

Challenges to effective leadership of urban secondary schools in Bangladesh: A critical study

Abu Nayeem Mohammad Salahuddin

Institute of Education and Research, University of Dhaka, Bangladesh

Abstract

Studies on school leadership suggest that effective leadership is basic to successful school development and improvement of teaching and learning. Secondary schools in Bangladesh depend on principals as their leaders. Since Bangladesh is now facing the challenge of reforms in secondary education, principals need to acquire current knowledge of leadership theory to give them the theoretical understandings of leadership that are likely to make their schools more successful. The purpose of the study described in this article was to explore how principals of Bangladesh understand leadership theory and investigate the leadership challenges faced in their school contexts. The participants in this study were the principals from four secondary schools in the city of Dhaka, Bangladesh. The findings show that the principals have adequate experiential knowledge for leading their schools but they lack theoretical knowledge of school leadership, as they have not had opportunities to participate in formal leadership training programmes. This article suggests that professional leadership programmes should be provided for principals of secondary schools and that principals should increase self-management in the administration of their schools. The recommendations from this study could lead to more effective leadership in Bangladeshi secondary schools.

Introduction

This article examines understandings of school leadership in Bangladesh secondary schools. Secondary education is in a transitional phase. This transition comes from rapid development of the country's capacity to educate all its citizens and follows not only centuries of British colonisation but also more recent decades as a province of Pakistan. After a history of successive colonisations has meant that in 1971 Bangladesh began its nationhood with problems of widespread poverty and the need to cater for one of the densest populations of the world.

As a nation that seeks to secure its survival and increase the well-being of its people, Bangladesh sees universal access to education as a key ingredient. The development and improvement of educational opportunities and provisions is a complex process. One of the components in the effectiveness of a school is the role of the school leader.

By definition a school leader is in a particular kind of power relationship with the staff in the school. However, that power relationship exists within a complexity of other power relationships: with the Ministry of Education and its regulatory expectations, with influential

people in the community, with the Government and its policy processes. In addition, the ideologies underpinning the development of educational leadership in Bangladesh exist in a power relationship with the ideologies of the outside world. One powerful factor in that ideological power relationship is the power of a large body of literature, containing research and theoretical constructions about leadership, written in English and from the context of countries like America, Britain, Australia and New Zealand.

Leadership theory in Bangladesh is in its emergent stages. School principals grapple with the practical realities of management of a school system that is itself in change. Thus conceptualisations of effective teaching and the effective leadership of teachers are forced into a negotiation of the influence of western ideologies and the perspectives that come from lived experience in Bangladesh. The degree to which the body of western literature will ultimately be useful is still something to be discovered. In the short term Bangladeshi researchers, although they can draw on the grounded experience of local participants, are forced to rely on theorisations found in the existing global literature.

A richer integration of the relationship between western and Bangladeshi conceptualisations of leadership will develop over time. Although it is not the aim of the study reported in this paper to resolve these potentially different conceptualisations, it does offer a contribution to the development of a local Bangladesh conceptual base, which may inform future discussions.

A framework offered by the literature and the present condition in Bangladesh

The roles and responsibilities of school leaders are changing frequently due to a wave of reforms which cause leaders to face continuous challenges in their jobs. As there are ambiguities about the activities which may actually be considered leadership, it is difficult to sketch the boundaries of leaders' work (Mayrowetz, 2008). Depending on the school situation and personal characteristics, leaders may work alone or collaboratively to reach their goals. Heroic forms of leadership, where leaders work mainly alone, tend not to use the leadership capabilities and aptitudes of others (Duignan, 2006; Riley & MacBeath, 2003). This type of leadership does not draw on the leadership capacity of teachers.

In many countries that the western world might call developing, the schools demonstrate the heroic type of leadership without considering and utilising potential talents and expertise of their teachers. In most schools in Bangladesh, leadership is seen as positional leadership; the leadership style is based on the authority and power given by the position of principal (Salahuddin, 2011). Principals are accountable to the authorities and to school communities by virtue of their position, with little consideration of the capabilities of other staff in the school. This is time to consider change in Bangladeshi school leadership styles to break the isolation of traditional positional leadership by utilizing the capabilities of all in Bangladeshi schools.

In ideal western models of leadership, school leaders are expected to work effectively within and outside the school context for successful outcomes: work and outcomes for which they may be accountable. A culture of sharing of energy, commitment and contribution of all who work in schools is needed for them to be successful. It is beyond the capacity of school

leaders to manage all things and this requires a distribution of power to engage teachers' expertise to create cultures that foster development of teaching, learning and leadership (Elmore, 2000). Distribution of power can be considered an important element of effective leadership which enhances the scope to develop such a culture in schools.

