

STUDY OF PRINCIPAL LEADERSHIP TRAITS IN THE CONTEXT OF CONTEMPORARY SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

In the field of education, the role of the school principal is crucial. The principal is not only a key figure in educational administration, but also a shaper of the school culture and environment. Leadership occupies a central place in the work of the principal and has a profound impact on the overall development of the school and the academic achievement of students. As key drivers of school education, they should be courageous in reforming traditional methods of education and committed to its continuous development. Their educational philosophy should emphasize the development of innovative thinking and practical skills for students, laying a solid foundation for their holistic and lifelong development. For principal leadership theory research content is relatively rich, but each theory has certain flaws, in the process of practice, if you cannot deeply analyze and interpret these theories, then based on the theory of the measures made and the effectiveness of the relevant tools will be improved. Comprehensively, all the theories of principal leadership have a simple core concept, as effective school leaders have some basic qualities.

Keywords: Leadership skills, School Culture Shaper, Comprehensive development

INTRODUCTION

1. Principal leadership competencies of school principals

In modern society, education is regarded as one of the most fundamental areas of building a nation. And the school headmaster, as the leader and manager of the school, plays a vital role in the development of the school. The basic function of education is to influence the mind and body of the educated through a purposeful, planned and organized approach. As the impact of the function of education on political progress, economic development, social harmony and cultural heritage deepens, so does the concern for the effective realization of the function of education.

School headmasters are at the heart of school management and are important agents of school development (Khoarane, 2024). Their role is not only to manage the day-to-day affairs of the school, but more importantly to make strategic decisions for the development of the school, to plan the long-term direction of the school, to promote educational and teaching reform and innovation, and to enhance the overall strength of the school. There is now a general trend in all countries that from the community to

the school, from teachers to parents, and even including students, there are increasing and growing expectations of headmasters.

2. The demands and challenges of modern education for headmasters

The increasing demands of modern society on school education require schools not only to impart knowledge, but also to develop students' comprehensive qualities and innovative abilities to adapt to the rapidly changing social environment. This has led to new demands and challenges for the management of school headmasters, and headmaster leadership has gradually become an important indicator of the quality of school operation (Green, 2023; Chambers, 2023).

In today's intricate and ever-evolving landscape, headmasters find themselves navigating a maze of unprecedented challenges, particularly in the realm of leadership. The role of a principal in contemporary times extends far beyond the realms of basic subject expertise and rudimentary management experience. It demands a profound degree of leadership acumen that intertwines knowledge with the nuanced complexities of educational administration.

In an era where modern education is increasingly leaning towards a model that is personalized, diversified, and geared for lifelong learning, the responsibilities and expectations from headmasters have escalated significantly. They are required to embody a comprehensive educational philosophy that not only resonates with current educational paradigms but also anticipates future trends. This philosophy should be rooted in a strategic vision that enables headmasters to accurately gauge the pulse of the times and comprehend the developmental trajectory of their institutions. Such foresight allows them to craft educational strategies that are not just innovative and forward-thinking but also sustainable in the long run, ensuring that their schools remain at the forefront of educational excellence.

The rapid integration of technology in education has brought forth a new dimension to leadership in this sector. Headmasters are now expected to possess the ability to leverage information technology to augment teaching methodologies and enhance administrative efficiency. This involves staying abreast of the latest technological advancements and understanding how to effectively incorporate them into the educational framework. It's not just about digital literacy, but a deeper comprehension of how technology can transform learning experiences, streamline administrative processes, and facilitate more effective communication within the school community (ARFAN, 2024; Akter & Tabassum, 2024). Furthermore, in this age of information and innovation, headmasters must also excel in areas such as change management, emotional intelligence, and cultural competence. They should be adept at guiding their schools through transitions, nurturing an environment that supports creativity and critical thinking, and fostering an inclusive culture that respects and celebrates diversity.

The role of a headmaster in the current complex and changing environment is multi-faceted and demanding. It requires not only a high level of leadership but also an amalgamation of strategic foresight, technological proficiency, and a deep understanding of the evolving educational landscape. Headmasters must be visionaries, innovators, and compassionate leaders, guiding their schools with a clear sense of direction and purpose, and shaping the future of education in a way that is responsive, responsible, and revolutionary.

