Perceptions of School Principals on Factors that Improve School Performance in Albania

This study aims to provide a complete overview of the factors perceived by principals of pre-college educational institutions in Albania as potential factors to predict improvement in school performance. These factors are teaching and learning practices, teachers' professional development, collaboration with parents. The study had a quantitative approach. Data were collected using the Likert scale, with a Cronbach's coefficient of .79. The sample was purposely selected and the link to the instrument for data collection was sent to the principals of the pre-college schools in Albania. The response rate was 44%. To answer the main research question of the study, multiple models' regression was performed. The results of the analysis showed that 22% of the variance in school performance could be predicted by these variables. The overall model proved to be statistically significant, $F (3, 547) = 55.049 \ p = .000$. adjusted $R^2 = .22$. Examination of the individual predictors showed that teacher professional development (Beta =.184, p = .000), teaching and learning practices (Beta =.302, p = .000), and collaboration with the parent community (Beta =.164, p = .000) were significant predictors of overall perceptions of school performance.

Keywords: *Leader practices, school improvement, teaching and learning, professional development.*

Introduction

Schools nowadays face many challenges in how they need to improve all aspects of their work (Reed & Swaminathan, 2014) to be in coherence with the development of the generations of students they educate, is very necessary to promote school effectiveness (Somech A. , 2010). Since the main mission of the school focuses on teaching and learning, as well as since in all cases the effectiveness of the school is measured in academic achievement (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008), a school leader must focus on time, energy, and priorities, in terms of improving those factors which directly affect school performance (Kwan, 2011). In this context, the identification of factors that should be considered by the leaders of school institutions to improve not only the academic achievements of students (Bruggencate, Luyten, & Scheerens, 2012), but the entire performance of the educational institution is of particular importance (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2007). An effective school must pursue a strong and evolving vision, developing strategies that are focused on the students' performance and the learning process. This focus includes passion and long-term commitment. Also, in an effective school, decision-making must be developed and supported by all segments of the school community (Somech A. , 2010) to build the right capacities, maintain the school's sustainability, and support the reforms needed to improve its quality. In the same respect, an effective school should promote and support continuous development,

reflection on practice, as well as professional development, to improve the teaching and learning process; and most importantly, build a culture of school collaboration, with broad enough community connections to provide support for long-term improvements (Seager & Jorgenson, 2003). Although it is widely acknowledged that the importance of an effective leader is quite important (Haug & Wasonga, 2021), there are not many studies that help school leaders improve the effectiveness of their schools (Grissom & Loeb, 2011). This study aims to provide a complete overview of the factors perceived by principals of pre-college educational institutions in Albania as potential factors to predict improvement in academic performance.

Teaching and learning practices from the viewpoint of the instructional leadership

Effective teaching in school is a very important aspect that interacts in enhancing student learning (Angelo & Cross, 2012; Decristan, et al., 2015), and has an impact on school achievement. Instructional leadership, school performance (Heck, 1992) and achievement are very related together (Andrews & Soder, 2007; Schrik & Wasonga, 2019). Moreover, the role of instructional leadership is always to influence effective teaching and learning processes. (Munna, 2021). The instructional leader not only knows constructivist teaching and learning methods and practices (Hallinger, 2010), but also constantly encourages his staff to apply these methods (Cosner, De Voto, & Rah'man, 2018; Kiliç, 2021). By the same token, school principals need to work together with their staff to increase the level of achievement of their school (Hill & Taylor, 2004). This is done by considering important elements of organizing the process of proactive teaching in the classroom (Sondergeld, Bell, & Leusner, Spring 2010), connecting teaching techniques with the interest and ability of the student (Clouse & Nelson, 2000), and designing annual planning according to the needs of students (Routman, 2012). It is also accomplished by supporting teachers to design realistic learning goals (Andrews-Larson, Wilson, & Larbi-Cherif, 2017), enriching learning resources (Pino & Viladot, 2018), and using appropriate methods and techniques for formative assessment of students (Johnson, Sondergeld, & Walton, 2019). The school should act as a single organization and as such the attention of teachers should primarily be focused on improving daily practices to improve the teaching and learning process.

Teachers Professional Development

For an effective school, it is very important to promote professional development activities (Shabibi & Silvennoinen), and more importantly sustentation for capacity development (Cisterna, Gotwals, Kintz, Lane, & Roeber, 2020). In this case, successful professional development activities

must include knowledge of the discipline and also focuses on certain principles such as pedagogical content knowledge (Van Driel, 2012), new ways of teaching, and using formative assessment in the class (Andersson & Palm, 2018), as well as information on recognition of students including their progressive development concerning the workload shown in the school curriculum (Shaw, 2012). Also, these activities may contain information related to developing the competencies of teachers. These competencies may include teachers analyzing their practices and exploring new opportunities, how practice influences different students, and new opportunities for evaluating and improving practices, etc. (Van Veen, Zwart, & Meirink, 2012; Garet M. S., Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001). All teachers engage in discussions about their professional development. Discussion groups, peer observation, self-assessment, workplace practices (Dall'Alba & Sandberg, 2006), as well as opportunities for professional development outside of school, are some of the ways for the professional development of teachers (Garet M. S., Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon).