At the present time, schools have become reliant on the leadership of principals and other members of a school for continuous improvement (Ferrandino, 2001). In most countries, schools are being asked to be more accountable for the education of students through effective leadership of school principals and teachers. Schools are trying to provide more effective leadership to build the capabilities of teachers and cultivate learning communities by engaging teachers in leadership activities and professional learning. For principals to become effective leaders utilising a more distributed style of leadership, they need to have knowledge of school leadership theory. However, empirical research suggests that many principals internationally lack the understanding to carry out their role successfully (Williams, 2006). Secondary school education in Bangladesh is now in a transitional position to develop from the traditional system where principals are the foremost source of power and authority in schools. It is considered that on the whole principals tend to develop their schools by controlling teachers in the school and without considering their talents in a continuation of the previous colonial system. Present secondary education in Bangladesh has evolved from the colonial practices in the Indian sub-continent (Rahman, Hamzah, Meerah & Rahman, 2010). This article provides an initial exploration of principals' perceptions of leadership shaped by the enduring remains of historic systems and to investigate the current challenges in leadership responsibilities in Bangladesh secondary schools.

Overview of Secondary School Leadership in Bangladesh

Secondary education in Bangladesh covers seven years with three sub-stages: three years of junior secondary, two years of secondary and two years of higher secondary (Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics [BANBEIS], 2010). Though there are three major streams in secondary education in Bangladesh: general, technical/vocational and madrasah (Islamic Religion based education) education, only the general education stream has been considered for this article. This focus is further explained below with other aspects of my methodology.

There are two types of secondary schools in terms of administration and finance: public and private. The public schools are fully run by the government. The total number of this type of school is only 317 in the whole country. The majority of schools are run privately, though they receive 100% of government financial assistance for their teachers' basic salary. Teachers in these schools also receive some allowances from government, such as less than 2% of basic salary for house rent whereas public school teachers get around 50% of their basic salary in this regard. Fundamental physical facilities, infrastructure development, educational equipments and teaching aids are also supplied by the government of Bangladesh in these secondary schools. In addition to government funding, some private schools offer extra incentives to their staff through the charging of tuition fees. Secondary schools, generally, are co-educational, though a minority offers single sex education.

School administration is shaped by the traditional and prevailing heritage of the historical colonial system (Thornton, 2006) where a top-down approach to management is exercised. The Ministry of Education is concerned with policy formulation, planning, monitoring and evaluation of the post-primary education sector (BANBEIS, 2007). In the administrative hierarchy of secondary education, the Ministry of Education is the highest authority and the principal is the root-level authority for school management. In addition, there is the School Managing Committee (SMC) for secondary schools and a governing body (GB) for higher secondary schools as school level policy making authorities (Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education, Dhaka, [BISED] 2011). These committees consist of representatives of teachers, community members, parents, educators and the government (ibid). Indeed, the SMC and GB play semi-executive roles in recruiting teachers, setting school fees, establishing advisory positions for different tasks and overall supervision of the schools.

There are two key leadership positions in every secondary school. The principals have the power to lead the school formally and the assistant principals are responsible to assist the principals in executing rules and regulations in a school (BANBEIS, 2010). Principals hold the formal leadership and management roles, and are responsible for the development and improvement of the schools. There are indications (Salahuddin, 2011) that though principals are accountable for school improvement because of their administrative position, many appear not to be aware of ways that would assist them to be more successful leaders.

School quality and success is measured by the student achievement in public examinations. The level of remuneration for teachers and the facilities available in schools have been considered constraints to principals' attempts to improve student learning achievement (Thornton, 2006). Many principals have to lead in the challenging contexts of high teacher-student ratio, poor physical facilities, and difficulties caused by the economic and socio-political environment. Begum and Bhuyan noted that secondary schools in Bangladesh face the problem of inadequate physical facilities, lack of qualified teachers and poorly trained educational administrators (as cited in Rahman et al., 2010). Furthermore, teachers have little involvement in decision making related to the strategic development of their schools. As a result, they feel undervalued and do not have a stake in school development (Thornton, 2006).