3. Research on the leadership evaluation system of principals

From the current research results, the actual research theories derived from the development and advancement of school leadership research theories such as from school leadership trait theory, leadership behavior theory, and leadership power change theory and transformational leadership theory have begun to be gradually applied and served in practice, for example, in the Finnish education system, where Finnish school leaders adopt student-centered approaches to education, emphasizing teachers'

professional development and school Autonomy. Finnish teachers have a high degree of autonomy in designing curriculum and assessing student performance, and school leaders support this autonomy by providing resources, training, and encouraging collaboration among teachers (Firdaus, R., Maghfirah Mannong, A. B., Latief, S. A., & et al., 2023). High Tech High, California: High Tech High is a project-based learning environment that encourages students to solve complex problems through hands-on learning. The school's leadership theory practices are reflected in its innovative educational model and organizational structure, where school leaders encourage teacher and student innovation and promote deeper learning through interdisciplinary projects. School leaders also enable co-leadership of teachers and students through participation in the design of curriculum and school decision-making processes (Abella et al. 2024). Harvard Business School (HBS): By promoting a case-based approach to teaching and learning, HBS demonstrates how to integrate practice-based learning with leadership development. School leaders encourage students and faculty to explore various aspects of leadership and management together by providing an environment that supports innovation and personal development (Lewis et al., 2023).

For the evaluation of school principal leadership, countries such as the United Kingdom, the United States and Australia advocate the development of professional standards for principals as a basis for assessing leadership skills, viewing these professional standards as the basis for principal development and evaluation. Tailored to meet the unique educational needs of each country, they ensure continuous educational development. research on the roles and responsibilities of principals, action research on the activities of principals, and investigations into the characteristics that define high-performing, outstanding principals. The democratization of the assessment process has received a major boost. This includes the promotion of principal self-assessment, school personnel involvement, and community participation. In the view of these educational organizations, it was felt that the assessment of principals should not just be subject to scrutiny and oversight but should be a process that helps principals identify problems so that they can improve their work and enhance the quality of education. This process highlights the importance of diverse participation, communication and negotiation among all parties involved in the assessment.

LEADERSHIP RESEARCH

1. Leadership essence

The history of leadership theory can be traced back to the early 20th century, and its development over more than a century of scholarship on leadership can be broadly divided into the following phases: early theories from the early 1900s to the 1940s, behavioral theories from the early 1900s to the 1940s, contextual theories from the 1960s to the 1980s, emerging theories from the 1980s to the early 21st century, and contemporary theories and research.

Leadership is mostly defined as the process of influencing a group to achieve goals and guiding an organization to become more cohesive and coherent (Dzikriana et al., 2024). Leaders achieve influence on group organizations by demonstrating their own leadership traits such as values, beliefs, character, knowledge, skills, ethics, experience, and culture. Leaders motivate followers in a group and push them to take action and accomplish goals. Leadership is a highly complex social process.

2. Basic framework of leadership theory research

The research framework of leadership studies can be succinctly summarized into the following core elements:

I. Evolution of Leadership Theories: The evolution of leadership theories from the initial Great Man and Trait Theories to Behavioral and Contingency (Situational) Theories, and then to contemporary Transformational, Transactional, and Servant Leadership theories, reflects a continuous deepening and expansion of our understanding of leadership.

II. Importance of Traits and Behaviors: Early theories emphasized the inherent personality traits of leaders, while subsequent theories focused more on the behaviors and styles of leaders, and how to adjust leadership methods according to different situations.

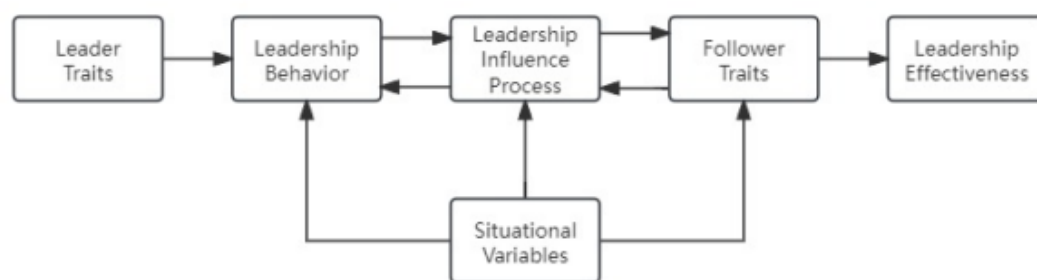
III. Influence of Situations: Situational theory posits that the effectiveness of leadership depends on specific circumstances. Leaders need to choose an appropriate leadership style based on different environments and conditions.

