Reflective Habits of the Mind: A Systematic Literature Review

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A B S T R A C T

The principal as a reflective leader plays a critical role in today's fast-paced school environment. Although the growing role of principals in improving decisions through reflection, few researchers have studied the reflective habits of the minds that involved principals. Hence, the study intends to review existing literature on reflective habits of the minds among principals and to track what was contributed to understanding reflection and its effect on ethical leadership and decision-making. A comprehensive search of major databases was undertaken which identified 32,896 studies on the topic; 13 met the inclusion criteria. Using a systematic literature review, data were extracted and analyzed using thematic analysis. Three themes emerged from the analysis: reflective habits for teaching and learning, reflective habits for professional development, and reflective habits towards authentic and transformational leadership. Studies focused on the heart of the reflective practice of school principals as an instructional leader as a critical tool for learning and professional growth. It also shows the inspiring ways of how authentic and transformational leadership through reflective practice could change the educational system. As a result, the literature review pointed to the following discussion points, which are the areas that require further research: (1) diverse reflective practices among school principals in instructional leadership, (2) continuous reflective professional development activities, and (3) reflection-in-action towards transformational leadership.

Keywords: leadership, school principal, reflection, reflective practices

1. Main text

According to Dewey (1933), reflection is a serious and consecutive consideration of subject thinking that occurs over in the mind. Moreover, Dewey cited reflection as an everyday part of making moral decisions and choices (Willower, 1994). To be effective, reflection should be a core habit and practice of mind. Thus, improving the habits of mind within oneself is the goal of reflective practice development.

Studies on reflective habits of the mind that involved teachers have received considerable attention in the past years. The impacts of reflection are significant and noticeable for teachers as claimed by the study of Killen (2007). As stated, reflective teachers improved their social associations among students, felt higher job fulfillment and outlooks of self-efficacy, became more expressive on their experiences written and non-written, and anticipate themselves and their students to act uprightly.

The vital part of reflective thinking in recognizing, analyzing, and unraveling the multifaceted difficulties and challenges faced by teachers in their career were suggested by Lyngsnes (2012). This notion was supported by Postholm (2008) who defined reflection as the fundamental component to the learning and improvement of teaching practice. Besides, reflections that have done by teachers make them more responsive to their teaching. Furthermore, reflective teaching is helpful for beginning teachers on their professional growth and development. Unquestionably, the fast professional expansion of beginning teachers benefits a lot from reflective teaching practice (Guo & Zhang, 2014).

However, the fast-paced school environment does not only involve the teachers but the critical role of the principal as a reflective leader. Despite the growing role of principals in improving decisions through reflection, few researchers have studied the reflective habits of the minds that involved principals and school heads. Previous studies have tended to focus on the role of reflective habits of the mind towards teacher professional development and reflection on teaching rather than the critical role of reflective leadership. Despite these early observations, the implication of reflective habits of the mind towards ethical leadership and decision-making remains unclear. Hence, it is of interest to study the reflective habits of the minds that involved principals and school heads.

This study intends to review existing literature on reflective habits of the minds among principals and to track what was contributed to understanding reflection and its effect on ethical leadership and decision-making. The remainder of this paper revolves around three themes namely, reflective habits and teaching and learning, reflective habits and professional development, reflective habits, and authentic leadership.

2. Materials and Methods

There is an immense amount of literature on the reflective habits of the minds. However, this study attempted to filter the most significant and relevant papers since the year 2001, focusing on the reflective habits of the minds among principals. Using a systematic literature review, studies identified the themes. The data extracted from each literature were analyzed using thematic analysis.

A comprehensive search of major databases like Google Scholar and ERIC Journal was undertaken which identified 18,000 and 14, 896 studies, respectively, a total of 32,896 studies on the topic. The inclusion criteria used in filtering the cited sources include a set of keywords like leadership, school principal, improving teaching and learning, and professional and organizational development. Aside from the keywords, studies that involved reflection and reflective practices in school management were also considered as inclusion criteria. On the other hand, studies that involved reflection and reflective practices among students and teachers were excluded.

