School Leader Self-Development Assessment: A Review Paper

PhD C. Ibrahim Can Korkut

Kosovo

Abstract

School leadership concept has continually changed and keeps changing due to societal, methodical and technological developments, changes in pedagogy and teaching environment, the global and national markets, etc., so do standards and assessments for school leaders. Furthermore, in comparison with the history of learning, teaching and school leadership, the history of school leadership standards, assessment tools and standard certification progresses are quite new. However, in our globalized world, standards have gained importance and there has been great progress in school leadership standards and assessment means. Private schooling has become a great business and self-development is a part of the competition.

The purpose of this paper is to attract school leaders' attention to self-development, inform them about self-development and assessment issues and encourage them to assess themselves from the point of self-development. The assessment can focus on personal and professional development. It is also important to introduce some modern-world leadership concepts to school leaders since they might be absorbed in their own way of leading/managing without thinking some key concepts and standards of leadership.

Keywords: School leaders, Self-assessment, Private schools.

1. Educational Leadership Policy Standards

If it is necessary to apply to the standards, the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) by the Council of Chief State School Officer provides standards for school leaders which are used by more than 40 states in the USA. ISLLC 2008 uses six standards to define school leadership. According to ISLLC these standards call for:

1. Setting a widely shared vision for learning;

2. Developing a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth;

3. Ensuring effective management of the organization, operation, and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment;

4. Collaborating with faculty and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources;

5. Acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner; and

6. Understanding, responding to, and influencing the political, social, legal, and cultural contexts [1].

And each of the ISLLC 2008 standards gives a definition of school administrators as follows;

Standard 1

A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by facilitating the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a vision of learning that is shared and supported by the school community.

Standard 2

A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by advocating, nurturing, and sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth.

Standard 3

A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by ensuring management of the organization, operations, and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment.

Standard 4

A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by collaborating with families and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources.

Standard 5

A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner.

Standard 6

A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by understanding, responding to, and influencing the larger political, social, economic, legal, and cultural context [1].

ISLLC gives the highest priority to student and adult learning, setting high expectations, demanding content and instruction that ensure student achievement, creating a culture of continuous learning for adults, using data to guide improvement, and actively engaging the community [2].

2. Strategies For Self-Development

Whether they are mandatory or voluntary, while planning self-development strategies as a school leader, one should have direct purposes with an acceptance of educational environment complexity. It makes an appropriate approach a vital point here. Such an approach should take students' achievement as the centre. Other criteria are as follows;

- availability of continual opportunities for each stage of the career
- quality, comprehensiveness and a system-based approach
- focus on practice with knowledge and values
- variant providers
- provision of basic training with using other development opportunities
- bases on the best available evidence

Bredeson (2003) [3] also provides a set of principles for design to enrich learning at schools. According to him there are six themes for research and practice as follows;

- the basic idea about development is learning including teachers and school leaders
- it is a journey, not a matter of credibility on the basis
- There is no limit for learning and the opportunities for it
- There is an intimate link / tie between development, learning and school mission
- the theme is development of people, not tools or programmes.

As for the strategies to provide school leaders with professional learning and to develop themselves strategies for systematic improvement is needed. The strategies of self-

development should start before school leaders get appointed to their posts and continue after they are hired. This idea is also supported by the OECD report 2008 with the consideration of different needs of school leaders. The most important question for the beginning can be that this learning and development should fulfilled whether by the system or by the self-assessment of school leaders themselves. A middle way can be also found as people should take responsibility on their own improvement and system should supply variant opportunities for different levels and needs. It is apparent that small children and adults learn differently and adults concentrate on problematic areas for themselves. They also learn more through practice than theory. However, theory is a necessity and it makes it essential to build a bridge between theory and practice. This bridge is built through a selection of generic strategies as Huber (2011) [4] suggests. These strategies are categorized as 'cognitive theoretical ways of learning' (courses, lectures and self-study), collegial (cooperative group work) and communicative process-oriented procedures (projects), and reflexive methods (feedback and self-assessment, as well as supervision) [5]. The following figure illustrates the connections between generic strategies and experience (p.21).