IV. Diversity in Leadership: Modern leadership theories consider leadership as multidimensional, including various styles, traits, and behaviors. Effective leaders need to flexibly apply different leadership skills based on the diverse needs of organizations and individuals.

V. Malleability of Leadership Traits: Contrary to early theories, modern theories suggest that leadership traits are not fixed and immutable; people can develop and improve their leadership abilities through learning and practice.

Gary Yukl (2002) covers a range of leadership theories, from traditional models like Trait and Behavior Theories to more modern approaches like Transformational and Transactional Leadership. He often focuses on what makes leaders effective, exploring factors like decision-making, communication styles, and motivation strategies. He tends to study leadership within the context of formal organizations, discussing how different organizational structures and cultures influence leadership styles and effectiveness. By combining theory and practice, he identifies the characteristics of leaders and followers and their performance in situational contexts, researching the causal relationships among these three types of variables. The capabilities of leaders, including communication abilities, emotional intelligence, strategic thinking, motivation, and decision-making skills. The followers' enthusiasm, sense of responsibility, growth, and willingness to learn. Organizational culture and structure, team dynamics, and the availability of technology and resources. These characteristics and factors interplay and collectively form the structure of his theoretical framework (Figure 1).

Figure 1
Causal relationships between variables.



House's Path-Goal Theory is a leadership theory developed by Robert House in 1971. The theory centers on the idea that a leader's behavior affects the performance and satisfaction of team members, and that leaders help team members achieve their goals by clearly indicating the path, while alleviating obstacles in the path and increasing the likelihood that they will complete the task (Daft, R.L., 2018). Key elements of the path-goal theory include:

Leader behaviors: House's theory emphasizes the need for leaders to adopt different leadership behaviors in order to adapt to the needs of their followers and the work environment. These behaviors include giving clear instructions to followers about what they should do, including planning, organizing, and controlling the work; paying attention to the welfare and needs of followers and creating a friendly and supportive work environment; encouraging followers to participate in the decision-making process and to consider their opinions and suggestions; and setting challenging goals, aiming for a high standard of performance, and demonstrating confidence in success.

Follower characteristics: The needs, characteristics, and work motivations of followers can influence the effectiveness of a leadership style. For example, followers who need more autonomy may be more comfortable with participative leadership.

Task characteristics: the nature and complexity of the task may also influence the choice of leadership style. For example, structured tasks may be more appropriate for directive leadership.

Leadership effectiveness: The goal of path-goal theory is to enhance followers' motivation, satisfaction, and job effectiveness. A leader's behavior should help followers recognize the path to reach their goals and reduce obstacles in the workplace, thus increasing the likelihood of task completion. (Figure 2) (Figure 3).

Figure 2
Leader Roles in the Path–Goal Model.