The traditional hierarchy of leadership in schools expects power to be in the possession of the principal. The Bangladeshi government has now changed focus on secondary education from 'quantity' to 'quality' where improvement initiatives are being implemented via School Managing Committees (SMC), teachers and curriculum development (Rahman et al., 2010). However, to date there has been no leadership programme provided for principals; although, recently, the Bangladesh government has taken an initiative to develop and deliver leadership training for the principals in secondary schools through the Teaching Quality Improvement in Secondary Education Project (TQI-SEP), funded by the Asian Development Bank (ADB), Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and Government of Bangladesh (GoB) [TQI, 2011] which might be a step in the right direction for secondary education.

Methodological approach and method

This article reports research about perceptions of secondary school leadership in the Bangladeshi context. It aims to explore how urban secondary school principals in Bangladesh practice leadership in their contexts and endeavours to investigate the void in the theory and practice of secondary school leadership developed in Bangladesh secondary education. Four secondary school principals' views and practice of leadership are discussed to gain insight into the beliefs and practices of school leadership in Bangladesh.

I bring a partial insider's perspective to this study. As an Assistant Professor of an educational institution for higher education in Bangladesh, I teach various courses in educational leadership at undergraduate and post-graduate levels. I also teach at the Executive Master of Education level for the professionals (principals, teachers, education administrators) in the education sector and those who want to be teachers. I lead them through the teaching and learning process to gain theoretical knowledge of school leadership.

I was involved in a school leadership project run by British Council, Bangladesh, where I developed and delivered leadership training for principals of secondary schools. The leadership project allowed me to think deeply about perspectives on school leadership in Bangladesh. Before and after the training programme, I visited some participant schools to observe their leadership activities where I acquired first-hand experiences of secondary school leadership and was encouraged to conduct a study on school leadership. However, I have not had the opportunity to work alongside the principals of secondary schools in Bangladesh to gain insight into a breadth of views on leadership and leadership practices. For this reason I wanted to discover how principals of Bangladesh understand and practise leadership in their schools with the aim of making their schools more effective.

In-depth data were collected from four principals who were considered to be successful school leaders in Bangladesh. Semi-structured interviews were used as the methods of data collection. To set up the questions for the interviews, a pilot interview was trialled with a principal who was not included in this study. The responses to the sample interview indicated that the interview had allowed the principal to respond to the questions in-depth but required the inclusion of two more questions plus some modification of the existing questions. Each interview took around 30 to 40 minutes and was conducted one-to-one in Bengali or English where they felt comfort. After conducting the interviews, I transcribed them verbatim. Though different systems are available for transcription, with variation in their degree of exactness (Flick, 2009), it was imperative that as a novice researcher, I transcribe all verbal data from the recordings of the interviews. The Bengali transcripts were translated into English afterwards and sent to a person who is expert in both Bengali and English to check the accuracy of translation. After feedback from that person, I finalised the transcripts. A full description of the methodological approach and findings can be found in Salahuddin (2011).

To discuss the meaning of successful leadership, data were analysed and interpreted inductively. The data were collected over three months from November, 2010 to January, 2011. The schools were selected purposively from the ten top ranked schools in the Secondary School Certificate (SSC) examination of the Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education, Dhaka, Bangladesh, for the academic year 2009-2010. The principals were chosen because they are recognized by the Education Board of Dhaka for their interest and knowledge of current educational research and their ongoing involvement in school improvement strategies that have been demonstrated in the public examination results for several years.

Findings

This article reports on four schools, large public and private schools in the capital city of Bangladesh. Pseudonyms have been used for the anonymity of the schools in writing the findings. I focus on the perspectives of the principals enacting their roles as 'effective leaders' and challenges faced in making their schools successful. I do this not to privilege their accounts, but to explore the understanding of leadership and challenges they face in their position in the age of globalization. The table below shows key aspects of each school.

Name of School	Type of School	Student No.	Shifts	Medium of instruction	Gender of Principal	Service Length as Principal	Professional Degree of Principal in Education
Blue	Private (Boys+ Girls)	4100	Morning(Girls) Day (Boys)	Bengali & English	Male	03 years	No
Green	Private (Girls)	2300	Morning & Day	Bengali & English	Female	02 years	B. Ed and M. Ed
Yellow	Public (Boys)	2800	Morning & Day	Bengali	Male	13 years	B. Ed and M. Ed
Pink	Private (Boys+ Girls)	9700	Morning(Girls) Day (Boys)	Bengali & English	Female	03 years	B. Ed

Blue School

Blue school is a private school, with a non-teaching principal, who formerly had a career with the armed forces, and two vice principals, one each for the two different shifts: morning and day shifts. The morning shift starts at 7.30 am and is for girls and the day shift for boys starts at 12.30 pm. This school provides education to the secondary and higher secondary levels, in both Bengali and English, following the national curriculum. With about 4100 students and 156 teachers, Blue school has become one of the top ranked schools because of its

achievements in public examinations for the last few years. This school has set records with 100% passes, 95% at the highest grade passes in SSC examination in recent years. The school has a strong academic tradition, which has continued under the leadership of the principal who has been there for three years.