As it is seen in the figure, 'concrete experience' is in the centre and it means practice. Huber shows the importance of individual contribution to development programmes with his recommendations which can be summarised as follows (p.839-841);

- learners' needs, such as time and speed of learning, concerns and demands are important
- programmes should be organised as reflection and feedback-oriented
- while deciding on the programme, participants ideas should be taken
- objectives of the programme should target pedagogy, theory and practice, competence and sustainability, effectiveness and competence, quality

Figure 2.1: Approaches to learning in professional development.
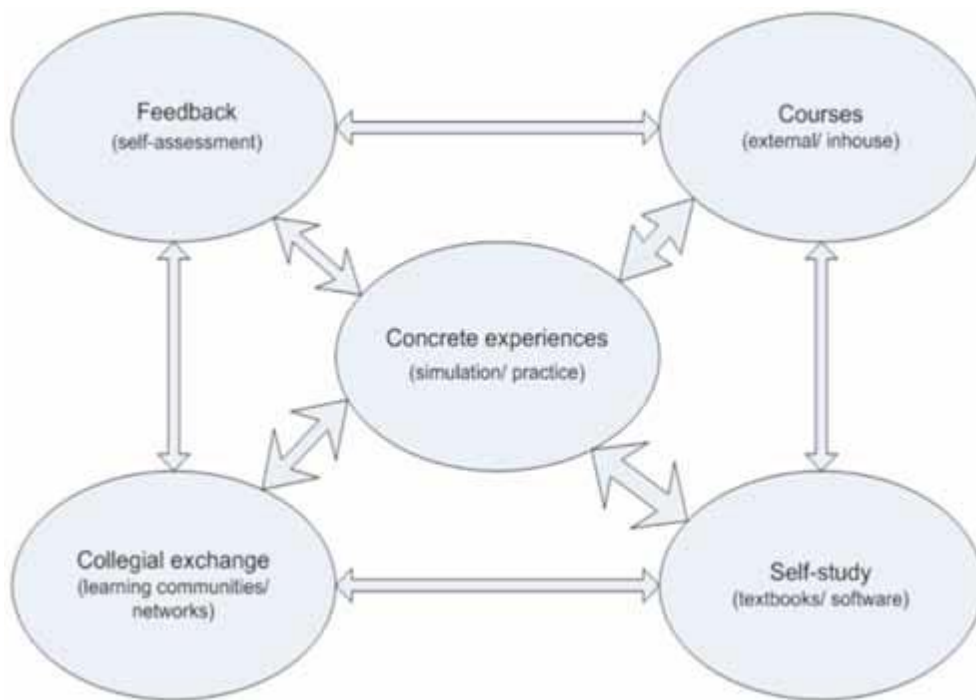
Source: Demster et al, 2011, Strategies to develop school Leadership

The basic question about the school leadership development lies in what brings the result or what is the impact. This first question points to strategies. The second most important question is how this improvement makes a difference.

Two more essential points for the school leadership self-development strategies can be added as;

1) Finding Talents

In fact, school leadership self-development should start before future leaders take the post. Finding suitable candidates for the post and getting them ready are the key policies behind the continual self-development as talented people likely will have more desire and motivation for self-development and it will be easier for them. McKinsey report (2010) [6] claims that 'attracting and selecting those with the right qualities is critical to the overall leadership capacity of the system' (p.9).

2) Experienced Leaders

Another problem that school leaders and consequently schools face is that some experienced school leaders can lose their commitment and / or ability to learn to face new challenges and it can become an insurmountable barrier for self-development and school development. One

recommendation is that more experienced school leaders' work as mentors for the new ones to keep themselves developing. In York of Ontario, Canada, school leaders with three years' experience supply mentoring support for the school leaders with an experience of less than two years. It means that school leaders within the first two years of their leadership work with more experienced school leaders with a minimum of 25 hours of tutoring a year and the mentor get paid for their service [6].

