Effective Educational Leadership in Primary School Principals: A Teacher-Centric Perspective

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Receipt date: 12/June/2024; Acceptance date: 09/August/2026; Publishing Date: 31/August/2026

Abstract:

This paper seeks to assess the implementation of educational leadership by principals in primary schools as perceived by the educators themselves. Additionally, it examines the significance of variables such as gender and professional experience on these perceptions. Using a descriptive methodology, the study involved a questionnaire comprising 18 items, which was administered to 51 educators in select Saïda primary schools. The results indicate that the principals' educational leadership is perceived as moderate. Notably, the study identified significant gender-related differences in perceptions of leadership, whereas differences due to professional seniority were not statistically significant.

1- **Keywords**: Educational leadership, Primary school principals, Educator perspectives

الملخص:

تهدف الدراسة إلى الكشف عن درجة ممارسة القيادة التربوية لمديري المدارس الابتدائية من وجهة نظر أساتذة التعليم الابتدائي، وقياس دلالة الفروق بين أساتذة التعليم الابتدائي فيها والتي قد تعزى لمتغيري الجنس والخبرة المهنية، من أجل ذلك استخدم المنهج الوصفي، وطبق استبيانا مكون من (18) فقرة على عينة مكونة من (51) أستاذا (ة) ببعض ابتدائيات ولاية سعيدة. وكشفت النتائج أن درجة ممارسة القيادة التربوية للمديرين من وجهة نظر أساتذة التعليم الابتدائي متوسطة، وأنه توجد فروق ذات دلالة احصائية في القيادة التربوية للمديرين في وجهة نظر الأساتذة نحوها تعزى لمتغير الجنس ولا توجد فروق تعزى لمتغير الخبرة المهنية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: القيادة التربوية، مديروا المدارس الابتدائية، أستاذ(ة) التعليم الابتدائي.

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1 . Introduction:

Globally, nations are committed to enhancing educational quality and achieving academic excellence through diverse strategies. Within this context, the role of leadership is pivotal—viewed not only as an art form but also as an essential quality for every school principal. Effective educational leadership emerges from a synthesis of varied experiences and practices. At its core, leadership in education focuses on planning, implementation, and evaluation. These tasks demand advanced skills and capabilities, positioning the educational leader to elevate institutional performance, navigate challenges, and adapt to technological shifts.

1.1. Statement of the problem

Educational leadership is fundamentally the driving force and the cornerstone of institutional progress, propelling schools towards societal advancement. Effective leadership extends beyond the sole figure of the principal to encompass the entire school community—teachers, administrators, and students—addressing their needs, aspirations, and objectives. This comprehensive approach is crucial for enhancing the outcomes of the educational process. Successful implementation of educational leadership relies on the leader’s and their team's ability to manage and overcome the challenges they face.

Historically, school principals were viewed as the singular authority within educational institutions, possessing exclusive control over school governance. This traditional view placed principals at the pinnacle of decision-making, isolated from collaborative engagement with other stakeholders in the school community. However, evolving educational paradigms, particularly evident in the 21st century, have necessitated a shift towards a more inclusive and strategic form of leadership. The transition from an autocratic to a collaborative leadership model underscores a broader societal transformation towards inclusivity and shared responsibility. This evolution towards a participatory leadership model is supported by literature, as articulated in Saghir (2016), contemporary educational leadership has moved away from top-down authority to embrace a model where challenges are addressed through collective problem-solving and decision-making. This shift emphasizes the importance of building a cohesive community within the school, fostering loyalty and cooperation among teachers, administrators, and students alike. The modern educational leader is no longer just a figure of authority but a facilitator who encourages innovation and motivates staff through partnership and shared goals.

Educational leadership is increasingly recognized as a fundamental component of training programs for school principals, particularly in response to the myriad challenges that impede their effectiveness and the rapid pace of technological innovation. The introduction of the concept of educational leadership in Algeria, a relatively recent development, underscores the urgent need for its integration

into the professional development curricula for school leaders. This integration is vital for enhancing the performance of educational institutions, especially at the primary education level which is crucial for laying the foundational academic skills of students.