The principal considers that his school is successful because of his leadership. He thinks that effective leadership can be defined in different ways and it varies according to the person. He explained that leadership is effective when the leader motivates others to work according to the rules. He said, "Effective leadership involves team building, inspiring, leading, showing the path to the followers, doing work, abide by the rules". He has a reward and penalty system to motivate teachers though such schemes are not widespread in secondary schools in Bangladesh. He added:

I try to inspire them or give them incentives in various forms. They'll get a good job or a good salary. We want to give them a bonus and s/he will also want to get (a bonus) after a good result. So, there we have both, you can say reward and punishment system for the teachers and students.

As a principal of one of the top ranked schools, he has to face a range of pressures. According to him, political pressure is a big challenge for his leadership. Sometimes politicians, or other influential people, recommend that principals do things that may seem to be unethical, such as recommendations for admission of students who fall below the standards required for admission in the specific school. This principal overcomes the challenges in various ways as indicated in the following statements.

One challenge in our country is that of Tadbeer, which means recommendations that try to influence someone. But we have established some good traditions. People already know that Tadbeer or recommendations do not work much here. Even then people try- for admission, for getting a job or whatever.

This principal seemed to use rules and regulations as a way to deal with potential problems:

We don't do anything unless it is stated in our statute or in our policy. If I violate policy then someone will come and ask why I have done so.

This Principal said that principals meet their challenges through strategic use of existing rules, by receiving government help or through their own efforts.

Green School

Green School is one of the most renowned girls' schools in Bangladesh maintaining a splendid past record. It was established in Dhaka, the capital city, before the foundation of Bangladesh in 1971. The school is a private school, providing education from Grade One to Grade Twelve, in both Bengali and English, following the national curriculum. This school has several different campuses. It has a strong record in achieving 100% passes in Secondary School Certificate examinations and including top grades for several years. The

principal of Green School has worked for 22 years on the main campus of this school, first as a teacher then as principal for several years.

The principal of Green school argued that teachers had a significant role in effective leadership. She thinks that it is impossible for the principal to make the school successful without the help of other teachers. She added:

I want to say that from the viewpoint of effective leadership, main tasks are to be started by the help of teachers.

She also indicates that decision making is important for effective leadership and there are different ways to come to a decision. She depends mainly on the senior teachers for important decisions. She stated:

I have made decisions on the basis of everybody's opinion. Not actually the staff council; I make these decisions through the support of senior teachers. By acknowledging their opinions, I make important decisions related to academic issues. It will never be good if I only depend on my decision alone without considering the ideas of most people. I think, without considering the combined decisions of seniors, a single decision cannot completely be fruitful.

The principal encountered different problems in operating her leadership. There is a large number of students in Green school. She argued that there are three types of educational programmes running in the same campus which has hampered the environment for learning and diminished the expected standards:

Our main campus is comprised of three parts - school, college and English version (of curriculum). As a result, physical facilities are a great concern. If we had fewer students, our teachers would take more care of their students. Our campus area has been so large, it consumes much time when executing a task jointly. It also takes time to arrive at common perceptions. Everything would be more fruitful, if we could lower the number of students.

The principal also talked about the lack of teaching aids and lack of facilities for teachers:

We have a lack of teaching aids. If government helped us in providing sufficient teaching aids especially for science classes, everything would then be at a satisfactory standard.

Yellow School

Yellow school is a leading public school in Bangladesh, maintaining an outstanding reputation since its beginning. The government schools in Bangladesh are categorised into four groups: A, B, C and D. This school is in group A for its high achievement. Yellow school provides education for grades one to twelve. It follows the national curriculum and Bengali is the medium of instruction. Although government schools seldom achieve results that put

them in the top twenty institutions based on the SSC examination, this school attains such results most years.

The principal of Yellow School believes that effective leadership depends not only on the role of the leader but also the stake holders, such as students, teachers, parents and community members, who play an important role in making them successful. He thinks that the interaction among the stakeholders is a major reason for their success:

In effective leadership, the factors that should necessarily be kept in view are (i) interactions between teachers, (ii) interactions between the principal and students and (iii) the inter-relationships between teachers, students and guardians. The progress of a school significantly depends on how effectively it establishes a relationship among these three factors.