Collaborations with Parents' Community

Developing collaborations between families and schools to promote academic success (Smith, Atkins, & Connell, 2003) is a very difficult task that schools need to face (Hill & Taylor, 2004). School principals need to have the communication and interpersonal skills needed to interact with all school-community factors, including parents, students, teachers, and community members (Reid, 2020). According to Epstein (2009), the way the school cares for its students is reflected in the way the school makes connections with its families. If teachers view students simply as students, families are likely seen as separate from the school. This partnership means that the parties share the same interests and responsibilities for the children, and they work together to create better programs and opportunities for their students (Epstein, 2009). Communication is one of the most important elements to create and strengthen connections between school, families, and beyond. This communication can include sharing information about students, certain curricula, activities, and all the necessary information. Teachers have to inform parents about both learning outcomes and curricula. Since today the use of technology and the facilities it offers are present in every aspect of our lives, teachers can use technology to facilitate communication with parents. Also, many schools have institutional procedures for communicating with families. These include regular and organized meetings with parents, evenings dedicated to special events at school, such as entertainment programs, student competitions or exhibitions, seasonal concerts, student-led conferences, and more (Danielson, 2002).

1 **School staff management**
2
3   A successful leader of an educational institution must consider and
4 effectively manage people, resources, and finances (Bruggencate, Luyten, &
5 Scheerens, 2012). Thus, he must show a deep professional commitment to
6 realizing human resource management, including the application of best
7 practices in this regard. A successful leader applies personal accountability to
8 the responsibilities he or she has, and effectively uses the resources available to
9 maximize the improvement of students' learning outcomes (Haug & Wasonga,
10 2021). She also applies methods of managing staff by demonstrating high
11 professional standards to their behavior and creating a positive, and positive
12 climate by promoting continuous improvement of all staff (Heck, 1992).
13
14
15 **Method**
16
17   A quantitative research approach was used in this study and its design is a
18 descriptive correlation. The study aimed to measure the perceptions of the
19 principals of educational institutions in Albania about the factors that are
20 related to the performance of the school.
21
22 *Research questions*
23
24   This study had some research questions
25   Research Question No.1 Are there statistically significant differences
26   between the female leadership group and the male leadership group in
27   terms of their perceptions of school performance?
28   Research Hypothesis Nr. 1 The mean scores of the female leadership
29   group are different from the mean scores of the male leadership group in
30   terms of their perceptions of school performance.
31   Research Question No.2 How well does collaboration with parents'
32   community, teaching and learning practices, and Teachers' professional
33   development, leadership style, and school staff management, predict
34   school performance? How much variance in school performance can be
35   explained by these models?
36   Research Hypothesis: The regression model is used to produce an equation
37   that best predicts school performance as a function of independent
38   variables: collaboration with parents' community, leadership style,
39   teaching and learning practices, Teachers' professional development, and
40   school staff management.
41
42
43 **Conceptual framework of the study**
44
45   The following figure shows the main variables of the study, which
46 statistically predicted school performance from this study.

1 **Figure 1.** *Main variables of the study*
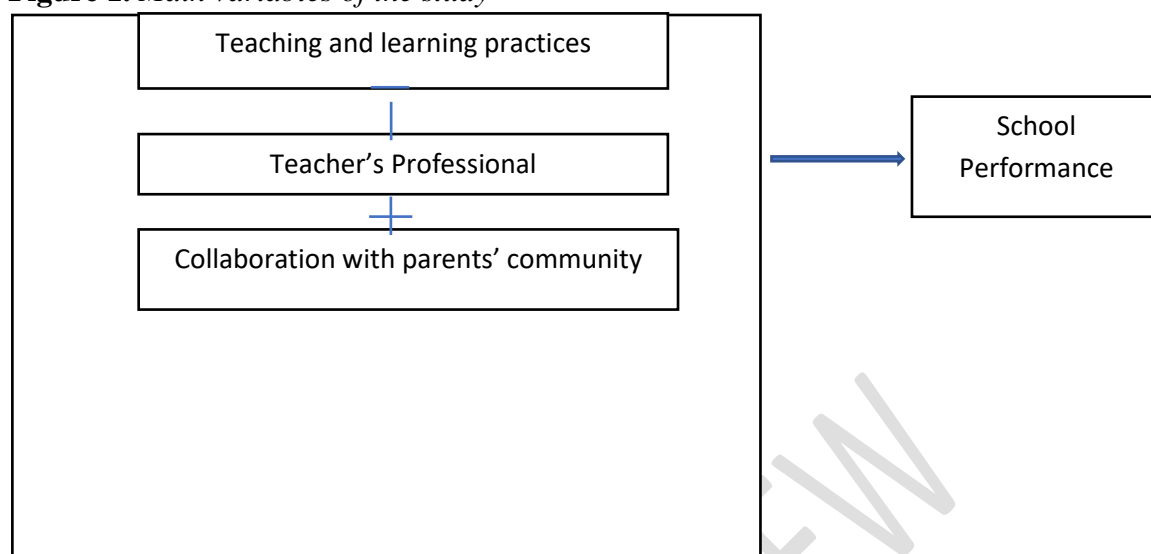
18 *Population and sample*