Focused educational training, aligned with the specific needs for systemic reform and the strengthening of leadership roles within educational institutions, is essential for achieving a thriving future. This approach is supported by Friwan (2022), who notes that the innovative and proactive principal is tasked with the continual responsibility of adapting and evolving school practices in alignment with current scientific and methodological principles. Moreover, Wahyuddin (2017) underscores the indispensability of effective management of school principals' roles and tasks within the broader educational organizational structure. Without such leadership, characterized by high professionalism and effectiveness, the attainment of educational quality and superior student performance would be unattainable.

Educational leadership extends far beyond the confines of the principal’s office, reaching into the most critical element of the educational landscape: the student body. Central to the educational ethos, the well-being and development of students stand as the principal focus of leadership roles within schools. Effective educational leadership, therefore, is not merely administrative but fundamentally student-centered. This notion is strongly advocated by Kapur (2018), who argues that the primary objective of educational leadership should be to enhance student learning, growth, and personal development. Such leadership embodies the institutional mission and upholds ethical and professional standards, encompassing curriculum design, system management, instructional methodologies, technological integration, and performance evaluations, all aimed at nurturing a collaborative and supportive educational environment. Sebastien (2016) emphasizes the critical need for educational leaders to foster an environment in which teachers are adept at recognizing and employing the most effective pedagogical strategies tailored to individual student needs.

Moreover, leadership is a ubiquitous component of daily interactions, often manifested subconsciously across various societal roles. Tayara (2018) suggests that numerous individuals engage in acts of educational leadership throughout their lives, including roles such as school principals, superintendents, teachers, and parents. Each of these roles entails inherent leadership responsibilities, yet the achievement of transformative educational change and advancement hinges on the presence of effective and strategic leadership.

The pivotal role of the school principal extends beyond administrative duties to embodying leadership that profoundly influences all stakeholders within the educational environment. Principals are not

merely administrators but exemplars of professionalism and excellence whose influence catalyzes significant workplace enhancements. This pivotal role is underscored by a study from Fatkul et.al (2021), which emphasizes that successful leadership involves actively nurturing and directing all staff members to foster organizational cohesion and elevate performance efficiency. Consequently, it is imperative for principals to consistently foster enthusiasm and self-confidence among teachers, staff, and students, aligning them with the school's goals. Further exploration by Tarmizi et.al (2020) reveals that principals' abilities to communicate effectively, understand diverse perspectives, and drive innovation are crucial for advancing school quality.

Effective educational leadership necessitates a leader who is not only capable but also adaptable and ethically grounded. Sebastien (2016) highlights that such leaders excel in adapting their leadership strategies to meet the dynamic needs of their organizations, characterized by their flexibility and ethical conduct. We must activate a new and effective approach to implementing sound educational leadership practices in Algerian primary schools, shifting from traditional leadership to transformational leadership that seeks to create clear visions and foster an inclusive and supportive culture for staff and students, as well as build an environment that promotes creativity and innovation.

This was supported by a study Priamphimai (2024), which found that transformational leaders in education can bring about positive change by encouraging collaboration and strengthening a culture of continuous improvement, leading to higher student academic achievement and greater teacher satisfaction.

Similarly, a study by Liu (2025) indicated that, at the international level, many countries have incorporated student participation in educational leadership into their educational policies. For example, in Finland, student participation in school management is considered part of the legal framework, and the student council regularly discusses educational policies and school development plans with the administration.

These insights lead to critical questions regarding the practice of educational leadership in primary schools, specifically:
What is the level of effective educational leadership exhibited by primary school principals as perceived by primary education teachers?

1.2. Subsidiary Research Questions :

1. Are there significant statistical differences in perceptions of effective educational leadership among primary school principals based on gender?
2. Are there significant statistical differences in perceptions of effective educational leadership among primary school principals based on their professional seniority?

1.3 .Primary Hypothesis:

The level of effective educational leadership practiced by primary school principals, as perceived by primary education teachers, is moderate.

1.4Sub-hypotheses:

- There are statistically significant gender-related differences in effective educational leadership among primary school principals as perceived by primary education teachers.
- There are statistically significant differences related to professional seniority in effective educational leadership among primary school principals as perceived by primary education teachers.