The principal discussed the lack of training for school leadership in Bangladesh.

To become a principal, there is no compulsory training in Bangladesh. However, a B.Ed degree is a must for the persons who desire to be a principal. I think that, more training on leadership is needed so that our teachers can be used more efficiently.

The principal of Yellow School indicated that there are pressures on all secondary schools, from small to large scale institutions in Bangladesh.

The challenge comes first from political pressure. Besides, traditional educational rules and regulations is another challenge. Many of our rules are not updated.

Yellow Principal added:

Our support staff (teachers and staff) do not have the necessary skills. It is a big problem. Lack of manpower is another challenge. I need more teachers and staff for better education.

He further mentioned the administrative processes as challenging in educational leadership. According to him, educational administration is not controlled by teachers. If it were, they could understand the necessities of education in a better way. He said:

Education should be administered by the teachers. What changes are needed in education (future goal, qualification of teachers, international standard of education) should be decided by teachers. If these duties are done by others, it might not be justified.

Pink School

Pink school is one of the most famous private schools in Bangladesh. Starting as a junior secondary school, this institution now offers education for Grades One to Twelve. It provides education for both girls and boys, but splitting them into girls in the morning shift and boys in the day shift. Following the national curriculum, Pink school uses both Bengali and English in

instruction. Besides the main campus, Pink school offers education in two other campuses. The principal manages her school with the help of assistant principals for different shifts. There are 161 teachers. This school is also renowned for its excellent results in the SSC examinations: 100% passes and top grades for several years.

The principal argues for effective leadership to be based on relationships between individuals within the school environment.

For effective leadership, intellectual abilities of a leader are not essential. Rather, effective leadership requires a leader's good networking with the people concerned in different areas; this may be relationships with teachers, members of governing body and other staff. In governing an institution, we need the cooperation of people working at different stages.

The main difficulties highlighted by this principal were insufficient physical facilities, many more students than the allocated seats and insufficient teachers in the schools for the number of students, which impacts on student outcomes. The principal indicated that if the teacher-student ratio were generated according to a standard level based on the facilities available, then the school would be more successful.

The academic buildings that I have contain double the students to allocated seats. If we taught half of these students, we could concentrate more on every student individually. And they wouldn't need extra care in house.

As there is no catchment area for secondary education in Bangladesh, this is another challenge for successful schools as many parents want their child to be admitted to such schools for a better future. As the principal states, "There are lots of schools in this area. But, almost all of them want to study here".

Pink Principal also believed that it was difficult and time consuming for the government to find solutions to problems since education in Bangladesh is administered by a central system.

It is difficult to solve all these problems. The government cannot find a precise way to solve these problems. By any means, we have to make our own way.

Overall, the majority of principals indicated that effective leadership was characterised by good interactions among principals, students, teachers, parents and community members. All the principals reported that discussion is an important element of effective decision-making. They aim to get the jobs completed on time with the help of their teachers and some try to encourage teachers by providing rewards and punishments. Principals articulated that there is no formal school leadership training available for principals in Bangladesh. They reported that most of their leadership skills have been developed through experience and intuition rather than training. The challenges in school leadership that they identified were a lack of physical facilities, too high student-teacher ratio, political pressure, unethical recommendations and lack of skilled personnel. The principals reported that they attempt to overcome challenges on their own, with the help of existing rules, or by taking government help.

Discussion

There is a widespread belief about the positive impact of leadership quality on school and student outcomes (Bush, 2008). Effective leadership by principals has been considered essential for school success for over two decades (Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000). The principals who were the participants in the current research noted that leadership is important for school effectiveness. According to the principals, the leader's role is one of building good interaction between the principal, teachers, students and community members. Principals guide the stakeholders towards a common set of goals and direct the students and teachers in reaching the goals for improvement of the schools; this resonates with research on effective leadership (Elmore, 2005; Northouse, 2007). One of the main school goals that the principals seem to focus on was to achieve good results in the public examinations. They lead and manage their schools effectively to achieve this goal, which means they have a reputation for being successful leaders. The findings from this research project also emphasise a broad view of effective leadership that includes team building, inspiring, leading, showing a path to teachers. This reflects international literature that discusses how effective school leaders enable others in schools to take leadership responsibility, inspiring and guiding them to reach school goals (Harris, 2003; Harris, Day & Hadfield, 2003).