3. Certification As a Means of School Leader Self-Development and Its Drawbacks

Although there is an ongoing discussion saying that certification does not mean quality, in today's standards-based societies, certificates out some candidates a step in front of others and it is important to reward people in any field of life who put some extra effort to improve themselves. Certification processes also force people and institutions to build and follow standards. The basic problem of school leadership assessment instruments is also witnessed in certification. There is not a complete coincidence or co-operation between theory and practice meaning real life. Therefore, there have always been some discussions and suspicions over the credibility of assessment tools and certificates. With very fast changing societies and slow academic processes and researches this problem seems insurmountable. Yet, certification stands here as a part of more formal and standard-based processes.

There are some basic questions to be asked while considering certification. One of them is the credibility of the certificate. Who provides the certification and the measurement for the selection of participants are the first questions to be answered. Later come deeper questions about the evidence that proves the certificate follows widely-accepted standards and correspondence of the certification programme to professional development and learning. It is quite natural that different certification programmes assess different aspects of school leadership depending on demands of the school environment, leadership styles etc. But the key point here is that such programmes should assess the observable aspects of daily leadership. But sometimes even often there is a gap between what is assessed and the responsibilies that school leaders consider as important [7]. Similarly, there are differences from the point of assessees. Since mostly headmasters and their assistants are considered as school leaders, other components of leadership team such as parents, students association leaders, partners even teacher leaders are assessed. In fact, to have a corresponding educational system standards, development, certification and recognition should be interlinked.

However, certification has its own drawbacks. The basic problem of certification is that the problems of school leadership development processes are specifically about the number of certified leaders but their quality. In fact, there is sufficient number certified staff and administrators. Moreover, surplus of school leaders with certification may cause some posting hierarchical problems. There are also some abovementioned certification problems of who certifies, who is certified and standards, credibility and processes. For instance, under some circumstances some people may get certified without completing the requirements and it may distract others' intention from certificates and they may lose their value. Training for certifications and requirements must so balanced that on one hand they should become a load on people's shoulders and on the other hand they should not lose their value if they are too easy to obtain. For instance, in the USA, potential leaders are supposed to finish university courses as certification requirement. Yet, hardly any evidence is there that there is direct impact of university education and courses on leadership skills. Some leaders become successful through their life-long experience and they credit it. Most certification programmes are only open to those with long educational especially administrative experience which makes many talented people waste years before they become certified or they lose their enthusiasm. Some countries such as Russia and some states in the USA apply a step by step certification processes and the first step of certification or in some cases the first certificate is given through their success inside or outside the school. Similarly, the state of Texas has built a different approach to leadership certification as it takes meeting the standards into consideration rather than course completion. While mentioning the standards and certification, it could be very applicable and practical to ask from school leaders' evidence that they have made some changes improving students' outcomes. It is also understandable that only course-based certification programmes by universities or other course providers are not very likely to be successful. Many successful school leaders complain that certification programmes by universities do not pay enough, if any, attention to some key aspects of schooling such as students' learning and curriculum. An inspiring result of the research by Elmore [8] shows that many successful school leaders owe their success to their personal values and commitments. Kronley [9] also argues that university or outside provider-based programmes lack the practical aspects of school life which of one is classroom assignment. Instead, they focus on conventional aspects of leadership such as instructions about finance, disciple, labour and facilities [10]. One suggestion that can be discussed is that some successful leaders form outside the schooling environment but with a talent of building and / or changing skills may be appointed to the posts of school leadership.

However, there is again the same question of development processes of schooling for such leaders.

As a sample for a formal certification body, in England the Training and Development Agency (TDA) whose responsibility is to build standards of teacher training and professional development and The National College for School Leadership (NCSL) that is responsible for leadership development and certification for middle-level school leaders are the two bodies appointed by the government for development, standards and certification. National Standards for Headteachers that are basis of development, assessment and certification of headmasters who have to take National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH) was created by The NCSL and there is ongoing preparation of development programmes for school leaders by the organisation.

4. Definition and Main Types of School Leadership Assessments

Leadership assessment follows locally determined, contract-driven review processes largely for personnel purposes [11]. School leaders set a frame of objectives to be reached at the end of every academic year by themselves or are provided by superiors and at the end of the year their work is evaluated within the school or / and by upper administrators. Most school leadership assessments focus on current practices school leaders, how they do and if they meet the school leadership standards to give themselves and their supervisors' useful data along with the measures of school outcomes. As the National Association of Elementary School Principals states:

Along with greater emphasis on instruction, assessment should be focused more on actual behaviors and actions, rather than on knowledge or traits [2].