1.5 Research Objectives:

- To assess the level of effective educational leadership demonstrated by primary school principals from the perspective of primary education teachers.
- To evaluate the significance of gender-based differences on primary education teachers' perceptions of effective educational leadership exhibited by primary school principals.
- To examine the significance of professional seniority-based differences on primary education teachers' perceptions of effective educational leadership among primary school principals.
- To leverage study findings to propose a targeted and effective training program for primary school principals.

1.6 Significance of the Study :

- Addressing the need for effective educational leaders in primary schools capable of implementing meaningful changes.

- Highlighting the crucial role of educational leadership and its significant impact on enhancing the educational process.
- Illuminating the current state of educational leadership in Algerian primary schools.
- Providing support to primary school principals in accessing appropriate training and development opportunities.

1.7 Operational Definitions:

Effective Educational Leadership: This refers to a collaborative effort aimed at uniting efforts, sharing decision-making, and fostering a strong commitment to dedicated work among the leader and their educational team. It involves selecting actions that benefit the institution, measured by scores provided by teachers, which range from 18 to 54.

Primary School Principal: This term describes an individual who has attained a specific academic qualification, has five years of professional experience, and has successfully passed a competitive examination for the role of a primary school principal.

Primary School Teacher: This term refers to an individual who holds at least a bachelor's degree in specific fields and has successfully passed a recruitment examination, thereby legally authorized to practice as a primary education teacher.

I. Literature Review of the Study:

Leadership: In linguistic terms, Ibn Manzur defines leadership as derived from the word "lead," which implies a firm resolve and unwavering focus (Ibn Manzur, 1998, 37). Kontz & O'Donnell define leadership as the process by which a leader influences their subordinates to actively contribute to collaborative activities (Al-Hourr, 2010, p. 2).

Educational Leadership: Described as any purposeful social activity where the leader recognizes their role as a member of a group, caring for its interests, attending to its matters, valuing its members, and striving to achieve its goals through thoughtful planning, cooperation, and allocation of responsibilities according to human competencies and available resources (Al-Saud, 2013, p. 77).

From these definitions, we conclude that educational leadership is a collective process involving the principal and their educational team aimed at enhancing efficiency and expertise to support and inspire the success of the educational process.

Significance of Educational Leadership:

Educational leadership is crucial for propelling institutions toward the highest levels of refined and effective operations. It employs a clear strategy and well-defined short- and long-term goals through a

team of qualified individuals who understand their roles and consistently strive for improvement. This leadership style is essential for stimulating motivation and achieving the desired success within educational settings (Lahloub & Sarrayra, 2012, p. 57).

Subordinates, whether workers or staff, profoundly require a leader who respects them, recognizes their contributions—however modest—motivates them, and fosters a competitive spirit for innovation and excellence. This type of leadership encourages the development of ideas that contribute significantly to advancing various types of institutions (Al-Hariri, 2008, p. 7).

Educational leadership in Algerian schools is considered a central element in enhancing the quality of education, especially in light of the reforms overseen by the Algerian Ministry of National Education. However, the effectiveness of this leadership varies according to the school context, the management style adopted, and the level of training received by school principals.

Educational leadership effectiveness in Algeria can be regarded as relatively strong on the administrative side, yet it requires improvement on the pedagogical and instructional side.

Qualities of an Effective Educational Leader:

- Decision-making skills.
- Time management.
- Problem-solving abilities.
- Effective communication.
- Creativity and innovation.
- Clear vision and strategy.
- Development of human resources.
- Fostering team spirit.

Performance evaluation (Al-Hourr, 2010, p. 17).

It can be said that the educational leader in Algeria possesses substantial field experience and a strong ability to adapt to pressures; however, they operate within a traditional organizational environment that limits their leadership potential. Therefore, developing educational leadership does

not only require training individuals, but also necessitates a structural reform in the philosophy of primary school management and a shift from administrative control toward a quality-driven approach.

Accordingly, the educational leader in Algeria has solid field experience and assumes broad responsibilities, yet needs a qualitative transformation from administrative management to strategic leadership.

II. Field Study Methodology:

This section details the methodology, sampling, research instruments, and statistical techniques used for hypotheses testing.

Methodological Approach: This research employs a descriptive approach, which is best suited to the objectives and nature of the study.