Though the principals have a broad idea of consultative leadership, the ideology of having to work according to rules prescribed by a central administration supports the hierarchical approaches that are residues of the former colonial system. Secondary education in Bangladesh is administered primarily from the top, by a centralised administrative system (Ministry of Education, Bangladesh [MoE, BD], 2011). Therefore, principals are restricted in the important decisions that they can make for their school due to the restraints of the current regulations. For them to implement better decision-making, the rules and required procedures would need to be changed by the central administration to allow the principals to be more self-managing. Unfortunately, changing procedure takes a long time and by the time regulations are revised the decisions would have already been made. Rules and regulations are essential for guiding the management of institutions but it is difficult to decide everything according to the rules without any freedom to adjust to the particular school context.

It has been discussed in the overview of secondary school leadership in Bangladesh that the principals are expected to implement the rules made by the central administration, such as the Ministry of Education. So, principals face problems in reaching their school goals without enough freedom to make decisions at the school level. They try to arrive at good decisions through discussion with stakeholders, but this must be done within boundaries, according to the rules. This indicates the traditional colonial bureaucratic constraints on secondary school leaders that prevent them from developing effective schools in Bangladesh.

The ability to reward the development of good teaching-learning practices is rare in Bangladesh. There is no funding source for principals to give money to teachers as rewards. It is only possible for the principals who can arrange money from student tuition fees or who receive donations for school development from rich people within society with the permission of BG or SMC (BISED, 2011). From my experience this usually happens in the well reputed schools established in the urban areas. The principals of high achieving schools use various

strategies to augment their school funds in order to provide more facilities for teachers. Provision of extra facilities can be considered as one of the significant factors leading to city schools achieving better results since not all urban schools have such extra facilities and do not achieve good results in public examinations.

Little attention has been placed on determining leadership development requirements of principals in Bangladesh. The findings of this study indicate a lack of professional leadership training programmes for principals in Bangladesh. To be a principal, the normal requirement is to have several years teaching experience, though the number of teaching years varies between government and private schools. While private schools require twelve years experience, the government schools ask for only four years. In Bangladesh secondary schools, no professional leadership degree is necessary to be a principal of government or private schools except a Bachelor in Education (B.Ed). A B.Ed is a one year teaching degree which is designed to improve teaching and learning for school teachers or for becoming a teacher. Western countries such as UK, USA, Canada, Australia, Hong Kong and New Zealand have distinct models of professional learning for preparing new principals and there are also extensive on-going professional learning models that recognise that leaders continue to need support to develop as more effective leaders (Caldwell, Calnin & Cahill, 2003; Daresh & Male, 2000). How can the principals be good leaders in Bangladesh without any formal leadership training programmes? Of course there are some characteristics of their leadership which could be locally developed that would help them to make their school successful. The Bangladesh government has started the journey to develop secondary school leadership but need to check the incorporation of local factors. One principal in this study received professional leadership training from the Teaching Quality Improvement in Secondary Education Project (TQI-SEP) which is a good initiative for the secondary school leadership in Bangladesh. This programme is a good start but in the modern competitive world of education, more professional learning programmes on principal leadership incorporating contextual factors are needed for effective and sustainable development of secondary schools.

Successful leaders are able to identify and overcome challenges to make their schools effective. They need to be able to recognise problems, explore options and develop innovative solutions to improve their schools. It is evident in many studies that principals act as stimulators and problem solvers for schools (Harris et al., 2003). To solve problems, principals have to overcome any challenge. Principals play their role in solving challenges that come from outside the school from people such as administrative staff, parents, community members, other external forces and special interest groups (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009). The principals in this article indicated they were struggling with inadequate physical facilities. Most have a large number of students which is much more than their allocated seats. While the standard teacher-student ratio in secondary schools is expected to be 1:30 in the National Education Policy of Bangladesh in 2010, at present it is more than double that (MoE, BD, 2011). To control the ratio is difficult for principals because the number of teachers in a school is not allocated in terms of enrolment size. Lack of better schools compels such schools to take more students; and teachers cannot take adequate care of their students for the reason of large numbers. Some schools also work across different campuses, which can increase the time to make decisions due to having to consult across a number of different locations spread across a busy city. Lack of teaching aids, such as insufficient science instruments, has also been identified as a constraint on school

development. All these challenges exacerbate the barriers in developing the secondary schools as really effective.

