



Exploring Aspiring School Leaders' Perception of Preparedness on Four Leadership Domains

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Abstract

Principals play a vital role in setting the direction for successful schools. With the emphasis on preparing highly qualified school leaders for the 21st century, this article investigated aspiring school leaders' and their perception of preparedness to serve as instructional leaders, talent and organizational system managers. Particularly, the findings explore how various factors are associated with improving future school leaders' readiness to effectively carryout critical leadership responsibilities. The article concludes with recommendations for developing a well-designed educational leadership training program that prepares and supports future school leaders for an ever changing world.

Key Words: Instructional Leadership, Talent Management, Climate and Culture, Organizational System

Introduction

In terms of preparing and developing educational leaders, previous studies have revealed four major findings. First, research consistently demonstrates that a high performing school with increased student achievement depends on effective leadership. Second, the majority of studies confirm that the role of school leaders has been transformed from building manager and disciplinarian to a multi-faceted role responsible for increasing student success, building a positive climate and culture, leading an organizational system, and serving as an instructional leader (Fullan, 2015; Pannell, Peltier-Glaze, Haynes, Davis, & Skelton, 2015). Third, previous studies indicate that the current pre-service principal preparation programs fail to adequately prepare future educational leaders to cope with rigorous and complex job realities (Lynch, 2012). Fourth, and perhaps the most important finding of the previous research, is that our nation's underperforming schools and children are unlikely to succeed unless we prepare and develop high quality educational leaders.

Much has changed related to the student learning, assessment and schools' organizational development in the last 20 years, but existing knowledge, policies, practices and strategies to prepare transformative and effective school leaders for 21st century schools are sparse (Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, Meyerson, Orr, & Cohen, 2007). Recognizing these challenges, the purpose of this paper is threefold: first, to describe a current comprehensive leader evaluation and support system, second, to share the results of educational leadership readiness self-assessment results, and third, to present a framework for ensuring that candidates who participate in a principal training program are performance and impact ready to make effective systemic changes in our nation's public schools. With the emphasis on preparing highly qualified school leaders for the 21st century, the purpose of this article is to investigate the aspiring school

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leaders' perception of preparedness to serve as instructional leaders, talent and organizational system managers.

Particularly, this study will address the following research questions in detail: (1) What are the self-reported lowest and highest scored leadership activities that focus on four leadership domains to ensure school improvement and student success? (2) How the aspiring school leaders' perception of preparedness change by the four leadership domains to ensure the success and achievement of all students (3) If the internship participation is associated with statistical significant different mean leadership score. Aligned with these questions, this study has implications for creating evidence-based and research supported practices for school leader preparation programs and professional development of novice leaders.

To address these major leadership issues, professional organizations such as the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP), National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA), Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP), and the National Education Association (NEA) provide standards and a set of common expectations for the knowledge, skills, and dispositions of school leaders in an effort to establish a framework of effective teaching and learning. Aligned with these standards, the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) (2015) developed a comprehensive leader evaluation and support system, which includes four domains: Instructional Leadership, Talent Management, Organizational Systems, Culture and Climate (see Figure 1).

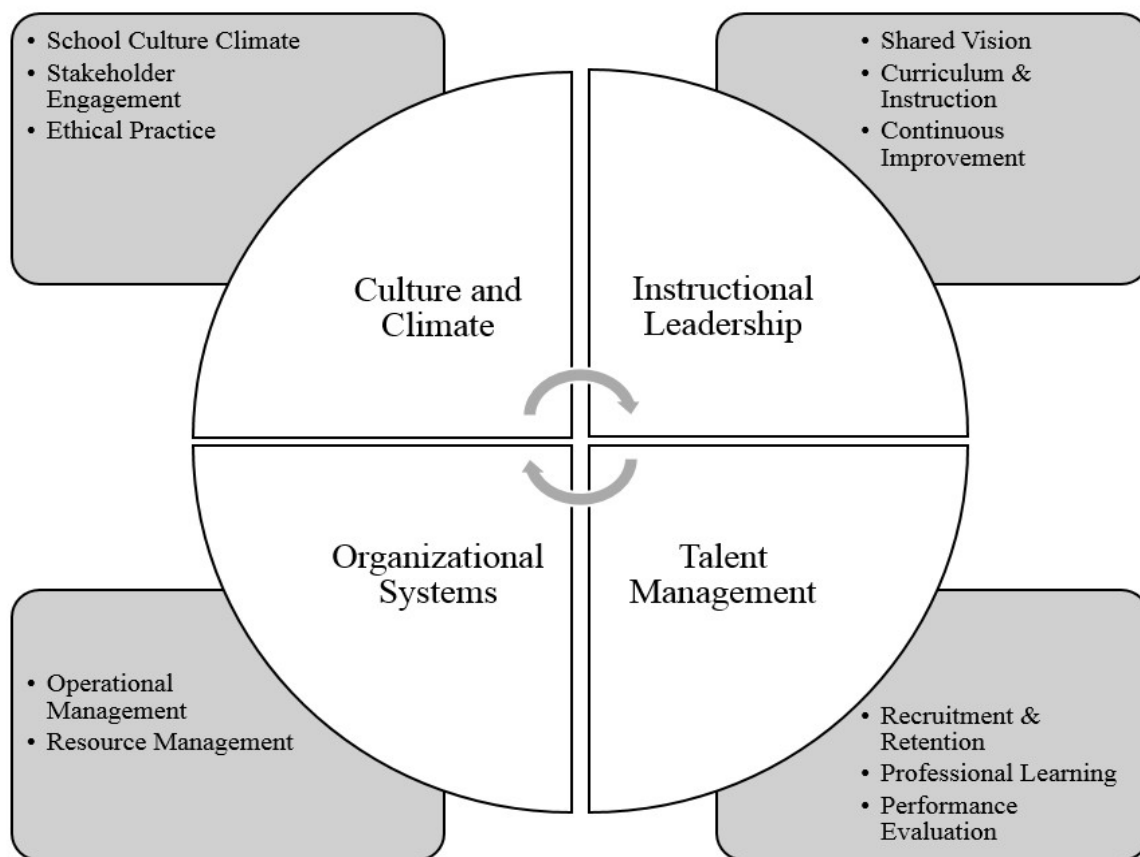


Figure 1. Visualization of Comprehensive Leader Evaluation and Support System

Culture and Climate

Schneider and Barber explain that organizational climate and culture are two conceptually distinct yet recently overlapping constructs for understanding how employees might experience their work setting