After thorough and careful reading and analysis, literature was selected for review under each keyword. There were eight studies selected for leadership, three literatures for the school principal, one literature for improving teaching and learning, and one literature for professional and organizational development. As a whole, there were thirteen articles included in this review. These studies were anchored on reflective practices among school principals. Three themes emerged from the analysis of the studies such as reflective habits and teaching and learning, reflective habits and professional development, and reflective habits towards authentic and transformational leadership

3. Results and Discussion

Across the reviewed articles, it was apparent that reflection is dynamic and vibrant. Equipped with multiple insights and ideas, reflection lets leaders move positions and traverse diverse circumstances and challenges. For emerging leaders, decision-making outcomes must be monitored with reflection to scrutinize the emerged events (Wood, 1996). Engagement in active reflection as an adaptive role to circumstantial hitches and tasks allows leaders to comprehend that their growth is a continuing determination. In this manner, they continue to grow and become sensible of their strengths and weaknesses. Three themes that cut across our results emerged from our analysis and interpretation of the data. The following sections present the emerging themes: (1) reflective habits for instructional leadership, (2) reflective habits for leadership preparation and professional development, and (3) reflective habits toward authentic and transformational leadership.

3.1. Reflective habits for instructional leadership

Instructional leadership theory is one of the utmost intentional types of leadership studied in the arena of educational administration. The early struggles to deliver a considerate effective leadership established a basis for the emergence and development of this said theory.Table 1 below shows the selected studies on reflective habits and instructional leadership. The common theme that emerged from these studies focused on the heart of the reflective practice of instructional leaders as a critical tool for learning. Bellibaş (2015) provided an all-inclusive understanding of how instructional leadership is apparent in Turkish middle schools. The study stated that instructional leadership is typically swayed by the view of leaders' unintended impact on teaching, and principals' direct connection in instructional concerns controlled by difficulties related to leadership content knowledge, the rationality of leadership practices, and teachers' classroom confidentiality. In this framework, the principals' instructional leadership role was more about generating opportunities and situations for teachers so that they could reflect on their instructional practices and their colleagues.

A study by Gobena (2017) examined the attitudes of principals, supervisors, and mentees toward action research as reflective practices in postgraduate diploma in secondary school teaching (PGDT). In the case of Haramaya clustered center, the findings exposed a statistically significant mean difference among mentees for the absence of innovative methodologies, deficiency of instructional materials, and non-existence of dedication from lecturers and attitudes toward action research. The above-mentioned study was also buoyed by Sharpe (2004), who originates the notion of action research as reflective practices considered by teachers as ethical agents and well-versed practitioners. Therefore, it is marked that action research as the reflective practice has been found to help not only as a means of cultivating education but also in developing practitioners' tractability and problem-solving abilities and their approaches toward professional improvement and the practice of revolution.

Table 1. Studies on reflective habits and instructional leadership

Author	Title	Country	Conclusion
Bellibaş 2015	Principals' and Teachers' Perceptions of Efforts by Principals to Improve Teaching and Learning in Turkish Middle Schools	Turkey	Effective schools should have principals who work diligently with teachers to develop classroom instruction. Recognizing the importance of principals as instructional leaders increase the excellence of teaching.
Gobena 2017	The Attitude of School Principals, Supervisors and Mentees towards Action Research as Reflective Practices	Ethiopia	Action research as reflective practice assists not only as a means of refining teaching but also in developing practitioners' suppleness and problem-solving skills and their approaches to professional growth and the course of transformation.
Janson et al. 2011	Constructing Collective Understanding in School:Principal and Student Use of Iterative Digital Reflection (IDR)	U.S.A	The Iterative Digital Reflection process as a reflective discourse between principals and students aided a more communal understanding concerning school policies and procedures.

Alongside with the evolving prominence on preparing school principals who are reflective practitioners, there is also a mounting acknowledgment of the significance of preparation that trains principals to better involve students in building opportunities (Cook-Sather, 2007). In association, a study by Janson et al. (2011) revealed reflection as a collaborative process through the usage of digital video through reflective discourse to assist collective understanding and reflection among principals and students. The Iterative Digital Reflection (IDR) process enabled student and principal undertaking from isolated to more unrestricted shared considerations of schools' practices, procedures, and databases that they assumed to upkeep student college preparation and readiness. As an outcome, the IDR process embraces pronounced assurance as an informative and support apparatus for principals and the students with whom they work.

