficacy of educational leadership programs in preparing future

educational leaders (Elmore, 2000; Hess & Kelly, 2005; Lashway, 2003; Levine, 2005). (Anderson et al., 2018; Campanotta et al., 2018; Cosner, 2019; Cunningham & Lochmiller, 2019; Cunningham et al., 2019; VanGronigen et al., 2018) In response, educational leadership preparation research inemphasized the processes, learning experiences, and components that contribute to quality educational leadership preparation. ESSA established a more comprehensive notion of educational leadership and underscored the imperative of cultivating a pipeline of educational leaders, as Young et al. (2017) delineated. Educational leaders' function in conjunction with traditional leadership and quasi-leadership positions along a continuum. In other words, the roles along the leadership continuum (e.g., teachers, instructional facilitators, administrators, and central office personnel), the objective of our research was to determine whether the program adequately catered to the requirements of these students. We aimed to identify efficacy gaps in the curriculum according to the professional roles of the students by analyzing data from the ELES exit survey.

The findings indicate that, overall, the educational leadership program effectively addresses the demands of students. However, it is important to note that there are variations in perception among different professional responsibilities. The sense of the academic challenge and stimulating intellectual climate was shown to be higher among administrators and instructional coaches, but central office personnel exhibited a comparatively lower opinion. The possible reason for this phenomenon might be attributed to the job responsibilities associated with these positions, which often entail working closely with individual teachers or teams of teachers to enhance teaching practices. To optimize the development of leadership skills among central office staff, it may be imperative to provide them with educational opportunities that focus on systemic initiatives aimed at enhancing teaching and learning outcomes within school districts or individual schools. The findings of the study indicate that instructional coaches exhibited a higher likelihood of perceiving a helpful faculty environment, whereas administrators shown the lowest sense of support. The observed disparity could potentially be attributed to the program's emphasis on cultivating prospective administrators as opposed to serving current administrators. In the pursuit of educational leadership preparation, it may be necessary to augment the curriculum with additional learning experiences to cater to the needs of in-service administrators. Administrators reported a decreased level of perceived faculty support, while concurrently expressing a heightened impression of the utilization of curricular materials within instructional settings. Instructional coaches exhibited a tendency towards increased views of faculty support and utilization of curricular materials, perhaps facilitating the provision of both "curricular coherence" and "curricular balance" for instructional coaches.

Conclusion

Educational institutions are evolving into complex organizations, requiring delegation of responsibility for reform initiatives across different levels of leadership. This approach to assessing the effectiveness of educational leadership programs may provide additional support for efforts aimed at enhancing education. The observed variations across professional responsibilities within this program serve as potential ramifications for policy, practice, and future study. National and state-level organizations should consider the entire range of leadership responsibilities within these programs during the development or revision of standards. The explicit recognition of leadership training undertaken by these groups in relation to leadership standards can serve as a foundation for effectively addressing the leadership requirements of different positions throughout the spectrum. Potential implications for educational leadership programs may involve expanding university-school partnerships and enhancing curricula to align with identified leadership needs. Educational institutions implement professional development programs for teacher leaders, instructional coaches, and central office professionals as an integral component of comprehensive educational reform initiatives. Educational leadership programs have the potential to enhance the efforts of school districts by expanding the scope of leadership preparation within the educational leadership curriculum. Additional research is necessary to understand the differences in perspectives among various professional responsibilities within educational leadership programs. Future research endeavors using focus groups and interviews could provide valuable insights into faculty approaches, program implementation, and learning experiences. This comprehensive understanding can help identify areas of convergence in leadership competencies and areas where divergence is necessary to effectively address the requirements of diverse professional roles.



References

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