School Leadership For Implementing Inclusive Education

Dr.Piku Chowdhury
Associate Professor
Satyapriya Roy College of Education

Abstract:

Fostering equity is one of the main goals of inclusive schooling. Effective implementation of Inclusive education requires cooperation between special and regular teachers. However, little is known about the relationship between the leadership of a school, the provision of structures for collaboration, and the implementation of IEP in an inclusive context. The article remans a humble attempt at exploring to what extent leadership is connected to the provision of structures for collaboration and implementation of Inclusive education directly and indirectly.

Key words: inclusion, education, collaboration, leadership style, correlation

Introduction

Leadership is understood as a process of providing direction and applying influence (Lumby and Coleman, 2016). It involves managing people's emotions, thoughts and actions decisively to influence others towards a preferred direction (Diamond and Spillane, 2016). Leadership in inclusion means seeking out an understanding of the fundamental tenets of inclusion and constructing an administrative approach that complements its execution by teachers without their understanding and an active and carefully directed administrative approach, the facilitation of inclusion will occur only by incidents than by professional design approach by the head of the institution. Inclusive school leadership is specifically dedicated to addressing inequity to build community and the full participation of all learners. Research has identified three main leadership functions that must be performed for inclusive schools to run effectively (Billingsley, McLeskey and Crockett, 2017; McLeskey and Waldron, 2015; Skoglund and Stäcker, 2016). These main functions are setting direction, organisational development and human development (European Agency, 2018). Inclusive school leaders have the following qualities:

- They combine elements of instructional, distributed and transformative leadership models in their school leadership. Inclusive school leaders set direction towards more inclusive school practice.

- They take responsibility for and value all learners irrespective of their background, needs or ability.

- They work to ensure every learner's full participation and engagement by setting and communicating a clear direction for inclusive education in schools.

- Inclusive school leaders are aware that leadership is a collective and co-ordinated effort. Accordingly, they distribute leadership among key actors within or linked to a school. Therefore, effective inclusive leaders do not act only as individuals but within leadership teams.

- They have a role in building partnerships with staff, parents and external organisations. Inclusive school leaders use transformative leadership in the sense that they lead and organise change and build capacity for improvement aimed at the best possible learning experience for learners.

- This includes raising learners' achievement and developing a sense of well-being and belonging for all. They develop staff and other stakeholders. Using all available evidence, experience and expertise, they collaboratively create and sustain inclusive schools.

School leaders are responsible for mediating between highly complex demands of inclusive education, including Individualized educational planning and the structures at the specific school within their scope of action. The scope of action refers to, e.g. the allocation of resources and fostering of lesson development, as well as fostering cooperation between teachers and other pedagogical personnel. Moreover, school leaders in inclusive schools must ensure the improvement of learning opportunities for all children and especially for disadvantaged students, such as students with special educational needs (Kugelmass &Ainscow, 2004). From research on school leadership in general it is known, that school leaders differ in terms of their leadership styles and that those leadership styles are connected to the way, school leaders use their scope of action. Therefore, it can be assumed that schools differ in the way they implement individualised education planning and that those differences between schools are linked to the school's leadership. The regular class teacher and special teachers are involved in individualised education planning and the school leader needs to provide structures in order for them to collaborate. However, little is known about the relationship between leadership of a school, the provision of structures for collaboration, and the implementation of individualised education planning in inclusive schools.

Individualised education planning

Different terms are used like Individualised Education Programme, Individualised Intervention Programmes, Learning Plans (Mitchell, Morton, and Hornby, 2010) for IEPs. IEPs were first introduced legally binding as Individualised Education Programmes with the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA) in the USA in 1975. The EAHCA defines five key elements of IEPs:

i. a statement of current academic performance,
ii. a statement of annual goals,
iii. a statement of specific service provided for the student,
iv. duration of the service, and
v. criteria to evaluate if the goals were reached (EAHCA, Sec 4, 19).

IEPs aim to support individualised instruction for children with special educational needs in order to provide them with adequate educational opportunities (Smith, 1990). Despite early critiques, IEPs became a key element of inclusive education in many countries, e.g. most European countries, Australia, and Canada (Mitchell, Morton, and Hornby, 2010). Although adaptations to national educational systems produced variations in the specific design of the IEPs, the key elements defined in EAHCA still seem to play a major role internationally. The implementation of individualised education planning [IEP] is not primarily bound by school laws but depends on effective institutional leadership.