Basically there are two types of assessment tests that are summative and formative assessments. Both measure the competence of assessee and all assessment tests try to evaluate a leader's knowledge and ability but summative and formative assessment tools have different purposes. As the summative one is used for employment concerns, there is no improvement plan or remediation after the performing the test. However, it is a difficult and risky decision to make someone redundant merely due to an assessment test. The formative one is the opposite in this way. Although the main objective of the formative one is also measuring the competence, it is served as personal development plan. When assessment tools are used as and offer feedback, they also serve as constructive tools for better performance in the future. Studies of assessment

and feedback in other learning contexts [12] — including athletics [13], computer technologies [14], medicine [15], the military [16], and — have all investigated the formative role of feedback. What has been learned from these sources about the purposes and uses of assessment, feedback, and revision to improve practice has important implications for education; though the matter has not yet been extensively studied in school leadership [11].

5. Importance of School Leadership Assessment

In today's highly competitive educational climate a school leader's accountability for students' achievement, improvement and narrowing students' level / performance gap in diverse society has gained great importance [17]. When conducted properly it has great impact on a school leader's, students', educational system improvement, setting organisational targets and focusing on students' behaviour that has influence on learning. A real-life picture of a school leader reflects managerial and leadership work. But since the focus is on instruction and student's learning and behaviour that influences it and the greatest change in the concept of leadership in recent decades is on the learning and teaching improvement, it is better that assessment tools pay more attention to actions and behaviours as they are real-life facts rather than personality traits.

In a very broad definition, leadership is to grow professionally and fix realistic objectives. "The Sacramento City Unified School District in California states that the purpose of their evaluation is for "growth of professional educators and commitment to accountability" with the intent "to promote the values, beliefs and norms of the district" and "to promote security, reduce political influences, and promote a sense of fairness." The evaluation continues to state its purpose of "promoting caring, teamwork, communication and feedback" and "most importantly to improve employee performance" [18].

The basic outcome of all schools is learning. Many countries analyse school / student outcomes through tests / exams. As a matter of fact, improvement is more important than current situation and there is a growing interest in what assessment can do for leaders [19]. If a school leader's performance is judged according to the test results, some even many school leaders will get penalised not because of their schools' history of bad exam results. In fact, if they are judged through the assessment tests, their weaknesses and strengths will be analysed and if there is an improvement, they will be considered successful. And success is not only a matter of teaching and learning although they are in the centre. Today's educational environment forces a school

leader to deal with a lot of different issues and a school leader is the second after the class teacher that influence students' success.

One of the most important and fruitful benefits of assessment tests and tools is to introduce new ideas, thoughts for educational institutions, to raise the quality standards and to build a dialogue between the educational environment and stakeholders.

In general, assessment tests and tools are used for summative purposes such as employment or formative purposes such as improvement. They can be used to close the gaps between high achieving schools and low achieving schools. Out of 44 assessment tools in the market today, four of them are purely used for summative purposes.

For many scholars assessment tests - especially leadership assessment tests - are the basic tools for personnel management [20, 21, 22, 23]. This kind of usage is not very popular and fruitful among school or educational leaders. Yet, if they are used as quality control and then if improvement processes follow such as setting new targets followed by certification, identifying new needs and supports of different levels and warning for upcoming challenges, they become much more fruitful tools for leaders, as well as for their supervisors and upper-level administrators. An assessment test can focus on particular / specific area or it can give a general /overall estimation of the leader or their institution. For stake holders it can be a means of rewards, hiring, promotion, assignment, sanctions.