(2014). While Williams and Glisson suggest that organizations with a poorly proficient culture and climate exhibited more dysfunction, less engagement, and more stress. Their findings suggest that administrators should support organizational systems with ongoing interventions that improve specific dimensions of culture and climate for the wellbeing of the organization (2014). In Zilber work on *The Relevance of Institutional Theory For The Study of Organizational Culture*, he shared that culture represents an important means by which normative and cognitive structures of an organization are transmitted, he also suggested that culture can be described as the foundation upon which an organization is built; thus, indicating that adopting a broad lens that considers all aspects of the organization and its employees is important when thinking about culture and climate (2012). Huyghe and Knockaert explain that culture is understood through visible elements that include values, beliefs and patterns of behaviors held by the school leader (2105). More importantly, the literature shows that culture develops over a period of time and consists of stated and implicit-beliefs under which the organization will ultimately function.

Norms and traditions of the an organization are structured around the culture and the climate which ultimately affects policies, practices, procedure and how the organizational environment is perceived through the eyes of the individuals in the workplace (Denison 1996;Reichers and Schneider 1990). Schneider and Barbara explain that the organizational culture determines how employees function, behave and commit themselves to the mission of the organization (2014). They go on to explain that in order to establish a successful culture and climate within in an organization, more than discussion and resources are needed. They emphasize the urgency of leadership that comprehensively guides its members towards innovation, creativity and open communication that can have a direct effect on how culture and climate will take root within the organization.

According to Williams and Glisson, leadership has an obligation to support organizational effectiveness through interventions that improve specific dimensions of the organization's culture and climate (2014). Understanding the differences and similarities between culture and climate gives school leaders a comprehensive understanding of how the organization functions and how they might improve the overall structure of the organization. Schneider et al (2011), suggest that building the culture and climate of an organization requires a strong focus from the leadership, they rationalize that an administrator cannot simply expect that the culture and climate of an organization will transform in meaningful ways without a deliberate commitment and a defined purpose from the very start. Understanding climate and culture can provide school leaders, faculty and staff a way of thinking, acting and functioning; therefore, it is critical that leadership training programs focus on improving the capacity of school leaders by improving their understanding of how significant culture and climate are to the future of the school.

Instructional leadership

In 2007, Robinson rationalized that leaders who understand the value of instructional leadership and its impact on the business of teaching and learning, are more likely to make a difference in a students' academic performance. While Bush, 2013; Drysdale and Gurr, 2011; and Spillane, 2016 discussed instructional leadership as a relationship between teacher effectiveness, learner performance and leadership quality. In her work on *The Changing Shape of Leadership*, King explained that instructional leadership should be defined as anything a leader does that improves teaching and learning in the school's community (2002). On the other hand, Bush and Glover argue that instructional leadership focuses on teaching and learning and the behavior of teachers in their engagement with students (2003). In 1990, Avila explained that how a leader understands his/her role as an instructional leader is exactly how a teacher will perform under the banner of instructional leadership and engage student in the learning process. Graczewski, Kundson and Holtzman closed their discussion on instructional leadership by emphasizing that school administrators have a clear idea of what instructional leadership is and tasks they are required to perform. Understanding their role as an instructional leader can directly assist towards avoiding difficulties with teachers, staff, parents and students which inevitably leads to a strong culture and climate.

According to Elmore, the role of the principal, as an agent of change, requires that he/she performs as an instructional leader (2000). Hallinger explained that instructional leadership is grounded in three dimensions: defining the school's mission, managing the instructional program and promoting a positive school-learning culture that leads to student success (2001). In their work on instructional leadership, Graczewski, Knudson and Holtzman shared that principals who lack the capacity to perform as instructional leaders are less likely to form a sound vision and goals around instruction. They explained that these leaders were less effective at guiding efforts that lead to instructional improvements. More importantly, they shared the need for instructional leadership in schools highlighted by the emergence of standards-based accountability and the demand that principal take full responsibility for all aspects of student learning (2009). Merwe and Schenck emphasized that, over the years, instructional leadership has been motivated by a demand on school leaders for efficiency and accountability inside and outside the classroom. As far back as 1999, Blase and Blase explained that effective instructional school leaders work towards integration, reflection and long term growth that build a comprehensive school culture, which is centered on an ongoing critical examination aimed towards instructional improvements and students learning.

Organizational Systems

Management studies have come to understand organizations from a systems point of view; however, years of organization leadership and practices in the workplace have not followed a systems perspective. Nonetheless, with tremendous changes facing organizations and how they operate, many educators and school administrators have come to embrace organizations as systems management as a way of improving input and output. This interpretation has brought about significant change (or paradigm shifts) in the way school leaders have come to manage the school community. According to Clabaugh and Rozcki, through organizational system, the success of the organization can be measured across multiple dimensions including financial and operational data, as well as staff and customer feedback. They also shared that systems management models should be seen as a large computer that proper programming controls. They further explain that organizations tend to have four basic conflicts, following policy vs. sensitivity, delegating authority vs. authorized goals, process vs. product and power vs. morale; however, organizations that operate under structured organization systems have a tendency to avoid these basic conflicts (1990).