Review of Related Literature

With regard to the implementation of IEP, the recommendations provided by studies emphasise that IEPs should be dynamic, should contain concrete learning goals and a fixed time frame, yet they can be altered if necessary, should be variable in form and criteria and have to be adapted to the needs of the specific student as well as the school's culture. Based on more than 190 studies from the USA, Canada, Europe, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa Mitchell, Morton, and Hornby (2010) summarise that IEP requires collaboration between general and special teachers, the involvement of the students themselves as well as their parents. However they also found that the role of institutional leadership in actual implementation, especially collaboration was not sufficient. Moser Opitz, Pool Maag & Labhart (2019) who investigated the implementation status of IEPs in Switzerland confirmed this assessment: They found that only three quarters of teachers reported that IEPs existed in their schools, despite all schools were required to implement IEPs.

With regard to different aspects of the implementation, research is rare. Around 80% of teachers reported to modify learning goals within the IEPs and 76% reported to adapt the IEPs regularly. Paccaud & Luder (2017) conducted a study in Switzerland on the precision of the documented learning goals. They found that the quality of learning goals was rather low with respect to measurability and defined time frames. Little is known about factors that influence the different aspects of the implementation of IEP, such as the involvement of leadership, the definition of learning goals, and the dynamic of IEPs. However, collaboration is emphasised as an important aspect (Eller & Grimm,2008). Şenay Ilik & Konuk Er (2018) found that teachers as well as special teachers considered collaborative individualised education planning to happen less often than necessary and institutional leadership was to beheld responsible to some extent. It can be concluded, that the provision of structures for collaboration within schools seems to be a crucial factor when it comes to implementation of IEP. In order to foster collaboration between teachers and special teachers, school leaders play an important role by providing the necessary infrastructure. This article seeks to understand to what extent school leaders may influence the implementation of IEP directly and indirectly by the provision of structures for collaboration.

School leadership in inclusive schools

Against the backdrop of inclusive education, school leadership is associated with promoting equity (Blackmore, 2006). The main task of school leaders is the promotion of the best education for all students and especially disadvantaged students (Dyson, 2010; Kugelmass & Ainscow, 2004). To achieve this, the school leader needs to develop the teachers' motivation, skills and working conditions with respect to a diverse student body (Amrhein, 2014). From general research on school leadership it is known, that four sets of leadership qualities seem to be effective:

i. building vision and setting directions,
ii. redesigning the organisation,
iii. understanding and developing people
iv. managing the teaching and learning programme (Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008).

With respect to building vision and setting directions and redesigning the organisation, it is assumed that those leadership practices influence motivation and commitment of the staff, while understanding and developing people as well as managing the teaching and learning programme aim primarily towards building knowledge and skills, teachers need in order to fulfil the school's goals and to develop effective instructional conditions. Some important facets of leadership for successful implementation of inclusive education identified from review of relevant literature, are –

i. Administrative trust
ii. Team building including overcoming problems faced by educational leaders.
iii. The fundamental elements identified as principals' perspective related to the inclusiveness of their schools identified through research include:
iv. Philosophy
v. Policies
vi. Assessment
vii. Behaviour and discipline
viii. Student evaluation
ix. Community involvement
x. Attitudes and perceptions
xi. Professional development

Within the framework of inclusive education, two main components of leadership can be extracted from the literature associated with promoting inclusive education: Collaborative processes and lesson development. Dorczak (2011) defines the valuing of collaboration as the key aspect of inclusive leadership styles. In a systematic literature review based on 41 reports, Dyson (2010) found that collaborative processes between teachers and pedagogical personnel but also in terms of decision making were crucial in order to develop inclusive schools. Comparing international leadership practices in inclusive schools on the basis of case studies, Kugelmass & Ainscow (2004) concluded that leadership in inclusive schools is marked by a