Study Population and Sampling: The sample consists of 51 primary school teachers from various institutions within the Wilaya of Saïda, selected through simple random sampling. The demographic breakdown of the sample is provided in the following table:

Table (01): Distribution of Sample by Gender and Professional Seniority

Variables	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	6	11.76%
	Female	45	88.24%
Professional Seniority	Less than 5 years	3	5.88%
	More than 5 years	48	94.12%
Total		51	100%

Analysis of Table (01) reveals a predominantly female cohort (88.24%), with a small percentage of male participants (11.76%). Most teachers (94.12%) possess over five years of professional experience, suggesting a seasoned group of educators which aligns well with the objectives of this study.

Research Instrument Description:

The research instrument developed for this study is a questionnaire derived from the researchers' expertise and a review of related literature. It consists of 18 positively oriented items, each scaled to measure responses as 'to a great extent' (01), 'to a moderate extent' (02), and 'to a lesser extent' (03).

Psychometric Properties of the Research Instrument:

Rater Reliability: The content validity of the questionnaire was confirmed through a review by five experts, including university professors and specialized inspectors. This review process was aimed at assessing the relevance and clarity of the questionnaire items in relation to the traits measured. Following their feedback, minor linguistic adjustments were made to improve clarity. The instrument received a 90% approval rating from the reviewers, confirming its suitability for the study.

Internal Consistency Validity: Internal consistency was assessed using Pearson correlation coefficients between the individual items and the total score of the instrument. The findings are summarized in the table below:

Table 02 : Correlation Coefficients and Significance Levels

Item No.	Correlation Coefficient	Significance Level	Item No.	Correlation Coefficient	Significance Level
01	*0.398	0.05	11	**0.664	0.05
02	*0.413	0.05	12	**0.745	0.05
03	0.317	Not significant	13	**0.676	0.05
04	**0.573	0.05	14	**0.540	0.05
05	*0.400	0.05	15	*0.458	0.05
06	**0.725	0.05	16	**0.629	0.05
07	**0.745	0.05	17	*0.408	0.05
08	**0.679	0.05	18	**0.710	0.05
09	**0.731	0.05	19	**0.744	0.05
10	**0.888	0.05			

The table indicates that the majority of items exhibited statistically significant correlations with the total score, with the exception of Item 03, which was excluded due to its lack of statistical significance.

The Internal Consistency Reliability of the Instrument: The reliability of the questionnaire was established using Cronbach's alpha, a measure of internal consistency.

Table (03): Cronbach's Alpha for the Questionnaire

Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
18	0.90

Cronbach's alpha yielded a high reliability coefficient of 0.90, indicating strong internal consistency and making the instrument highly reliable for the purposes of this study.

Implementation Procedures:

Following the confirmation of the instrument's validity and reliability, the researcher distributed copies of the questionnaire to a sample of primary education teachers in the Wilaya of Saïda. A total of 70 questionnaires were distributed, with 51 being successfully retrieved for analysis. The collected data were processed using SPSS version 22.

Statistical Analysis:

To answer the research questions, the following statistical methods were employed:

- Mean
- Standard deviation
- Independent samples t-test

Results and Discussion:

Presentation and Discussion of the Primary Hypothesis:

The primary hypothesis posits that the level of effective educational leadership practiced by primary school principals, as perceived by primary education teachers, is moderate.

The means and standard deviations of the teachers' responses regarding the level of effective educational leadership were calculated, and the weighted averages for each item were estimated. The results are categorized as follows:

- 0.66-1 : Represents a low degree
- 1.67-2.33 : Represents a moderate degree
- 2.34-3.00 : Represents a high degree

Table 4: Mean and Standard Deviation of the Instrument Items

Item No.	Item Description	Mean	Standard Deviation	Degree of Practice

01	Ability to effectively lead the educational team	1.75	0.523	Moderate
02	Skill in making sound decisions	1.76	0.619	Moderate
03	Simplifying administrative procedures for staff	2.10	0.640	Moderate
04	Leading discussions democratically	2.02	0.707	Moderate
05	Ability to develop teamwork skills among staff	2.20	0.633	Moderate
06	Ability to adapt to new developments in the education sector	2.12	0.711	Moderate
07	Skill in using scientific methods to solve problems	2.14	0.693	Moderate
08	Ability to train teachers in classroom management	2.18	0.590	Moderate
09	Ability to face challenges and difficulties at work	2.14	0.800	Moderate
10	Control over work problems and planning solutions	2.18	0.713	Moderate
11	Skill in dialogue and discussion in departmental meetings	2.22	0.702	Moderate
12	Clear vision and strategy for the institution’s project	2.25	0.627	Moderate
13	Ability to innovate and renew for the institution's benefit	2.22	0.757	Moderate
14	Skill in maintaining the institution's assets	1.76	0.764	Moderate