In Homburg, Grozdanovic and Klarmann's work on organizational systems they explain that organizational systems are the degree of which information is processed within the organization. They further rationalize that an effective organizational system provides a culture and a climate that allows employees to experience high levels of satisfaction that translates into a commitment to the workplace. They further add that the successful development of culture and climate within an organization is a direct reflection of the effectiveness of the organization system (2007). Shrivastava discusses organizational systems in relations to effective communication. He explains that effective communication leads to the clear interpretation and the relevant use of knowledge which leads to decision-making that adds to the development of the organization, which affects a broad range of organizational activities that provide input to multiple departments, divisions, and hierarchical levels of the organization (1983). The Haines Center for Strategic Management discussed systems theory is a powerful tool that can take management organization to an entirely new level. They describe organizational systems as an effective method for understanding the purpose of an organization and for performing an effective analysis of subsystems. They explain that applying systems theory to leadership not only serve the organization, but the entire culture and climate of the organization (2010-2013).

Talent Management

There is considerable debate with respect to the understanding of the meaning of talent management. Some see it from a human capital perspective (Cappelli, 2008) while others see it as a mindset with talent as the key to organizational success. Redford, defined it as an attempt to ensure that each employee

worked to the fullest of his/her potential (2005). Others see the alignment of talent management to the business strategy and the corporate culture as a key feature of how talent management should be understood (Farndale et al., 2010; Kim and Scullion, 2011). The lack of a precise definitions of talent management may have contributed to the limited understanding of how talent management should be understood (Mellahi and Collings, 2010; Collings and Scullion, 2009). Nonetheless, there is a growing interest in talent management among academics since the late 1990s (Boudreau and Ramstad, 2007). The Boston Consulting Group highlighted talent management as one of five key challenges facing the human resources profession and it was also one of the areas which the administrators was least competent (2007). Khatri et. al., discussed Talent Management as the process of recruiting, managing, assessing, developing and maintaining the organization's most important resource; the people. They further elaborated that people are an organization's most important asset and in this regard, organizational leaders should seek ways to build data-driven decision making platforms that showcase the talent of its people (2010).

As talent management develops over the coming years, how it is understood should be an important measure, equally important is not to lose sight how it might, or should be carried out in the workplace (Collings et al., 2011). According to Scullion and Starkey and Farndale et al. A key requirement for effective decision making in talent management is that it must be linked to a system of organization which connects to the culture of the organization (2000, 2020). Lewis and Heckman suggest that leadership should focus on talent without regard for organizational boundaries or specific positions (2006). Ashton and Morton argued that getting the right employees in pivotal roles at the right time creates long-term organizational success; they also added that effective talent management strategies lead to administrative accomplishment, incorporates related processes and systems within the organization and creates a clear talent mindset that moves the organization forward (2005). In Cappelli's work on Talent Management for the Twenty-First Century, he explained that talent management problems of employees and employers are intertwined. Employers want the skills they need when they need them and employees want prospects for advancement and control over their careers.

He went on to discuss the need for higher levels of skills and deeper competencies in talent management which are best developed within the organization. Finally, he shared that talent management gives organizational leaders a way to manage talent needs which is a way to balance employees and employers interest and a way to increase productivity (2006). According to Aston and Morton, when school leaders plan for talent management it must be done in parallel with comprehensive organizational planning, creating a rich integration of people and strategy.

Method

Research Setting

In this study, data was collected from pre-service school leaders who successfully completed their educational leadership internship program in the United States. In their first year at this leadership program, the school leader candidates complete the foundational courses that focus on leadership development, student learning and curriculum development. In their second year, the aspiring school leaders were required to take courses that cover educational law, school finance, school improvement, staff supervision and development. In addition to these eight leadership courses, each candidate was also required to complete a two-part, field-based internship that focused on theory and provide a more realistic understanding of leadership practices.

The internship program is designed to provide interns with a practical leadership experience in an actual educational setting. The intern is provided with the opportunity to synthesize prior coursework and incorporate content into an operational framework. This intensive internship experience allows for the application of theory to the world of educational leadership practices.

Particularly, in the educational leadership internship program, a faculty member and a certified site mentor provided interns with hands on guidance and direction throughout the internship process. In

addition to working closely with the faculty member and the site mentor, interns completed their internship learning goals and submitted their reflections on various field experience activities. Participants selected to participate in the study successfully completed the foundational courses and the fieldwork portion of the leadership preparation program. Moreover, after completing the program requirements, participants were required to pass the state administrator test. Once all state obligations were met, participants are awarded a certificate of completion that made them eligible to serve as an assistant superintendent, building principal, assistant principal and coordinator of programs in a public school system.

Participants

Participants were comprised of 186 educational leader candidates who successfully completed their educational leadership internship program in the United States. Table 1 provides demographic information on participants. Overall, the participants' demographic information represent the general school leader candidates' profile because in The United States of America, the majority of the aspiring school leaders are female and White. As indicated in Table 1. The 86.6 percentage of the participants in this study are White.

Table 1
Participants' Demographic Information

Categories	Frequency (N)	Percent (%)
Gender		
Female	128	68.8
Male	58	31.2
School Size		
1-500	80	43.0
501-1500	106	57.0
Race		
White	161	86.6
Hispanic or African American	25	13.4
Teaching experience		
1 - 9 Year Teaching Experience	69	37.1
10 - 19 Year Teaching Experience	98	52.7
20 - 29 Year Teaching Experience	19	9.2
Previous Leadership Experience		
Yes	75	40.3
No	111	59.7
Future Leadership Plan		
Yes	136	73.1
No	50	26.9

Instrumentation and data collection

The study used an exploratory correlational research design to analyze the pre-service school leaders' responses regarding the four leadership domains including talent management, instructional leadership, climate/culture and organizational system to determine readiness levels. The purpose of the design was to yield information regarding competencies of future school leader candidates to ensure the success and achievement of all students. In alignment with the Connecticut Leader Evaluation and Support Rubric (2015) developed by the Connecticut Department of Education, a comprehensive leadership readiness

self-assessment was designed to help educational leader candidates explore their perceived readiness for performing selected leadership activities. This survey was distributed to the candidates in the beginning of the educational leadership internship. At the conclusion of their internship experience candidates were asked to retake the self-assessment. The survey also included demographic information from participants who participated in the study.