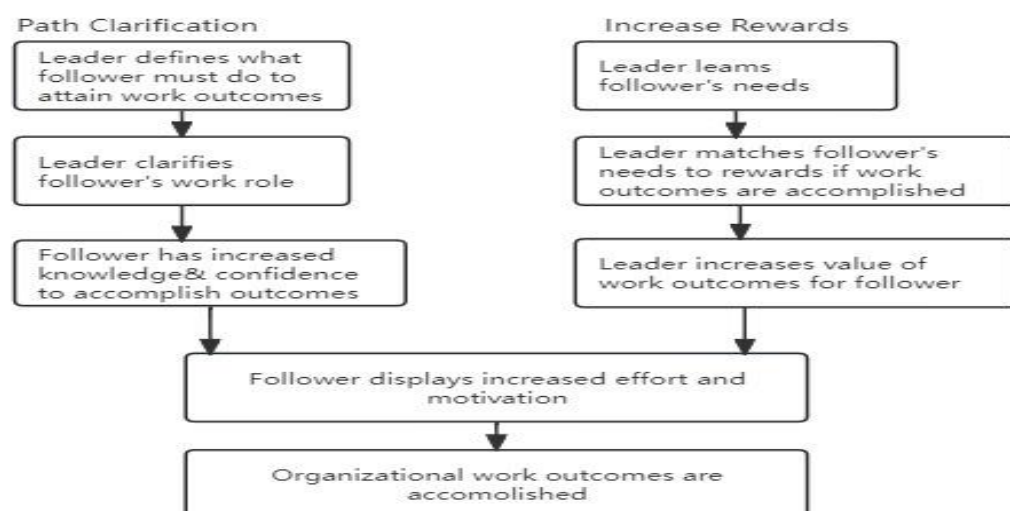
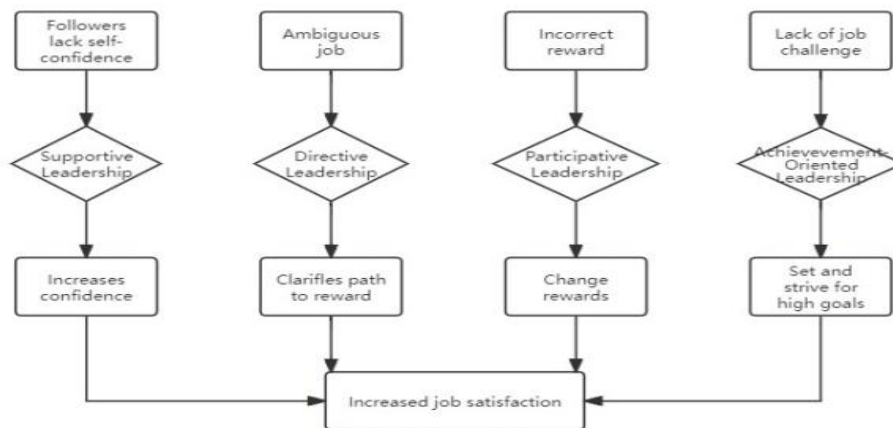


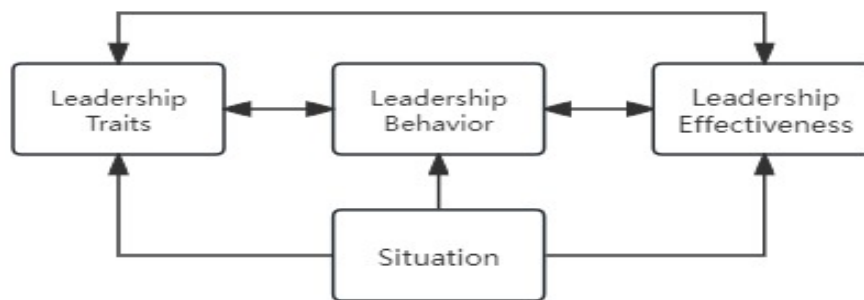
Figure 3
Path–Goal Situations and Preferred Leader Behaviors.



Synthesizing modern leadership theories, their structural framework basically contains a core set of theoretical concepts. Included in this core set of theoretical concepts are leader characteristics, leader behaviors, follower characteristics, internal and external organizational environments, and leadership effectiveness. Across the various theories, there is consensus on the causal relationship between these concepts, although each theory focuses on a different set of concerns. For example, leadership trait theory, which is considered fundamental to understanding leadership, highlights the personal qualities inherent in effective leaders. These traits range from personality traits and cognitive abilities to emotional intelligence and values. On the other hand, leader behaviors are considered the tangible actions and strategies that leaders use to influence and guide their followers to achieve organizational goals. This includes everything from decision-making processes and communication styles to conflict resolution and delegation skills. In addition, the context in which a leader operates, whether it is the internal organizational culture or the external socio-economic environment, can have a significant impact on the processes and outcomes of embodied leadership. In this contextual factor embodied leadership does not come out of thin air but is heavily influenced by internal organizational influences and broader external pressures and opportunities. Finally, leadership effectiveness, a concept central to all leadership theories, is a measure of the extent to which leaders achieve desired outcomes and goals. This includes improved team performance, organizational success, and meeting the needs and desires of followers. While modern leadership theories may differ in their focus and the depth to which they explore the interconnectedness of these concepts, together they emphasize the complexity of leadership. They recognize that effective leadership stems from the dynamic interplay between the traits and behaviours of the leader, the characteristics of the followers and the situational context, all of which converge to influence leadership effectiveness.

The author synthesizes the views of scholars and proposes a simple framework with minor adjustments.

Figure 4
Leadership Theory Research Framework.



PRINCIPAL LEADERSHIP RESEARCH

Research into headmaster leadership, a significant subset of broader leadership studies, has emerged as a pivotal area of interest and application within the educational sector. This focus is driven by the evolving demands of school reform and development, necessitating a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of what constitutes effective leadership in an educational context.