20 The population for this study was 1259 principals and vice-principals of
21 pre-university schools in Albania. The questionnaire was sent to all these
22 respondents. After sending the questionnaire, in the first stage only 12%,
23 completed it. After the third reminder, it reached 44%. The total number of
24 principals/vice principals who completed the questionnaire was 554
25 respondents.

27 *Instrument*

29 For the identification of the indicators that have been used in the
30 construction of the Likert scale for measuring the dimensions of this study, the
31 Albanian School Leadership Standards document has been taken as the basis,
32 and a Likert scale instrument with five levels of agreement, and five main
33 sections, was used for data collection The first section asked for demographic
34 data on participants such as age and gender. In the second, third, fourth, and
35 fifth sections, questions were designed that measured the principals'
36 perceptions regarding the dimensions of school performance, collaboration
37 with parents' community, teaching and learning practices, teacher professional
38 development, leadership style, and management of school staff. The
39 instrument's reliability has been acceptable with a reported Cronbach alpha.79.

41 *Data Collection*

43 Data for this study were collected through a google form, over 45 days.
44 Participants were contacted via email to participate in the survey. When
45 contacting participants there were provided a brief presentation of the
46 researcher, the main aim of the study, and a short description of the survey. A

1 cover letter was attached to the study, explaining the anonymity/confidentiality
2 of the study as well as the information that participants are under no obligation
3 to participate in the study.
4
5 *Pilot study*
6
7 The instrument used for collecting data for this study was created
8 specifically for this study, so its content validation was necessary. Gall, Borg,
9 and Call (1996) suggest that to validate the content of the Likert scale, six to
10 ten, field experts whose profiles are like those included in the sample should be
11 included in this process. Thus, 8 principals with over 25 years of experience in
12 education and over 10 years of experience as school principals or vice-
13 principals, were contacted and a panel was set up with them, which later served
14 to validate the content of the questionnaire. All the suggestions of these
15 professionals were reflected in the questionnaire before it was distributed to the
16 respondents. Two pilot phases were then conducted to achieve a reliability
17 rating of 0.79.
18
19 *Data analyses*
20
21 The data gathered was transported into an SPSS package. Before
22 continuing with the inferential analyses, needed assumptions for statistical
23 analyses were assessed. A two-tailed alpha level of .05 was used for all
24 statistical tests. Cronbach's alpha was run to assess internal consistency
25 reliability for the scale that was used to collect data. By the same token,
26 normality, homogeneity of variance, and total independence of observation
27 have been established. For those variables that did not have a normal
28 distribution, the transformation process was performed, involving
29 mathematically modifying the scores using the appropriate formula until the
30 distribution looks more normal, to be subjected to multiple regression analyzes.
31 The table below summarizes the research questions, variables, and statistical
32 analysis developed.
33
34 **Table 1.** *Research questions, Dimensions, and statistical procedures*

Research questions	Dimensions and indicators	Statistical procedures
Research Question No.1 Are there statistically significant differences between the female leadership group and the male leadership group in terms of their perceptions of school performance?	Gender School performance	T-test
How well does collaboration with parents' community, teaching and	Collaboration with parents' community: Teaching and learning	Multiple regression

learning practices, Teachers' professional development, leadership style, and school staff management, predict school performance?	practices Teachers' professional development. Leadership style School Staff Management School performance	

Results and Discussions

To answer the first question of this study whether there are statistical differences between female and male principals in terms of their perception of school performance, an independent-samples T-test analysis was performed. Table two shows that this question was answered by 193 male executives (N = 193, SD = 1.05) and 361 female executives (N = 361, SD = 1.10). Thus, the averages of the groups of female principals from male principals were analyzed to see if there were differences in terms of their perceptions regarding school performance. The data in table No.3, show that there are no statistically significant differences in scores between female leaders and male leaders concerning this dimension. In this case, the research hypothesis H_1 has been rejected ($\mu_1 \neq \mu_2$). The null hypothesis H_0 has been confirmed, based on which there is no statistically significant difference between female and male executives in terms of school performance ($\mu_1 = \mu_2$).