The survey included four main leadership domains: (1) Instructional Leadership, (2) Talent Management, (3) Organizational System, (4) Culture and Climate. Each leadership domain included fifteen items to explore the pre-school leaders' readiness in an effort to explore their perception of preparedness to support student achievement and school improvement. In addition to high content validity that focuses on effective leadership practices, as shown in Table 2, each leadership domain very high Cronbach alpha value .95 or higher per items that indicates a reliable and stable factor structure that could be used in future research studies. An online survey system was utilized to collect data from the participants. Each item listed in the survey described an activity or behavior that a school leader might perform to improve a school and student success. Moreover, each item was measured on a 4-point rating scale. The details of the scale is introduced below.

Table 2
Selected Items from Questionnaire and Domains' Measure of Scale reliability

<i>Talent</i> $\alpha=.95$		<i>Management</i>
Develop positive and trusting relationships with staff		
Establish teacher mentorship or peer support programming		
Understand and apply the professional learning system		
Develop positive and trusting relationships with staff		
<i>Instructional</i> $\alpha=.97$		<i>Leadership</i>
Collaborate with staff to improve teaching and learning		
Create high expectations for students		
Involving school stakeholders in the visioning process.		
Create a continuous improvement cycle		
<i>Organizational</i> $\alpha=.96$		<i>Management</i>
Collaboratively monitor student learning progress		
Improve the data, information and communication systems		
establish, implement and monitor organizational system		
Engage all stakeholders to create and monitor budget		
<i>Culture</i> $\alpha=.97$	<i>and</i>	<i>Climate</i>
maintain the highest standards of professional conduct		
Maintain and strengthen a positive school climate		
Protect the welfare and safety of students and staff		
Advance social justice for all members of the community		

This scale of 1 to 4 was adapted from Diffley's Four Levels of Readiness Framework (2006). A representation of the preparedness ratings is presented below:

"1" represented: *Not Ready at All*

The candidate has no awareness and knowledge regarding performing the necessary leadership practice.

“2” represented: *Awareness and Knowledge-Ready*

The candidate can acquire concepts, information, definitions, and procedures. Candidate can also interpret and integrate the leadership practice, but have little or no readiness to apply knowledge or measure its impacts without coaching or guidance.

“3” Represented: *Performance Ready*

Candidate can apply knowledge and skills, but the candidate is not ready to create innovative solutions and/or evaluate the impacts of leadership practices.

“4” Represented: *Impact and Accountable Ready*

Candidate has the ability to apply knowledge and skills to solve large complex problems and make systemic changes, which includes innovative solutions and the associated impact.

Analysis and Variables

This section provides the readers with information on dependent and independent variables along with the analysis for each research question. Seven independent variables were used to explore if there were relationships between the variables and measured outcomes. First, the descriptive statistics were used to describe the basic features of the data in a study. The mean and standard deviation provided simple summaries about the sample and the measures related to certain leadership activities. In the first question, the descriptive statistics was used to explore what are the participants’ self-reported lowest and highest scored leadership activities in each leadership domain. While the research question one focuses on exploring how spread out the data are about the mean for each leadership item, the second research question investigated how the aspiring school leaders’ perception of preparedness change by the four leadership domains to ensure the success and achievement of all students. In order to visualize the findings, a graph was prepared.

Finally, t-test was utilized to determine if the completing an educational leadership internship program is associated with statistical significant different mean leadership score for each leadership domain. Dependent variable was aligned with the research question and obtained from the survey results on the pre-service school leaders’ perceived readiness for leadership activities. In the last research question, the internship completion was considered as an independent variable. T-test was appropriate to utilize if the internship causes change in the participants’ perception of preparedness. As a dependent variable, mean scores obtained from 15 items measured on a 4-point rating scale helped to quantify participant’s the level of preparedness. Each item was measured on a 4-point rating scale; the highest mean score that could be obtained from the survey was 4, the lowest score that could be obtained was 1.

Findings

This section addresses the research questions in detail.

Research Question 1: *What are the self-reported lowest and highest scored leadership activities that focus on four leadership domains to ensure school improvement and student success?*

As indicated in Table 3, in terms of instructional leadership domain, compared to continuous improvement item “persisting and engaging staff in solving schoolwide or districtwide challenges related to student success and achievement” ($M= 2.78, SD=.82$), the aspiring school leaders have high level of readiness to collaborate related to curriculum development item “Works with staff to develop a system to design, implement and evaluate curriculum and instruction that meets state and national standards and ensures the application of learning in authentic settings.” ($M= 3.26, SD=.75$). When it comes to the talent management domain, it is noted that participants indicated relatively high perception of preparedness in developing and maintaining positive and trusting relationships with school and district staff and external partners to recruit and retain highly qualified and diverse staff ($M= 3.09, SD=.81$). On the other hand, related to the talent management, the participants reported that they have relatively low level of readiness

about using multiple sources of evidence of effective teaching or service delivery and identifying needs of students and staff as the primary factors in making recruitment, selection and retention decisions ($M=2.77$, $SD=.86$).

In the third place, the aspiring school leaders have been asked to share their perception of readiness related to conducting the organizational system leadership activities, participants reported relatively high positive perceptions or preparedness about the establishment, implementation and monitoring of organizational systems ($M=2.87$, $SD=.87$). However, related to organizational system domain, it was surprising to see that the participant reported lower levels of readiness to develop, implement and monitor a budget aligned to the school and district improvement plans and district, state and federal regulations ($M=2.37$, $SD=.88$).

Finally, based on the mean scores, the participants indicated their perception of preparedness about culture and climate activities. It is noted that while the aspiring school leaders reported higher perceptions of readiness to maintain the highest standards of professional conduct, they have lower level of readiness to promote understanding of the legal, social and ethical uses of technology. In other words, the participants find it difficult to hold teachers and staff accountable for the ethical use of computer technology, including social media, to support the school or district's vision, mission and goals.