The principals revealed the lack of skilled teachers, indicating a need for ongoing professional learning for teachers. Improvement also depends on creating opportunities for teachers to co-operate and collaborate with their colleagues (Camburn, Rowan & Taylor, 2003). The principals try to provide facilities for teachers and tend to overcome challenges though they have limited finances and resources. This echoes the political, economical, social and other leadership challenges in operating secondary schools in Bangladesh.

Another challenge for secondary education is outdated educational rules and regulations. The colonial regulations in education have hardly changed since the independence of Bangladesh in 1971. Along with this, secondary education is administered by bureaucrats who may be promoted from other civil services of Bangladeshi government (Rahman et al., 2010) which is a continuation of the British system. The bureaucrats in the education sector rarely have education degrees and practical experience in education. Consequently, the secondary sector as a whole faces the challenge of insufficient competent educational administrators (ibid). Changing of the rules and regulations in secondary education has become urgent to overcome the colonial legacy; policy makers and bureaucrats from different fields stand as barriers to these changes happening.

An additional challenge for principals is outside influence on their ability to make appropriate decisions about teacher and student recruitment. One principal indicated that teachers can be recommended for being recruited even when they might not have qualities to be teachers. This is referred to as *tadbeer* in Bengali. The recommendation typically comes from individuals who are powerful politically or financially, that is they are well-connected; in a number of cases so powerful that the principal cannot ignore the recommendation and is obliged to negotiate with them. Traditionally and historically, secondary school principals in Bangladesh have to address political and socio-economic problems along with the internal issues of the school. Though there is no direct reference to political parties regarding school administration, principals cannot work beyond the boundaries of politics. In most cases, the local Member of Parliament or his/her representative becomes the chairman of the SMC or GB of a school according to the rules. As well, the other members of SMC or GB are those who have money and power.

Political involvement in school development can be seen in a negative way as Deal (2007) argues, "Political manoeuvring is seen as manipulative, dishonest and destructive" (p. 112). Although the purpose of SMC and GB is to develop the schools, if a person of one of these committees is interested in exercising power for self interest, the development or new initiative might not happen. The principals often have to negotiate with power, rather than work according to the rules. Katzenmeyer and Moller (2009) indicated that principals often develop liaisons with powerful individuals in order to diminish the barriers to schools' success. It was evident that solving all problems by government is difficult since the secondary education is administered by the central system. As a result, the principals develop solutions in their own way relating it to their contextual environment. For example, one principal has made it clear that political or any other recommendations do not work in his school since he works according to the rules and regulations. This principal can work in this way because of involvement of high officials in the governing body of the school, such as the

education secretary, and their willingness to develop the school. This means that secondary school principals are able to do work according to the rules but under political pressure

Conclusion

There are many challenges for school leadership in various settings in Bangladesh. Although current research gives a broad description of school leadership internationally, to date there has been little research on leadership in Bangladeshi secondary schools. In Bangladesh, there is an urgent need to understand how school leadership can be developed beyond the traditional colonial system that values positional leadership without developing processes for consultation and participation, so that schools can improve and be more effective. Without effective leadership in schools, it is difficult to see how schools will be able to attain the learning outcomes to which principals and policy makers aspire.

Bangladesh has made significant progress in some aspects of secondary education such as enrolment, number of schools and teachers, gender equity and revision of curriculum. However, the improvement of the quality in the leadership of this sector is now recognized as urgent. Empirical research studies in Western countries have found that school development depends on the quality of principal leadership (Bush & Jackson, 2002, Elmore, 2000). The Bangladeshi government has taken initial steps to enrich the leadership of secondary schools by introducing a leadership programme for secondary school principals. Although the education system is continuously being changed since independence in 1971, the leadership in this field still retains some colonial views and demands. To develop our education in a way that not only fits into the global world but also retains local values and serves local needs, educational leadership in Bangladesh will need to change. For such change to be effective, it is important for Bangladeshi policy makers to avoid replicating the colonial situation or creating a neo-colonial dependency on the western world.

With support from the government, principals can create and have influence over the journey of success of their own schools. But they still face many challenges along the path of continuous improvement and one of those is to clarify and act on their understanding of school leadership. To become purposeful in their leadership activities from a basis of theory, reference to effective leadership practice and research are other challenges. Principals need to move away from traditional positional leadership to a more distributed leadership approach, to utilise the expertise of the managers and teachers in the schools in a collaborative way to build capacity for further success. In addition, principals need to develop their teachers' ability to be critical and self-determining in seeking knowledge so that they can evaluate appropriate local knowledge for themselves rather than being imposed upon by others.