Table 2. *Group Statistics for School principals*

Group Statistics					
	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
School performance	Males	193	4.15	1.051	.076
	Females	361	4.07	1.104	.058

Table 3. *Independent Sample test*

Independent Samples Test										
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
									95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
School performance	Equal variances assumed	.307	.580	.812	552	.417	.079	.097	-.112	.269
	Equal variances not assumed			.824	409.335	.410	.079	.095	-.109	.266

As there are no statistically significant differences between the two groups, the effect size was not calculated.

To answer the second research question, two multiple regression models were constructed. Before the dependent variable data, and the independent

1 variable data were treated in this model, they were scanned to meet the normal
2 distribution conditions, and the homoscedasticity and linearity of the residuals
3 for the dependent variable.
4   As results from table No.4, 22% of the variance in the school performance
5 variable can be predicted by factors of cooperation with the parent community,
6 learning and teaching practices, and the professional development of teachers.
7
8 **Table 4.** *Model Summary of the regression*

Model Summary			
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.482[a]	.232	.228	.954
a. Predictors: (Constant), Collaboration with parents' community, Teaching and Learning practices, Teacher's Professional Development			
b. Dependent Variable: School performance			

9
10   If we refer to table no. 5, for the interpretation of the model which was
11 created to answer this question, it turns out that $F_{(3, 547)} = 55.049$, $p = 0.000$,
12 which shows that this model is statistically significant. Based on this result, it
13 is stated that this model predicts statistically significant change in the school
14 performance variable.
15
16 **Table 5.** *The result of the ANOVA*

ANOVA					
Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1 Regression	150.175	3	50.058	55.049	.000[a]
Residual	497.412	547	.909		
Total	647.587	550			
a. Predictors: (Constant), Collaboration with parents' community, Teaching and Learning practices, Teacher's Professional Development					
b. Dependent Variable: School performance					

17
18   Table No.6 also presents an overview of the multiple regression model. As
19 can be seen from the results in this table, all the results are statistically
20 significant where $p = .000$. Also, from this table, it is concluded that the
21 coefficients for this model are all positive values, which means that the high
22 values of the variables of cooperation with the parent community, learning and
23 teaching practices, and professional development of teachers, are associated
24 with high values of school performance, seen from the point of view of the
25 leaders of educational institutions.
26
27

1 **Table 6.** *Coefficients of Equation of Multiple Regression*

Coefficients					
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.331	.220		6.042	.000
	Teacher's Professional Development	.196	.045	.184	4.337	.000
	Teaching and Learning practices	.319	.042	.302	7.587	.000
	Collaboration with parents' community	.138	.034	.164	4.033	.000
a. Dependent Variable: School performance						

2

3 More specifically the estimated equation of multiple regression for the
4 model of this question is:

5 $\hat{Y} = 1.331 + 0.184 \, x \, Teacher's \, Proffesional \, Development +$
6 $0.302 \, x \, Teaching$ and
7 $Learning \, Practices + 0.164 \, x$
8 $Collaboration \, with \, parents \, community$

9 Thus, from the regression equation generated by the model, it can be
10 interpreted that if according to the perception of the leaders of pre-university
11 education institutions, the professional development of teachers increases by
12 one unit, the school performance will increase by 0.184 units. If it increases by
13 one unit the dimensions of classroom learning and teaching practices, school
14 performance will improve by 0.302 units. And if it increases by one unit of
15 collaboration with the parent community, school performance will improve by
16 0.164 units.

17 Regarding the variables of leadership style and management of school
18 staff, the second regression model was constructed. From this model, none of
19 these variables statistically predicted school performance.

20
21

22 **Conclusions**

23

24 This study aimed to identify some of the variables that best predict school
25 performance, seen from the perspective of 554 principals and vice-principals,
26 in pre-university education schools in Albania. The study has had a quantitative
27 approach. A Likert scale with acceptable reliability has been designed for data
28 collection. The results showed there was no significant difference in scores of
29 male leaders (N = 193, SD = 1.05) and female leaders in terms of their perception
30 for school performance (N = 361, SD = 1.10), t(552)=.82, p = .41. On the other
31 hand, to identify which of the variables is related to school performance, two
32 models of multiple-fold regression have been constructed. Of these models,
33 only the first model turned out to be statistically significant. The results of the
34 analysis showed that 22% of the variance in school performance could be
35 predicted by these variables. The overall model proved to be statistically

significant, F (3, 547) = 55.049 p = .000. adjusted R^2 = .22. Examination of the individual predictors showed that teacher professional development (Beta = .184, p = .000), teaching and learning practices (Beta = .302, p = .000), and collaboration with the parent community (Beta = .164, p = .000) were significant predictors of overall perceptions of school performance.

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