To synthesize, studies that fall on the first theme- reflective habits for instructional leadership unite the common point that instructional leadership through reflective habits by school principals is crucial in improving general school performance. Principals, who devote most of their time and devotion towards the academic facets of their schools in providing chances for instructional enhancement than managerial concerns, produce an affirmative influence of instructional leadership on teaching and learning. The model of instructional leadership in these studies did not continuously suggest the undeviating effect of principals on teaching and learning. It is a partnership among school community stakeholders. From this viewpoint, the principal is a robust instructional leader who should unswervingly and vigorously employ in classrooms and toil not only with teachers but also with students.

3.2. Reflective habits for leadership preparation and professional development

Amey (2004) takes command of reflective practice on a deeper level. It suggests that college leaders and developing leaders create a philosophy of inquiry that nurtures individual and communal accountability for organizational choices. To complement, leaders in the course of tough times, gather a range of knowledge, skills, and alternative outlooks that are beneficial in producing revolutionary approaches through inquiry, interpersonal dialogue, and intrapersonal reflection.Table 2 below shows the selected studies on reflective habits, leadership preparation, and professional development. The common theme that appeared in these studies was the principals' role in crafting opportunities to work with peers collaboratively and reflectively, rather than in seclusion, to inspire professional progression.

A study from Costa et al. (2019) recognizes the foremost desires of principals to support beginning teachers. Principals str essed the necessity to support new teachers to encourage differentiated pedagogy, critical reflection, and collaborative practices. Usually, this issue concerned only teachers. Presently, there appears to be a change towards a promise of principals to become more directly involved in driving teachers' practices. Nonetheless, this accord is not complete, as they value differently, in coverage and depth, which must be scrutinized in the light of the characteristics of each educational system.

On the other hand, a study by Delgado and Loya (2018) revealed the importance of leadership identity development and preparedness and to upgrade the system of promotion to enable the appointment of better school leaders that serve indigenous students in Mexican primary schools. Given the fronting cultural challenges and low student outcomes, the preparation of school leaders is more needed for them to serve indigenous schools with newly appointed heads. Bennis (2009) confirms that an unpretentious understanding of oneself as a leader through leadership distinctiveness development programs derives after continuous reflection on experiences.

Nasreen and Odhiambo (2018) exposed that the role school principal has become a multidimensional responsibility. They also di scovered the existing practices and impediments in the pursuit of continuing professional development (CPD) as a period of educational transformation and reform. It is found that most of the principals' time is consumed on retaining the school schedule, thus hampering their commitment to informal professional undertakings. The principals were not fulfilled with the existing CPD opportunities and the content of the training packages. Further, the principals conveyed numerous constrictions that they come across in their quest of CPD, concerning time, finance, and workload. Therefore, professional development programs must address principals' wavering heights of enthusiasm, awareness, knowledge, and ability while developing leadership capacities of organization, communication, consultation, decision making, critical reflection, and interpersonal connectedness with participants of the school community.

Table 2. Reflective habits, leadership preparation, and professional development

Author	Title	Country	Conclusion
Costa et al. 2019	School Leaders' Insights Regarding Beginning Teachers' Induction in Belgium, Finland, and Portugal	Belgium, Finland ,and Portugal	Principals stressed the necessity to support new teachers in promoting differentiated pedagogy, critical reflection, and collective practices. There's an agreement on the significance of principals' actions as educational leaders and reflection as a chance for professional growth and development.
Delgado & Loya, 2018	Leadership Profiles of New Appointed Mexican School Leaders to Indigenous Schools Through the New System of Promotion	Mexico	Advancing the legal framework system of promotion controls the school heads' performance in schools. Training of school leaders in facing cultural challenges and low student outcomes is crucial through continuous reflection on experiences.
Nasreen & Odhiambo 2018	The Continuous Professional Development of School Principals: Current Practices in Pakistan	Pakistan	The school principal's role has become a complex responsibility. They need an active continuous professional development as a period of educational transformation and reform. Professional development programs must address principals' wavering heights of enthusiasm, awareness, knowledge, and ability while developing leadership capacities of organization, communication, consultation, decision making, critical reflection, and interpersonal connectedness with participants of the school community.
Todd Rogers et al. (2016)	Using Cognitive Coaching to Build School Leadership Capacity: A Case Study in Alberta	Canada	Reflection is positioned in action. It highlights its concrete budding practicality for professionals. Effective principals learn on the job how to deal with emergent situations in which they must take action without opportunity for prolonged reflection.