15	Ability to communicate with students' parents	1.82	0.767	Moderate
16	Skill in collaborating with other institutions	2.29	0.672	Moderate
17	Ability to encourage students in cultural and sports competitions	2.29	0.672	Moderate
18	Ability to create a motivating environment for teachers	2.34	0.712	Low
Total		2.09	0.683	Moderate

From the table, it is evident that the overall mean score for the instrument was 37.77, with a standard deviation of 12.302. This indicates a moderate level of effective educational leadership among primary school principals from the perspective of primary education teachers.

The findings suggest that primary school principals exhibit a moderate degree of effective educational leadership. Despite several deficiencies, it is crucial for principals to exert significant effort and demonstrate competence in their roles. Effective leadership requires principals to lead with a democratic approach, exercising patience, wisdom, and insight while managing diverse mindsets and personalities. Additionally, educational leaders must be proactive, creative, and capable of identifying and addressing gaps within their institutions to enhance staff performance.

These findings are consistent with the study by Friwan (2022), which found that the degree of creative educational leadership practiced by principals in government primary schools in the Bani Kenana district was moderate in areas such as problem awareness, flexibility, fluency, and originality of ideas.

Presentation and Discussion of the First Hypothesis Results:

The first hypothesis posits that there are statistically significant gender-related differences in effective educational leadership among primary school principals as perceived by primary education teachers.

Table (05): Results of the Independent Samples T-test for Gender Differences in Perceptions of Educational Leadership

Gender	Sample Size	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	T-value	Degrees of Freedom	Significance Level
Male	6	33.33	10.211	-1.827	49	0.004
Female	45	38.36	5.717			

The table reveals that the mean score for male teachers is 33.33 with a standard deviation of 10.211, while the mean score for female teachers is 38.36 with a standard deviation of 5.717. The T-value is -1.827, with 49 degrees of freedom and a significance level of 0.004. Since the p-value is less than 0.05, this indicates statistically significant gender-based differences in the perceptions of effective educational leadership among primary school principals, as reported by primary education teachers.

The findings suggest a marked difference in how male and female teachers perceive the effectiveness of educational leadership, with male responses suggesting a more analytical or less influenced approach, despite their smaller numbers. Conversely, female responses might reflect a greater emotional engagement, potentially due to more positive personal interactions with their principals.

The majority of respondents acknowledged the administrative prowess of their principals, particularly noting their active involvement in managerial aspects. Nevertheless, there appears to be a shortfall in the pedagogical leadership, which could stem from the numerous pressures and challenges that principals face.

Additionally, the responses highlighted a division within the faculty: some exhibit staunch loyalty to their leadership regardless of the circumstances, whereas others express dissatisfaction due to perceived deficiencies in support and encouragement for innovation. This dichotomy illustrates the complex nature of effective educational leadership, which fundamentally relies on fostering a collaborative and motivational environment.

The results underscore the necessity for focused leadership training for principals, emphasizing the development of leadership capabilities over administrative skills. Responses from unstructured interviews with the sample highlighted the importance of effective communication in overcoming challenges and ensuring productivity and teamwork, foundational elements of successful educational leadership.

These findings are consistent with Sukandar (2018), who concluded that school principals, as leaders, significantly influence others, including teachers and educational staff, in achieving the school's objectives. Success is contingent upon the principal's ability to foster commitment and diligently work towards making their school the highest quality institution in their region.

Additionally, the results align with Chihab and Ibrahim (2011), who identified significant gender differences favoring males in understanding the relationship between leadership behavior and decision-making among primary school principals.

However, these results diverge from Tayara (2018), who found no statistically significant gender differences at the 0.05 level in the leadership styles of principals of private primary schools in the capital region of Amman, as perceived by teachers.

The sample showed a split in perspectives: some teachers displayed strong loyalty to their principals regardless of circumstances, while others expressed dissatisfaction due to a lack of support and encouragement for creativity. This division highlights the complexity of modern educational leadership, which necessitates a collaborative approach aimed at fostering a positive and motivating environment for all stakeholders.