As schools face a rapidly changing educational landscape, the role of the headmaster becomes increasingly complex and multifaceted. Headmaster leadership research aims to address these complexities by exploring various dimensions of leadership styles, decision-making processes, and strategies that can significantly influence a school's performance and its educational environment. This research has become instrumental in charting the course of school reforms, providing a robust framework for enhancing educational practices.

One of the key areas where this research has made a substantial impact is in the professional growth of school leaders. By delving into the traits, behaviors, and practices of successful headmasters, the research offers invaluable insights for current and aspiring school leaders. It equips them with the knowledge and skills necessary to navigate the challenges of modern educational leadership, from managing diverse and inclusive school communities to implementing innovative teaching methodologies.

Furthermore, headmaster leadership research plays a crucial role in improving the overall quality of education and teaching. It does so by examining how leadership styles impact teacher motivation, student engagement, and academic outcomes. Effective headmaster leadership can foster a positive school culture, enhance teacher performance, and create an environment conducive to student learning and success. By identifying and disseminating best practices in leadership, this research helps schools to adopt strategies that promote excellence in teaching and learning.

During the initial mapping phase, most of the research theories in the field of educational management were borrowed from leadership theories in the field of business management. It was not until 1992 that the American scholar Thomas J. Sergio Anni, through his study of the leadership practices of authority sources, put forward the original theory of "moral leadership" in the field of educational management. This theory differs from traditional hierarchical and professional leadership in that it focuses on how headmasters should lead educational practice and development with ethics and values. The development of this theory marks an important milestone in the study of professional leadership

theory and practice. The authority of ethical leadership derives from broad and shared community values, ideas and ideals (Sergiovanni, 2002, p. 41-42).

Hemphill et al. focused on the leadership qualities of primary school principals and conducted a comprehensive and systematic study using them as their subjects. They found that headmasters who are highly committed to their work, keen to engage with people, have a strong affinity for and confidence in their work and life, and are optimistic have strong leadership skills. However, these traits vary from person to person, making it difficult to come up with a specific and scientific list of personality traits that would be appropriate for all school leaders. Restine identified conceptual skills, technical skills and interpersonal skills as key skills and necessary traits for leaders to achieve effective leadership. Leaders should also possess ten types of knowledge, including critical thinking, theory, locality, culture, ethics, research, politics, tacit knowledge, personal knowledge and skills. Haye Marber interviewed headmasters and used a scientific approach to systematically analyze and summarize the results. They concluded that enterprising, scientifically rigorous logical and analytical thinking, effective teamwork, broad and far-reaching influence, and strong rapport are the attributes of senior leaders. (Lin, M. ,2006)

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF PRINCIPAL LEADERSHIP RESEARCH

The theoretical underpinnings of principal leadership studies, a key branch of the educational administration field, must be integrated and adapted to the educational context. Matching theories cover not only traditional styles of leadership, but also more modern and refined theories. Key theories include transformational leadership, instructional leadership, distributed leadership, and servant leadership.

Principals, as a special group of leaders, need to lead not only to promote the development of the school, but also to consider the future development of the students and explore the balance between the two. Therefore, in exploring the research theories of principal leadership and their characteristics, we can highlight four mainstream leadership theories and their applications in the school environment:

Transformational leadership theories emphasize the importance of vision and inspiration. In this framework, principals are not only managers but also dreamers and inspirers. They inspire enthusiasm and creativity in teachers and staff by shaping a shared vision for education that drives continuous school improvement and growth. The key to transformational leadership is the principal's ability to inspire his or her team to go beyond the status quo and pursue excellence through his or her passion and clarity of vision (Enita, F. & Wening, N. ,2024).

Next, instructional leadership theory focuses on the principal's critical role in the teaching and learning process. This approach recognizes that principals not only manage the day-to-day operations of the school but are also actively involved in the development and implementation of instructional strategies. They improve the quality of education and overall school performance by promoting effective curriculum planning, supporting teacher professional development, and focusing on student academic achievement (Haga, B. B. ,2022).

Distributed leadership theory, on the other hand, promotes decentralized leadership within the school community. This model posits that effective leadership does not originate with the principal alone but is shared by multiple members of the school community. In this type of leadership system, principals, teachers, staff, and even students can take leadership roles in their respective areas and work together to promote the development and progress of the school (Achmad Imam. ,2024).