Todd et al. (2016) gauged cognitive coaching efficaciously in the emerging linkage of reflective school leaders whose first-class leadership elevates student learning and enhancement advantages. In agreement with Ellison and Hayes (2003) and Ellison and Hayes (2005), the results upkeep the usage of cognitive coaching to modify the performance of new principals so that they become well-equipped. Throughout the period of the pilot program, the knowledge, self-reflection, and confidence of the new principals developed.

The four studies presented in Table 2 show that reflective thinking and acting have appeared as critical facets of professional growth among teachers and principals. In many ways, reflective practice acts as a vehicle for transformation, providing chances in leadership training. Reflective practice is about improvement in becoming a more skilled practitioner. It is about consuming the shared knowledge of the assembly to formulate plans and thoughts for professional growth. To combine, principals' reflective habits not only improve their personal professional development but they also impact the beginning teachers as they become authorities. This is the core of school work since teachers are deliberated as the utmost influential predictor of students' triumph.

3.3. Reflective Habits towards Authentic and Transformational Leadership

Authentic leadership is another evolving and moral leader conduct that emphasizes on affirmative values like uprightness, unselfishness, empathy, positivity, and resilience. Building shared trust, esteem, and social justice among followers and finding solutions with stakeholders are some ways ethical leaders pursue. The keys that matter most for ethical leaders are values and integrity (Yulk, 2011).

Table 3 shows the selected studies on reflective habits toward authentic and transformational leadership. The common theme that emerged from these studies was all about the motivating ways of how authentic and transformational leadership through reflective practice could transform the educational system. Reflective leadership is closely associated with transformational leadership in the literature above. Ersozlu's (2015) study reveals that teachers recognize their school leader's level of reflective leadership in the middle. Their awareness of school principals is not affected by gender, age, or seniority. This study sets onward very significant findings that reflective leadership levels of school leaders deliver a crucial role in the enhancement of the organization.

The goal of improving students' lives and learning within a certain educational background allows authentic leaders not only to stand by their personal beliefs but improve authentic connections with others through self-reflection and amendment (Walker & Shuangye, 2007). A study from Feng-I (2016) shows that teachers perceived their principals' authentic leadership as moderate. It has been found out that the principals' run-through of authentic leadership was influenced by culture. Furthermore, the principals' authentic leadership was found to be meaningfully linked with teachers' psychological capital. Authentic leadership seems to impact teachers' psychological capital. High psychological capital among teachers is thought to convert into more positive attitudes affecting students' learning. Hence, principals play a significant role in working authentic leadership to withstand teachers' psychological capital, irrespective of the milieu. On the other hand, Lucas and Valentine (2002) established an understanding of the associations among principal and school leadership transformational leadership ¡nd school culture. The utmost influence on collaborative leadership discloses the role of the leadership team rather than the role of principal solely. The principal, rather than leadership teams, appears to exert the highest impact on teacher teamwork and unity of purpose.

Table 3. Studies on reflective habits toward authentic and transformational leadership

Author	Title	Country	Conclusion
Ersozlu 2015	School Principals' Reflective Leadership Skills through the Eyes of Science and Mathematics Teachers	Turkey	The transformational leadership approach is a skill essential for all organizations. The adjacent connection between reflective leadership and transformational leadership displays us that all organizations need a reflective leader.
Feng-I 2016	School Principals' Authentic Leadership and Teachers' Psychological Capital: Teachers' Perspectives	Taiwan	Authentic leadership nurtures optimistic psychological capital in an organization. Principals, hence, play a vital role in practicing authentic leadership to sustain teachers' psychological capital irrespective of the situation.
Lucas & Valentine 2002	Transformational Leadership: Principals, Leadership Teams, and School Culture.	New Orleans, LA	The development of positive school cultures involved both principals and leadership teams in exercising transformational leadership behaviors. Principals and leadership teams may have diverse characters to show in the exercise of transformational leadership and the shaping of school culture.
Okoko 2019	Towards School Leadership Development: The Essence of Working with Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Newcomer Families in Saskatchewan	Canada	Part of the spirit of the leadership experience is the important role that self-knowledge and reflection show in preparing school leaders for cultural competence and the need for partnership and partnerships with families.
Bond 2011	Thinking on Your Feet: Principals' Reflection-in-Action	U.S.A	Reflection is positioned in action. It highlights its concrete budding practicality for professionals. Effective principals learn on the job how to deal with emergent situations in which they must take action without opportunity for prolonged reflection.
View 2016	Administrative Reflective Practice Through Imposed Local Control and Accountability Plan	Southern California	A critical element of an effective administrator is the skill to make decisions that positively affect student learning and effectively steer accountability directives from stakeholders.