The study underscores the critical need for comprehensive leadership training for principals, emphasizing leadership skills over administrative capabilities. Responses from unstructured interviews with the sample highlighted the importance of effective communication in overcoming challenges and ensuring productivity and teamwork, foundational elements of successful educational leadership. It can be said that educational leadership in Algeria is an important part of the educational system, as it refers to the competence of leaders (such as principals, administrators, and educators) in guiding and developing schools and the educational process effectively in order to achieve the desired goals. However, it faces many challenges and needs that must be addressed, such as the provision of strong training and professional development programs and the support of the school work environment in order to develop education and improve its outcomes.

These results align with Sukandar (2018), who found that school principals significantly influence their colleagues and subordinates, driving them towards the school's goals. A principal committed to building dedication and working diligently can elevate the school to high standards. Similarly, Shahab and Ibrahim (2011) observed significant gender differences in understanding the relationship between leadership behavior and decision-making among primary school principals. Conversely, Tayara (2018) found no significant gender-based differences in leadership styles among private primary school principals in Amman, as perceived by teachers. This discrepancy underscores the need for context-specific research in educational leadership.

Presentation and Discussion of the Second Hypothesis Results:

The second hypothesis posits that there are statistically significant differences related to professional seniority in effective educational leadership among primary school principals as perceived by primary education teachers.

Table (06): Results of the Independent Samples T-test for Differences in Perceptions of Educational Leadership Based on Professional Experience

Professional Experience	Sample Size	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	T-value	Degrees of Freedom	Significance Level
Less than 5 years	3	34.00	6.557	-1.040	49	0.933
More than 5 years	48	38.00	6.461			

Analysis reveals that teachers with less than five years of experience had a mean score of 34.00 (SD = 6.557), while those with over five years of experience had a mean score of 38.00 (SD = 6.461). The T-value of -1.040, with 49 degrees of freedom and a significance level of 0.933 ($p > 0.05$) suggest that the differences are not statistically significant. Consequently, the null hypothesis is accepted, indicating no significant differences in perceptions of educational leadership based on professional experience.

The lack of significant differences may indicate a consensus in perceptions of educational leadership across teachers of varying experience levels. This uniformity could stem from the shared understanding and evaluation of leadership practices among both new and seasoned teachers. It suggests that the prevailing leadership style in the school quickly becomes apparent to all staff, regardless of their tenure During unstructured interviews, teachers suggested that an effective leader is perceived not as an authoritarian figure but as a collaborator who treats colleagues equitably and encourages a collective focus on the broader institutional goals.

Teachers emphasized that an impactful principal fosters a culture of mutual respect and cooperative effort, which persists even beyond their tenure. This enduring influence underscores the importance of leadership that connects, supports, and guides not just subordinates but all school stakeholders. These findings resonate with those of Tayara (2018), which also detected no statistically significant differences at 0.05 level in leadership perceptions related to the professional experience of private primary school principals in Amman.

Conclusion:

The study concludes that primary education teachers perceive the level of effective educational leadership among primary school principals as moderate. Furthermore, statistically

significant gender-based differences in perceptions of effective educational leadership were identified, whereas no significant statistical differences were observed concerning the professional experience of the principals.

This suggests that effective school leadership cannot be achieved single-handedly but requires the collective efforts of all staff members. Effective educational leadership necessitates not only exceptional skills and capabilities but also a strategic vision to guide the institution along the correct path. Therefore, there is a pressing need for comprehensive training and development programs to equip educational leaders with the necessary skills to perform their roles effectively. Successful leadership involves competence, expertise, and wisdom in making collaborative decisions that enhance educational outcomes.

Recommendations:

- High authorities should prioritize the training and development of school principals to refine their leadership skills, ensuring these are in sync with contemporary requirements and technological advancements.
- It is essential for principals to possess robust leadership qualities that elevate the standards of primary education.
- Decision-making within educational institutions should be of high quality, addressing problems effectively at the institutional level.
- Educational leaders must be attuned to the needs of teachers, staff, students, and other school personnel.
- Strong foundational practices in the educational system are crucial for fostering sound educational leadership in primary schools.

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