Table 3

Highest and Lowest Mean Scores of Each Leadership Activities by Leadership Domain

Domains	Highest Readiness Statements	M	SD	Lowest Readiness Statements	M	SD
Instructional Leadership	Collaborate with staff to improve teaching and learning	3.26	.75	Apply and evaluate cohesive school improvement plan	2.83	.86
	Create high expectations for all students	3.16	.75	Create a continuous improvement cycle	2.82	.84
	Involving school stakeholders in the visioning process.	3.13	.77	Implement effective solutions to districtwide challenges	2.78	.82
Talent Management	Develop positive and trusting relationships with staff	3.09	.81	Support, sustain and monitor the teacher growth	2.88	.85
	Establish teacher mentorship or peer support programming	3.02	.83	Apply coherent recruitment & retention strategies	2.84	.90
	Understand and apply the professional learning system	3.02	.82	Use various evidence based personnel decisions	2.77	.86
Organizational System	Collaboratively monitor student learning progress	2.87	.87	Search and apply for grant opportunities	2.44	.92
	Improve the data, information and communication systems	2.81	.91	Maximize shared resources among schools & communities	2.43	.90
	establish, implement and monitor organizational system	2.74	.86	Engage all stakeholders to create and monitor budget	2.37	.88
	maintain the highest	3.39	.70	Address the potential	2.93	.86

Culture and Climate	standards of professional conduct			hazards of technology and social media		
	Maintain and strengthen a positive school climate	3.18	.77	Advance social justice for all members of the community	2.93	.85
	Protect the welfare and safety of students and staff	3.14	.80	Promote legal & ethical uses of technology	2.92	.86

Research Question 2: *How the aspiring school leaders' perception of preparedness change by the four leadership domains to ensure the success and achievement of all students*

Although across the four leadership categories perceptions of the preparedness had some similarities. As indicated in Figure 1, based on the mean score values, some differences were noticed. For instance, aspiring school leader indicated that compared to instructional leadership ($M=3.35$, $SD=.53$) and culture and climate ($M=3.40$, $SD=.58$) leadership activities, aspiring school leaders have significantly low perception of preparedness for organizational systems ($M=2.98$, $SD=.65$), talent management ($M=3.30$, $SD=.59$) leadership activities.

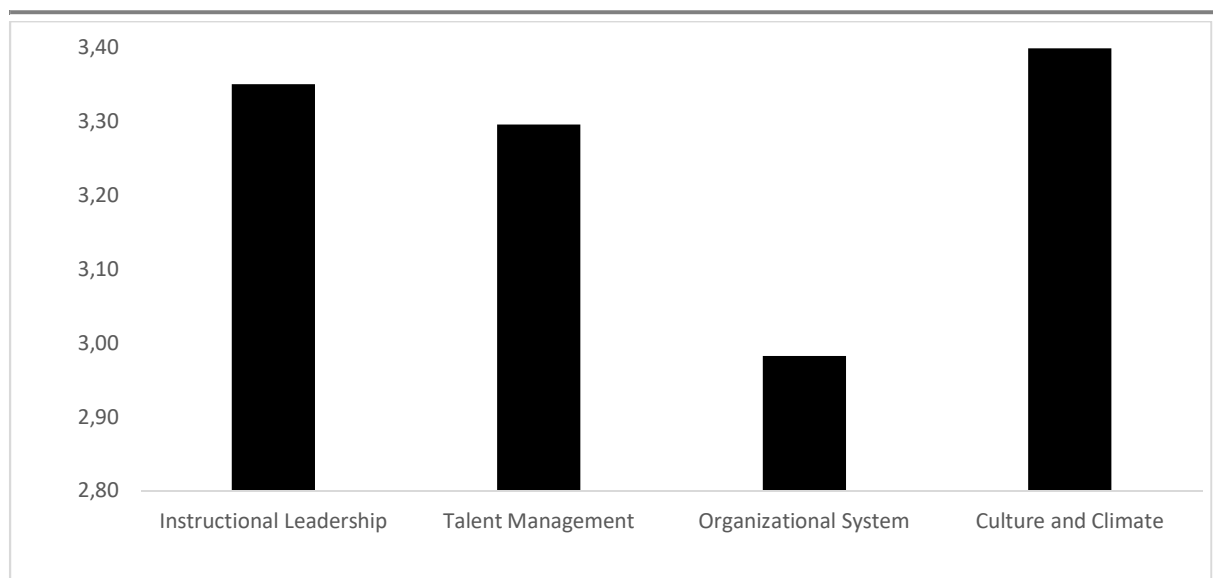


Figure 1. Mean Scores of Four Leadership Domain

In alignment with the Connecticut Leader Evaluation and Support Rubric (2015) developed by the Connecticut Department of Education, in this study, the four leadership domains are defined as follow: *Instructional Leadership*: Developing a shared vision, mission and goals focused on high expectations for all students, and by monitoring and continuously improving curriculum, instruction and assessment, *Talent Management*: Implementing practices to recruit, select, support and retain highly qualified staff, and by demonstrating a commitment to high-quality systems for professional learning, *Organizational System*: Managing organizational systems and resources for a safe, high-performing learning environment, *Culture and Climate*: Education leaders by collaborating with families and other stakeholders to respond to diverse community needs and interests, by promoting a positive culture and climate, and by modeling ethical behavior and integrity.

Research Question 3: *If the internship participation is associated with statistical significant different mean leadership score.*

On the overall mean score, the aspiring school leaders who completed the internship reported a higher sense of readiness for conducting instructional leadership activities ($M=3.35$, $SD=.52$) than the candidates

who did not complete the internship ($M=2.58, SD=.55$). This difference is significant based on the t ($358 = 13.47, p < .05$). The effect size as measured by d was higher than 1 and this value that can be considered large. To test the hypothesis that if scores of the internship completion was associated with statistical significant different mean talent management score, an independent-samples t -test was performed. Both the internship completer and non-completer sample scores were normally distributed, as assessed by Shapiro-Wilk's test ($p > .05$). Additionally, the assumption of homogeneity of variances was tested and satisfied via Levene's F test. The results indicated that there was a statistical significant difference in the talent management score between internship completers and ($M=3.29, SD=.59$) than the non-completers ($M=2.54, SD=.62$). The effect size as measured by d was higher than 1 and this value that can be considered large.