A study from Okoko (2019) shows the essence of school leaders to have knowledge, skills, and dispositions to recognize and respond appropriately to differences and cultural diversity. The principle also appeals for school leaders to have self-knowledge, to be more reflective, and to hold rational conflict as learning opportunities. Leaders must be conscious of these metamorphoses and the norms and prejudices connected with them. As such, leadership development initiatives must use schemes that inspire reflection and comprehend how diverse works in schools affect the success (Blackmore, 2006).

Reflection is positioned in action, which highlights its concrete nature and budding practicality for professionals. Principals are required to reflect action after having done something as well as reflect in action while doing it. A study by Bond (2011) examined the reflection-in-action of experienced school principals. Effective principals learn on the job how to deal with emergent situations in which they must take action without opportunity for prolonged reflection. Principals learn through trial and error on how to uphold composure in the heat of a moment while they evaluate t he condition and adopt how best to react. Correspondingly, Begley (2006) suggested that self-knowledge, moral reasoning, and sensitivity to others are fundamentals for authentic leadership among school principals.

A dire element of an efficacious administrator is the skill to make choices that confidently affect student learning while effectively traversing accountability mandates from stakeholders. Veeh (2016) explored the usage of administrative reflective practice in making decisions and to validate progress on authorized accountability Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP) goals. The indication highpoints that school administrators profit from engaging in reflective practice as it nurtures the understanding that translates into action through problem-solving and decision-making to implement policies to establish advancement on directed accountability LCAP goals.

To synthesize, studies under theme 3 show that organizations need a reflective leader. The reflective leadership skills of a school principal affect transformational leadership. The connection between transformational leadership and school culture is perceived as a gizmo for effective school systems. As a result, the accomplishment of a school community is reliant on how reflective the principal is.

4. Conclusion

To better understand the reflective habits of the minds among principals and to track what was contributed to understanding reflection and its effect on ethical leadership and decision-making, this paper performed a systematic thematic literature review and identified thirteen key studies. The studies revolved around three themes namely, reflective habits for teaching and learning, reflective habits for professional development, and reflective habits toward authentic leadership.

Studies under theme 1 focused on the heart of the reflective practice of instructional leaders as a critical tool for learning. It emphasized that instructional improvement, rather than managerial issues creates a positive impact on teaching and learning. Further, the studies indicated the importance of the reflective habits of principals in increasing the quality of teaching. Studies under theme 2 show the principals' role in creating opportunities to work with peers collaboratively and reflectively, rather than in isolation, to encourage professional growth. Reflective thinking and a cting have emerged as critical aspects of professional development for teachers, and principals show the selected studies on reflective habits toward authentic and transformational leadership. Studies under theme 3 show the inspiring ways of how authentic and transformational leadership through reflective practice could change the educational system. The reflective leadership skills of a school principal affect transformational leadership. Over-all, themes 1, 2, and 3 describe the close relationship between reflective habits on instructional leadership, leadership preparation and professional development, and authentic and transformational leadership. This shows that all organizations need a reflective leader.

Based on the findings of the 13 studies, school principals' reflective skills should deliver leadership during complex times that will stand-in and develop leadership practices involving problem-solving, decision making, and complex thinking. Reflection is an important apparatus to support programmatic approaches by emerging expertise. This finding not only displays that reflective leadership is a natural asset of school principals but also that this ability can be improved through training and preparation (Sullivan et al., 2010). In this way, an immense contribution can be prepared to their reflective leadership a skill which in a way- means life-long learning as well.

As a result, the literature review pointed to the following discussion points, which are the areas that require further research: (1) diverse reflective practices among school principals in instructional leadership, (2) continuous reflective professional development activities, and (3) reflection-in-action towards transformational leadership.

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