Finally, servant leadership emphasizes that the principal should prioritize and meet the needs of the staff, students, and community. In this philosophy, the principal's role as a leader moves beyond authority

and control and more toward service, support, and collaboration. Servant-leadership principals are committed to creating a caring and collaborative environment that fosters the growth of all members and the well-being of the school as a whole (Haga, B. B. ,2022).

While each of these theories is distinctive, what they have in common is that they emphasize the critical role of the principal in shaping the educational environment, stimulating the potential of the team, and driving school development. By combining these theories and practices, principals can respond more effectively to the challenges and opportunities in education today.

RESEARCH ON THE LEADERSHIP STRUCTURE OF HEADMASTERS

Research on the structure of principal leadership reveals the multidimensional role of the principal as a school leader and emphasizes the complexity and hierarchy of principal leadership. Principal leadership is not only a reflection of personal attributes and behaviors, but also a result of interactions with follower attributes, organizational context, and leadership effectiveness. It requires principals to adopt flexible and varied leadership strategies in practice to adapt to the changing educational environment and challenges from various sources, and ultimately to promote the sustainable development and progress of the school.

British academic Tomlinson outlines five key competencies for effective leadership: Symbolic Leadership, Human Leadership, Technical Leadership, Educational Leadership, and Cultural Leadership. Additionally, he emphasizes five strategic leadership areas vital for guiding all teachers and staff in school development: Vision, Organizational Argumentation, Integrity Thinking, Passion, and Strategic Positioning.

In parallel, the Professional Development Committee of the Australian Principals' Association highlights a slightly different set of five leadership competencies essential for effective leaders: Curriculum and Instruction, Culture and Wisdom, Politics and Community, Management Organization, and Education. American scholar Thomas J. Sergio Anni takes a categorial approach, dividing leadership into five distinct realms: Educational, Cultural, Interpersonal, Symbolic, and Technical. He posits a direct positive correlation between these five leadership categories and the effectiveness of headmaster leadership and school development. Specifically, higher proficiency in these categories leads to stronger headmaster leadership and more pronounced effectiveness in school development.

Each of these perspectives contributes to a multifaceted understanding of leadership, underscoring the diverse competencies and strategic areas essential for effective leadership in educational settings. This comprehensive view highlights the dynamic and complex nature of leadership, encompassing a range of skills and attributes crucial for driving positive change and development in schools. (Wang, M. ,2014)

CONCLUSION

Leadership is the capacity to influence and inspire members within an organization to achieve collective objectives, playing a critical role in organizational management. An adept leader embodies a diverse array of competencies and traits, especially vital in the context of school headmastership. Here are some key characteristics essential :

- I. Vision and Goal Orientation: Exceptional school headmasters must possess a clear and forward-looking vision, coupled with well-defined goals. They should be capable of crafting

realistic development plans that consider both the school's current status and future trends, and efficiently organize their team to execute these plans.

- II. Motivation and Empowerment: A school headmaster should be adept at motivating and empowering staff, fostering their enthusiasm and creativity. This not only enhances their contribution to the school's development but also cultivates a positive and dynamic educational environment.
- III. Interpersonal Skills: Effective communication and strong interpersonal skills are crucial for a school headmaster. They should excel in building rapport and establishing productive communication channels and partnerships with staff, students' parents, and the community. This approach facilitates enhanced collaboration and interaction between the school and its external environment.
- IV. Innovation and Change: School headmasters need to be pioneers of innovation and change agents. They should continually experiment with new educational concepts, management methodologies, and teaching techniques to drive the ongoing evolution and improvement of school education.
- V. Professionalism: Deep understanding and expertise in educational theory and practice are fundamental for a school headmaster. They should have a thorough and nuanced grasp of various aspects of the school's educational and teaching management, enabling them to steer the school's activities effectively.
- VI. Teamwork: Being a team player is vital for the Head of School. They must be skilled in organizing and leading the school's various departments, fostering a collaborative spirit to ensure cohesive and efficient functioning of the school.
- VII. Sense of Social Responsibility: A strong sense of social responsibility and mission is essential for the Head of School. They should be actively engaged in societal causes, advocating for equity and fairness in education, and contributing positively to the broader community.

In summary, the role of a school headmaster as a leader encompasses a broad spectrum of qualities and competencies. These attributes are critical for effectively advancing the school's mission and fostering an environment conducive to learning and growth.

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