On the organizational system sub scales, participants who completed the internship reported a higher sense of readiness ($M=2.98, SD=.65$) than non-completers ($M=2.17, SD=.62$). This difference is significant based on the t (10.78). The effect size as measured by d was 10.78, a value that can be considered very large. Lastly, on the culture and climate sub scales, the aspiring school leaders who completed their internship reported a higher sense of readiness ($M=3.39, SD=.58$) than the non-completers ($M=2.70, SD=.63$). This difference is significant based on the t (11.92). The effect size as measured by d was 1.14, a value that can be also considered large. As a result, in the independent sample t -test modules, there was a significant relationship between a participant's perceptions of preparedness for conducting four leadership domains with internship completer vs. non-completers in every sub scale.

Table 4

Results of t-tests and Descriptive Statistics Leadership Scores by the Internship Completion

	Readiness Level Before Internship		Readiness Level After Internship		t-test	Effect Size
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
Instructional Leadership	2.58	.55	3.35	.52	13.47*	1.42
Talent Management	2.54	.62	3.29	.59	11.70*	1.23
Organizational System	2.17	.62	2.98	.65	10.78*	1.26
Culture and Climate	2.70	.63	3.39	.58	11.92*	1.14

As shown in Table 4, consistent with the instructional leadership and organizational system leadership activities, internship completers reported a higher sense of readiness for conducting instructional leadership activities than the candidates who did not complete the internship. Parallel with these findings, the same improvement pattern was observed on the candidates' self-perception related climate and culture. In other words, increase in the candidates' self-perception are similarly high across all four domains. At the end of the internship, the school leader candidates reported significantly higher perceptions of preparedness.

Discussion: The implications for policy and practice

Findings show that participants' internship experience played an important role towards improving pre-service school leaders' perceptions of preparedness to conduct effective leadership activities. A positive, high-level and significant relationship is observed between four leadership domains and completing the internship program. The discussion and the implications for policy and practice are organized based on the four domains that include instructional leadership, talent management, climate and culture and organizational system

Preparing and Developing Instructional Leaders

Aspiring school leaders show high level of readiness to collaborate with staff, improve student learning and explore ways of improving teaching methods. These future leaders are intrinsically motivated to work with staff and other members of the school community in an effort to increase student learning which has a direct effect on every aspect of how the school community will function. This motivation can be

understood as a professional vision held by future leaders that drive how they will lead and inevitably set the foundation for the culture and climate of the school community. Their levels of readiness to collaborate with staff to improve student learning can also be understood as a plan of action, in the future, for creating a responsive community that will acknowledge diversity, social equity and justice for a cultural responsive school.

Aspiring school leaders who are currently certified educators have a deep rooted desire to support learning for all students and a motivation to encourage change that creates positive attitudes. Regardless of what aspiring school leaders do not know about leadership, what they do know is associated with collaboration and building relationships which has important implications for how policy and basic school practices will be carried out to promote student learning. Knowing that aspiring school leaders are willing to move forward with a collaborative mindset speaks to transformative leadership which creates a pathway for successful engagements with all stakeholders. When we think about aspiring school community leaders we should think about whether or not they have the capacity to lead. Knowing that aspiring school leaders are concerned with collaboration and student learning, which are cornerstones for a successful school, supports the notion that internship training programs are reaching student and moving them in the right direction as future school leaders.

While aspiring school leaders report higher perception of preparedness to conduct instructional leadership activities, the findings showed that the aspiring school leaders have relatively low levels of readiness towards creating continuous improvement cycles within the school community. Continuous cycles of improvement in a school are associated with improving the school and moving the student learning process forward. Cycles of improvement in a school include: creating a vision, gathering data linked to the vision, analyzing data, developing the mission of the school and aligning it with the vision. It also includes; implementing strategies layout in the action plan, and gathering new data in an effort to measure the impact of student learning, parent involvement, and teacher performance. The fact that aspiring school leaders shown relatively low readiness in understanding the full magnitude of how continuous improvement cycles operates and how they might lead creates strong levels of concern. With this, it is imperative that leadership programs develop processes that better equip future school leaders with the knowledge, tools and the confidence to manage and work towards better understanding the significance associated with continuous cycles of improvement within a school.

When the leadership programs provides adequate learning outlets for aspiring school leaders, they will build capacity to understanding the significance of navigating improvement cycles within the school community. This understanding can result in a enhancing the vision, along with social and educational outcomes. When candidates share that do not have skills in specific areas, leadership programs must act swiftly to make positive change in curriculum and instruction. In this case, the leadership training and internship program requirements might consider including the basic policies and everyday practices associated with the school's operations. As we continue to think about preparation for aspiring school community leaders, it is imperative that we consider the importance of making certain future school leaders are equipped with the necessary skills to comprehensively preform in their role as an effective school leader.

Preparing and Developing Educational Leadership Talent Managers

The results of this study show that aspiring school leaders express relatively high level of readiness towards develop positive, trusting relationships within the school community. It is encouraging to know that aspiring school leaders express high level of readiness towards developing positive and trusting relationships within the school community. Developing successful, meaningful relationships with all stakeholders, and increasing student learning and attracting committed staff and teachers who are devoted to the mission and the vision of the school is what moves a school forward. Positive trusting relationships can move a school towards an inclusive, high achieving environment that responds to equity, fairness and

social mindfulness. However, beyond student achievement, and managing a school, the leader plays a critically role in attracting and retaining talented teachers and staff; therefore, it is imperative that the leader has the skills and the knowledge to build a trusting, positive relationships at the start.