References

BANBEIS (Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics). (2007). *Education system of Bangladesh*. Dhaka: Ministry of Education.

- BANBEIS (Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics). (2010). *Educational structure of Bangladesh*. Retrieved from http://www.banbeis.gov.bd/es_bd.htm
- Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education, Dhaka (2011). *Circular on school managing committee and governing body*. Retrieved from <http://www.dhakaeducationboard.gov.bd/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/smc-1.pdf>
- Bush, T. (2008). *Leadership and management development in education*. Los Angeles: Sage.
- Bush, T., & Jackson, D. (2002). A preparation for school leadership: International perspectives. *Educational Management & Administration*, 30(4), 417-429.
- Caldwell, B., Calnin, G., & Cahill, W. (2003). Mission possible? An international analysis of headteacher/principal training. In Bennet, N., Crawford, M., & Cartwright, M. (Eds.), *Effective educational leadership* (pp. 111-129). London: Paul Chapman Publishing.
- Camburn, E., Rowan, B., & Taylor, J. (2003, Winter). Distributed leadership in schools: The case of elementary schools adopting comprehensive school reform models. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 25(4), 347-373.
- Daresh, J., & Male, T. (2000). Crossing the border into leadership: experiences of newly appointed British headteachers and American headteachers. *Educational Management and Administration*, 28(1), 89-101.
- Deal, T. E. (2007). Poetical and political leadership. In B. Davies (Ed.), *The essentials of school leadership* (pp. 110-121). London: Paul Chapman Publishing and Corwin Press.
- Duignan, P. (2006). *Educational leadership: key challenges and ethical tensions*. Australia: Cambridge University Press.
- Elmore, R. F. (2000). *Building a new structure for school leadership*. Washington, DC: The Albert Shanker Institute.
- Elmore, R. F. (2005). Accountable leadership. *The Educational Forum*, 69, 134-142.
- Ferrandino, V. (2001). Challenges for 21st century elementary school principals. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 82(6), 440-442.
- Flick, U. (2009). *An introduction to qualitative research* (4th ed.). London: Sage Publications Ltd.
- Hallinger, P., & Heck, R. (1996). Reassessing the principal's role in school effectiveness: A review of empirical research, 1990–1995. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 32(1), 5–44.
- Harris, A. (2003). Teacher leadership as distributed leadership: Heresy, fantasy or possibility? *School Leadership & Management*, 23(3), 313–324.

- Harris, A., Day, C., & Hadfield, M. (2003). Teachers' perspectives on effective school leadership. *Teachers and Teaching: theory and practice*, 9(1), 67-77.
- Katzenmeyer, M., & Moller G. (2009). *Awakening the sleeping giant: Helping teachers develop as leaders* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Leithwood, K., & Jantzi, D. (2000). Principal and teacher leadership effects: a replication. *School Leadership and Management*, 20(4), 415-434.
- Mayrowetz, D. (2008). Making sense of distributed leadership: Exploring the multiple usages of the concept in the field. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 44(3), 424-435.
- Ministry of Education of Bangladesh (2011). *Education Management*. Retrieved from http://www.moedu.gov.bd/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=244&Itemid=266
- Northouse, P. (2007). *Leadership: Theory and practice* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Rahman, M., Hamzah, M. I. M., Meerah, T. S. M., & Rahman, M. (2010). Historical development of secondary education in Bangladesh: Colonial period to 21 st century. *International Education Studies*, 3(1), 114-125.
- Riley, K., & MacBeath, J. (2003). Effective leaders and effective schools. In Bennet, N., Crawford, M., & Cartwright, M. (Eds.), *Effective educational leadership* (pp. 173-185). London: Paul Chapman Publishing.
- Salahuddin, A. N. M. (2011). *Perceptions of Effective Leadership in Bangladesh Secondary Schools: Moving towards Distributed Leadership?* Unpublished master's thesis, University of Canterbury, Christchurch, New Zealand.
- Thornton, H. (2006). Teachers talking: the role of collaboration in secondary schools in Bangladesh. *British Association for International and Comparative Education*, 36(2), 181-196.
- TQI (2011). *Teaching Quality improvement in secondary education project*. Retrieved from <http://tqi-sep.org/index2.htm>
- Williams, T. B. (2006). *Effective leadership practices utilized by principals in high achieving schools*. Unpublished Doctoral dissertation, Capella University, Minneapolis, USA.