collaborative nature and that school leaders play a major role in supporting collaboration. Their conclusion was built upon a comparative analysis in the USA, England and Portugal. The second main component, the focus on lesson development aims to deal with a diverse student body and to promote a school culture which enhances professional teacher development (Blackmore, 2006). School leaders in inclusive schools have to promote collaborative processes and lesson development with the goal of the best education for all students. School leaders differ in the way they lead a school. With respect to the relation between school leadership and the promotion of collaborative processes and lesson development, research on different leadership styles, suggest that transformational and instructional leadership practices are most promising (Day & Sammons, 2013). In terms of promoting collaborative processes, the transformational leadership style seems to be most adequate. Transformational leadership aims to understand and develop people to foster productive social relations. It includes leadership practices such as supporting teachers, recognising the personnel's work, and fostering participation (Day & Sammons, 2013). Lesson development is particularly associated with the instructional leadership style. Instructional leadership emphasises the importance of learning goals as well as the coordination between teachers' activities and those goals. Concrete leadership practices are for coordinating the teaching programme, providing advice for teachers with respect to their teaching, and ensuring systematic monitoring of the implementation of school goals (Day & Sammons, 2013). Empirical findings from different countries, e.g. Turkey, the USA, Germany, and Denmark suggest that leadership practices and teacher collaboration are related (Gumus, Bulut & Bellibas, 2013; Szczesiul & Huizenga, 2014). Pietsch et al. (2016) investigated the influence of leadership on working conditions, including collaboration between teachers in a sample of 1663 teachers in Germany. They found that instructional as well as transformational leadership had a significant positive effect on collaboration. Another study by Honingh and Hooge (2014) revealed a strong connection between perceived school leader support, that was operationalised using practices referring to transformational leadership, and collaboration among 614 teachers in Dutch primary and secondary schools. With respect to instructional leadership, Goddard et al. (2015) found a strong connection to teacher collaboration. However, there is a lack of research concerning the connection between transformational and instructional leadership and the promotion of collaborative structures in inclusive schools. Ingram (1997) pointed out, that transformational leadership is important for school and lesson development in an inclusive setting. It is assumed and empirically verified that the effect of leadership styles on developing processes within schools for inclusive practices is immense (Leithwood, Harris & Hopkins, 2008).

Research questions

Within the context of inclusive education, fostering equity by offering the best education possible to all students is one of the main goals of schooling. One instrument to implement individualised education for all students are IEPs. Based on the review of theoretical and empirical literature it is found that leadership is connected to the provision of collaborative processes. Those processes are in turn connected with the implementation of IEP. Moreover, indirect and direct effects of instructional and transformational leadership styles on the implementation of IEP are expected. IEPs can be considered a key aspect of the development of inclusive processes in schools with the aim to foster students' performance. It is likely that the school leaders' orientation towards teachers' professional development and the teaching and learning programme is connected to those inclusive processes. It can further be assumed, that the instructional as well as the transformational leadership style is positively connected to the implementation of IEP in inclusive schools. Within inclusive schools it can be assumed, that transformational and instructional leadership are connected positively to the promotion of collaborative structures.

To test those argumentative relationships, the following research questions were asked in the present study:

i. Are transformational leadership and instructional leadership linked directly to the provision of structures for collaboration in inclusive schools?
ii. Are leadership styles linked directly to the implementation of IEP?

Method

Sample

150 school leaders, both male and female, were randomly selected for the study from Kolkata and adjoining districts.

Tool

A survey questionnaire was designed after in-depth review of related studies and the content validity was duly established by getting it reviewed by three experts in the field. All items were answered on a scale ranging from 1 = does not apply at all to 4 = fully applies.

Process

Participating school leaders were asked to fill in an online-questionnaire. The final sample consisted of 135 school leaders. From 35 school leaders, 20.7% were male, and 79.3% were female. They had M = 30.87 (SD = 8.99) years of school experience in total, M = 13.87 (SD = 10.17) years of experience as a school leader, and M = 10.99 (SD = 8.87) years of experience as a school leader at the sample school.

Results:

Table 1:

	M	SD	Correlations			
TL	IL	ST	IIEP			
TL	3.46	0.39	1	.573*	.510*	.301*
IL	3.23	0.42		1	.494*	.499*
ST	3.39	0.58			1	.468*
IIEP	3.12	0.44				1

Table 1 shows the mean values and standard deviations of and the correlations between transformational leadership, instructional leadership, structures for collaboration, and the implementation of IEP. School leaders reported to use a high amount of transformational as well as a medium amount of instructional leadership practices. The structures for collaboration provided were positively rated. Moreover, the implementation of IEP was rated at a medium level. The correlations between the variables point to positive medium relations between transformational leadership, instructional leadership, the structures for collaboration, and the implementation of IEP.

Conclusion

This study aimed to investigate the relationship between the leadership of a school, the provision of structures for collaboration, and the implementation of inclusive education. In line with prior research, medium to strong connections between school leadership and collaboration was found (Pietsch et al. 2016; Goddard et al. 2015). The study revealed that structures for collaboration were indeed important for the implementation of inclusive education and individualised education planning. Further, the results show that the school leader can be seen as a gates keeper to implement inclusive education (Ainscow & Sandill,2010). The results reveal the school leaders' influence on processes in schools. As high quality IEPs and their collaborative implementation seem to be associated with greater student learning outcomes (Hunt et al. 2003), the school leader is likely to influence student outcomes in inclusive schools indirectly. However, Future studies should connect structural prerequisites with processes in schools on the level of the teachers and students to get better insights into the school leaders' influence on school processes to implement inclusive education.

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