Developing positive and trusting relationships within the school community can be understood in relations to how the leadership hires, trains, and retains employees. How employees are selected should be organized through an system-wide, strategic process that includes a structured plan of action. A structured plan of action considers: talent acquisition, learning and development, an understanding and sharing of the school's values, vision, performance management, career pathways and succession planning, each of which are building blocks towards establishing positive trusting relationships. The school leader should attract strong employees, develop the employee's talent, and never fail a providing adequate training and development once the employee is hired. Employee selection and employee developing has a direct influence on how policies and practices of the organization are respected and understood. With this, school leaders should not seek to quantify return on investments of establishing trusting, positive relationships if they are not willing to acknowledged that how talent is acquired has a important influence on how the school will function.

Related to the talent management, while the aspiring school leaders reported higher readiness for building trust and relations, they show low levels of readiness towards using multiple forms of evidence based personnel decisions that can change the course of the school community. School leaders are responsible for improving the culture and climate of the school, ensuring positive educational outcome for all students, developing a collaborative school community, and attracting and retaining well-meaning, teachers and staff who are commitment to mission and the vision of the school. This can only be realized when the leader has the skills and the knowledge to effectively use multiple resources to influence how decisions are made. Given the importance and the high level of responsibility associated with leading a school community, it is important that aspiring school leaders have a clear understanding of the value associated with using evidence based resources to make decisions. Evidence-based practice is about making decisions through a meticulous, explicit and careful use of reliable resources and the best available evidence collected from multiple sources. The process includes: seeking answers to difficult questions, developing a systematically process for researching and retrieving data, validating the trustworthiness of data, using the data efficiently, and using the data to influence how decisions are made.

When an aspiring school leader has a low level of readiness towards using multiple forms of evidence based data to inform decisions, how everyday policies and procedure are carried out will suffer which can have a meaningful impact on student learning. One of the many ways of achieving excellence within the school community is ensuring that aspiring school leaders have the mentally and social capacity to effectively respond to task associate with their role as the leader. Leadership requires strategic vison, planning and organization, each of which require structure and the use of multiple resources to build. Thus, leadership training programs have a responsibility of furnishing aspiring school leaders with the necessary tools so they can effectively perform as a school leaders. School leaders have a responsibility of using multiple forms of evidence based data to build a school community that fosters learning and growth. Therefore, school leadership training program should revisit their curriculum and instruction to meet every aspect of leadership development so their candidates have the ability to perform as an successful school leaders.

Within the context of the results of this study, compared with instructional leadership activities, aspiring school leaders shared that they have relatively low perception of preparedness for conducting organizational systems and talent leadership activities. When school leaders are prepared to address organizational systems and lead culture and climate activities that strengthen the school, they can efficiently reduce staff turnover and improve organizational relationships while, at the same time, improve classroom and school performance for all students. A key component of organizational systems is understanding ethical and legal aspects of technologies and the affect they have on communication flow

within the organization. Organizational systems consider conditions of the organization and what should be in place in order for the organization to evolve. How organizational systems are managed is what determines social networks, how systems within systems are structured and how policies and school practices are achieved for the purpose of enhancing student learning.

The fact that aspiring school leaders have expressed low perception of preparedness in this area should encourage internship leadership programs to think of ways they can change outcomes that better prepare future school leaders to act as successful talent managers. As school communities grow in size, geographical and ethnic scope and complexity, it is increasingly necessary that school leaders are well equipped with both intellectual and social skills that enable them to manage various systems that make up the organization, not only for the well-being of student success, but for improving the value of the organizational. Aspiring school leaders must know and understand the importance of building capacity for school improvement which is a component of organizational systems and a vehicle towards leadership that matters.

Based on the findings. The future school leaders have relatively lower perception of preparedness related to talent management and organizational system. This can be explained that during the leadership training programs, candidates have limited experience motivating teachers and addressing sensitive issues. Their lack of readiness makes it clear that candidates require more support and guidance around decision making, implementation and monitoring of organizational systems that consistently support the vision, the mission and the goals of the organization. Moreover, leadership training program can consider providing project based learning activities to better understand the orderly operation of the school and evidence-based personnel decisions.

Since the aspiring school leaders have expressed low perception of preparedness in talent management, this result may be perceived as an indicative of the leadership preparation programs' time to change and innovate to prepare future talent and organizational managers. Therefore, educational leadership programs are encouraged to make targeted efforts by integrating certain talent management leadership topics including: (1) Recruitment, selection and retention practices, (2) Evidence-based personnel decisions, (3) Cultivation of positive, trusting staff relationships, (4) Supporting early career teachers, (5) Professional learning system, (6) Resources for high-quality professional learning, (7) Evidence-based evaluation strategies, (8) Effective feedback, (9) School site safety and security, (10) Budgeting and Resource allocation

Preparing and Developing Organizational System Managers

When it comes to the third leadership domain which is organizational system, aspiring school leaders express high level of readiness towards collaborating with school community members to monitor and improve student learning. Monitoring student learning is an essential component that contributes to high-quality education and has a direct impact on student learning. However, if student monitoring is going to be successful the leadership team has the responsibility of building a strong collaborative community that understands the value of working together. The leadership is responsible for incorporating student monitoring in the school community and seeing that teachers and staff view this as a central component of how the school functions. Careful effective monitoring of student progress can be a clear representation of school effectiveness, teacher performance and leadership ability. If aspiring school leaders fail at expressing high levels of readiness understanding their role in collaborating with teachers and staff to monitor and improve student learning, it is almost certain student scholarship and student growth will not flourish.

The student monitoring process includes, but is not be limited to: creating acceptable routines within the school that comprehensively defines how the institution will function, developing systematic processes to determine student fluency in all academic areas, identifying students at risk and establishing systems that change the academic landscape, determining the rate of improvement needed to meet year-end goals, and establishing curriculum based measurements that improves academic outcomes for all students. The fact

that aspiring school leaders in the leadership program shown a readiness in collaborating with teachers and staff to monitor and improve student learning is a clear indication that they are prepared to effectively lead a school community. It also indicates they realize the value of evidence based student progress, which leads to informed decisions that directly impact the allocation of resources. Collaborating with school members to monitor and improve student learning requires the school leader to build a platform that delivers actionable data that improves student performance.