If the first usage of an assessment test or tool is personal development (it should be so), the second one is organisational / institutional improvement. It is ministries natural task to check if the process of teaching and learning along with other organisational functions of an educational establishment or a school on the right path or at least working. In both ways, it is working or not working, there should be a programme for improvement and if possible certification. Some assessment tools concentrate on more general items to view the process and development from a broader view such as learning atmosphere, community. But in assessment tests there are more and more attention for school leaders' improvement and accountability, especially for instructional leadership nowadays. Different assessment tools / tests pay attention to different functions of school leaders. For instance, PRAISE (Performance Review Analysis and Improvement System for Education) pays more attention to a school leaders capacity to improve educational system, VAL-ED to as instructional leaders their capacity and CFSQ (Change Facilitator Style Questionnaire) to a school leader's influence for a change. Naturally they approach to data collection differently.

Why conducting an assessment, there are some basic questions to be paid attention. They are as follows;

1. Why to conduct an assessment?

2. Who will be assessed?

3. How will the assessment be done?

4. How will the outcome be used?

While conducting the assessment there are some key points / hints that help during the progress. Goldring E. and Porter A.C [18] summarize these hints as follows;

1. Explain the purpose of each data collection strategy

2. Data collection tools should be brief, to the point, and questions should be necessary and phrased appropriately

3. Assure confidentiality of survey participants

4. Allow enough time for surveys to be returned

5. May use information from previously conducted needs assessments if data is current and relevant

6. Much information is already being collected—don't collect it again—just analyze the appropriate data

7. In analyzing data, look for patterns. For example, chart reading progress reports by monthly averages. Is one month consistently lower than average year after year? Why? Disaggregate data by subgroups. Look for differences and reason for differences [18].

While assessing, some obstacles may appear and it is vital to overcome those obstacles to have a healthy assessment result. Some of the obstacles and answers for them are as follows;

1. The issue of trust: As the first concern of an assessment test is the issue of confidentiality, an assessment provider has to gain trust of assessment doers and use trustworthy means of assessing.

2. Organisation's permission: If you are doing an assessment inside an organisation without any highest level permission, this assessment is doomed to fail since it will raise some suspicions.

3. Unwillingness: An assessment test is more likely to be completed if it comes from the highest authority in the organisation. Telling the aim of the assessment with the help of willing participants and making the completion and return progress easy will make it more applicable.

4. Time: If an assessment test does not come from an authority or even it comes if it is too long to complete, it is nearly impossible to have healthy results. So, it should be straightforward, not long enough to detract attention and pleasant by appearance.

5. Cost: High cost for the organization and /or applier can badly effect the assessment to be fulfilled. If possible, computer-based tests cost less than posting or travelling.

In general there are three uses of assessment tools. They are used for management of personnel, leaders' improvement / learning and improvement of organisations. Assessment tools and the results from them can set new learning and improvement objectives, control over organisations and policy making.

6. School Leader Self-Assessment Instruments

Training Program Self-Assessment Tool

Known as TrainSAT, the aim of this assessment tool is to identify the weak and strong points of anybody's training programme and it is 24 pages.

ISLLC Standards and (Self-) Assessment

In need of an official set of standards and assessment tools, the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP), the National Association of Elementary Principals (NAESP) and the National Policy Board for Educational Administration built a consortium in 1994. This consortium, called Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC), firstly built a set of standards based on dispositions, knowledge and performance in 1996 and revised it in 2008. More than forty states in USA have used the standards as a tool or a source to

develop their own standards since 1996. The ISLLC can be considered as a milestone in the history of educational leadership standards and assessments. The first and the most important reason for it is that the ISLLC Standards have changed the concept of leadership assessment from managerial style to learning and teaching centred style. The second one is that "at present, all NCATE-Accredited principal preparation programs in the United States have adopted the ISLLC Standards" [24].

The ISLLC Self-Assessment, which consists of 182 statements on knowledge, dispositions and performances directly linked to the ISLLC Standards, is to give information of school leadership.

Leadership Self-Review Tool (LSRT)

Developed by The Institute for Education Leadership, Ministry of Education, New Zealand focuses on school administrative boards' help for school leaders. It is set out in six domains meaning key areas and each domain has some indicators and descriptions of research-based and successful practices within the area. Assessees are asked to check the current practice against the priority. A peculiarity that makes LSRT different from others is that it includes two parts of writing with a title of 'Additional sample evidence your board wants you to consider' and a part of 'comment'. Another important key function of LSRT is that it provides a wide range of sample evidences to assist the evaluation. The 'Sample Evidence' section also serves as mind-opening samples of successful school leadership.

Educational Leadership Self Inventory

It aims at enabling school leaders' performance with the standards of 'Connecticut Standards for Educational Leadership'. It is consisted of twelve sections linked to twelve standards with several items within. The tool provides a graph to compare school leaders' performance with those of 251 principals.

Graduate Programs Educational Leadership and Administration Administrative Self-Assessment

Developed by Philadelphia Biblical University, the tool has got 15 items of competencies considered critical for effective school leadership. The tool uses a ten-level scale and an area for a comment for the each area. A significant difference of the tool is that the applicant is asked to send the form to the university to be evaluated.

Leadership Self-Assessment (LeadSA)

It focuses on three main areas; attributes, skills and knowledge. It provides means of evaluating oneself under the sections of 'Tools for improved advocacy, improved inquiry, at an impasse, individual self-improvement and leadership behavior. Under each of the above mentioned sections there are some thought-provoking questions to be answered.

Principal Self-Assessment Tool

The tool uses a set of five standards as school leadership concept followed by a question to take into consideration and several items follow the question to be rated form one to five. Any respond from one to three is considered as the area of growth. The tool takes instructional school leadership as the reference.

Training and Educational Leader Self-Assessment (TELSA)

TELSA was developed by the Westinghouse Electric Company of CBS, Inc. for the U.S. Department of Energy's Carlsbad Area Office (CAO) to determine training and educational leaders' need for development in 1998.

TELSA which consists of forty pages is a free assessment tool that can be used by any organisation and the Westinghouse technology transfer program has been used to deliver TELSA to support governmental institutions in the fields of economy and education to compete with the global economy. Main purpose of TELSA is to provide educational leaders and organisations with development needs. It can be applied to a wide range of educational leadership positions from school headmasters to training managers and academic deans. It consists of ten different sections and employs a Difficulty-Importance-Frequency (DIF) analysis and after each section it gives a list of useful reading material for weak results.

7. Discussion

There are many assessment and self-assessment tools and it is an important task of institutions to find the right assessment tool as well as informing about the standards of school leadership

standards and assessments for their educational environment, culture and circumstances. Every assessment tool might have their own peculiarities and different schools may focus on different development areas. For instance, TELSA pays specific attention to technological development of school leaders and assesses leaders on specific technological tools such as photocopy machines, scanners, projectors, etc. It gives a chance to different schools to reshape the assessment tool and add some new items such as smart-boards. One task of choosing the right assessment tool is to guide school leaders and their staff about the required type of learning and its necessities as what to know or believe. Three aspects of the tool should be well thought; which are 'what to assess', 'how to assess' and 'how to judge'. It is not enough to reach a consensus about assessment tool but researches especially practical ones should continue to support to see the change and the tool should support the development.

May be the hottest discussion about the standards and also assessment tools is about personality traits. Although there are some standards, it is impossible to say there is a set of personality traits to be a successful school / educational leader. Also exceedingly formulized standards will not reflect the realities of a profession or job. Or standards that measure generic skills might be useful in some schools but some older schools may need more specific talents. One criticism about the application of assessment tools that it is not realistic that a person handles all the issues in one leadership style. As a matter of fact a research conducted by Wasserstein-Warnet and Klein in Israel in 2000 [25] showed that successful leaders apply contingent leadership style meaning that they avoid having a static vision against the situations and issues (p.448). Therefore, one vital question about the application of assessment tools can be how relevant your self-assessment is to your leadership style. Along with the self-assessment, school leaders should also try to define their leadership style. In fact, assessment and self-assessment tools should be applied as a set of some assessments. For instance, self-assessment results should be compared with assessment results by staff and supervisors or counselors. One criticism of the TELSA self-assessment self-development section can be that although it contains an item for school leaders to assess their own performance, there could be a more specific item about students' outcomes as student outcomes are the most important objectives of schools and education.

In conclusion, it is high time to start school leader assessment and self-assessment practices in developing countries as less importance and frequency might be paid to school leadership self-development, most probably to development as well, in comparison with the developed countries.

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