Carrying the process of successful collaboration with community members to monitor and improve student learning includes long and short term supervision, year-round record keeping, organized systems of reporting that involves parents and teachers working collaboratively, developing organized data gathering process, and structured decision making that includes input across programs (Author, 2017). When these processes are in place they can effectively change policies to improved student learning, influences how all stakeholders involve themselves with how the school functions, which is example of a shared vision that will impact student perform.

In terms of organizational system, it was surprising that the aspiring school leaders showed low levels of preparedness to engage all stakeholders in an effort to create and monitor the school budget. Engaging stakeholders to create and monitor the school's budget should be a continuous undertaking by the school administrators and looked at as a way of building social capital. The fact that aspiring school leaders show low levels of readiness to engage all stakeholders in this process is alarming because building social capital is essential towards the development of the organization. Including all stakeholders in the budget process adds critical developmental links to the budget discussions, creates accountability networks that impact student performance, and improves policies and practices that guide the school community. In addition, stakeholder collaboration enhances communication among key parties and allows for unique perspectives both internally and externally which commonly creates buy-in and increases support for the overall budgetary process.

Including all stakeholders in an effort to monitor the school's budget directly affects the school's performance and creates champions for school change. The value in including all stakeholders in creating and monitoring the school's budget makes the evaluation process more objective and allows for an overall transparent budget process. Since understanding the value associated with building a collaborative school community is important for student learning and school success, the leadership training program provide aspiring school leaders with proper experience so they have high levels of readiness to include all stakeholders in monitoring the school budget and student resources. It is incumbent that leadership training programs take a more proactive position to create comprehensive programs that actively engage future school leaders in appreciating the need to engage all stakeholders in monitoring the school's budget. The training must be rigorous with a comprehensive understanding of why collaboration on monitoring the school's budget is necessary.

Preparing and Developing School Leaders for Nurturing and Safe Schools

Creating a positive school climate and safe school environment plays a crucial role in improving student and school success. It was encouraging to see that aspiring school leaders displayed high level of readiness to maintain high standards of professional conduct. How professional conduct is respected and carried out in the school community signifies the leadership's commitment towards maintaining high level of ethics, a commitment to student learning, and community building, a readiness to establish trusting relationships with stakeholders and an obligation to conduct school business in a manner that acknowledges social justice and diversity. A sound code of ethics clarifies roles and responsibilities, and provides guidance when addressing ethical questions. It is both reassuring and important to know that aspiring school leaders display high levels of readiness towards maintaining high standards of professional conduct. This understanding represents a continual strive for excellence, a commitment to building partnerships, and developing a mission centered focus on improving learning outcomes.

Maintaining high standards of professional conduct demands the school leader to provide truthful and accurate information regarding test scores, the budgetary process, hiring practices, standards of school safety and professional growth practices for teachers. How ethical standards are carried out and respected can have a direct effect on school practices and policies. More importantly, when a clear code of ethics is established and acknowledged by the school leader, ongoing lines of communication are created which makes room for meaningful dialog that adds a richness to the culture and climate of the organization. When a school leader exercise and maintains high levels of professional conduct, information has a way of moving through the school in a positive a meaningful way. The fact that aspiring school leaders display high levels of readiness to maintain high standards of professional conduct speaks volume to their ability to perform as ethical school leaders.

Related to climate and culture domain, the aspiring school leaders relatively high perception of readiness about the standards of professional conduct. However, compared to other leadership activities, they expressed low levels of readiness toward promoting and understanding the legal, social and ethical uses associated with technology. Technology in the school community has given rise to a host of legal and ethical issues that perplex school leaders and lead to discomfort and misunderstanding. It is no wonder aspiring school leaders express low levels of readiness towards promoting legal, social and ethical issues associated with the use of technology. Nonetheless, it is imperative that aspiring school leaders clearly understand how to responsibly engage with technology and how to promoted it in the school. School leaders should understand a reasonable amount of legal, social and ethical issues associated with the use of technology; their positions require that they be above reproach in these areas. If school leaders fail at the intellectual abilities connected with successfully understanding and encouraging the responsible use of technology in the school, teachers and students along with basic policies and procedures that govern the culture and climate of the school community will suffer.

The use of the internet has evolved into a participating culture where teachers and student have the ability to navigate the web in unique and outstanding ways. With this, school leaders have the responsibility of making certain all parties who participate in the use of the technology do so in a responsible way that is geared towards educational growth. Thus, school leaders have an obligation to incorporate ways to train student and inspire teachers to behave as conscientious, ethical learners of technology. However, if school leaders have difficulty understanding various aspects of technology they are incapable of enforcing rules and regulation for students and teachers. Leadership training programs should start with a grounded approach of training aspiring school leaders to comprehensively understand the applied ethics and legal language associated with technology. Aspiring school leaders who lack awareness in these areas lack the ability to navigate the social political environment of the school. The central focus of any school community should be educational awareness, if aspiring school leaders are expressing low levels of awareness promoting and understanding the legal, social and ethical uses associated with technology proactive steps should be taken to change this outcome.

The limitations of the study

For students who show low levels of preparedness in educational leadership programs, it is incumbent on administrator to provide the necessary resources to make certain all students can effectively demonstrate signs of development throughout various stages of the program. Issues that remain, are whether or not leadership programs have the means to successfully promote learning among students and whether individual programs are equipped with relevant materials that can actually move the educational process forward. Instructors and administrators must constantly find innovative ways to engage future school leaders so they are motivated and have the tools to actively take part in the learning, at the very start of the program. This includes systematically designing programs so that all students are comprehensively learning in all areas of the leadership practices.

Data from the study was gathered from only one institution which creates a possible limitation for this study. Nonetheless, the study generated useful, positive data that produced a meaningful discussion.

However, as we think about future work around exploring future school leaders' perception of preparedness in the four leadership domains, the net must be cast much further in an effort to hear voices from students in leadership programs around the country. A more vigorous discussion could yield additional data that could possible change outcomes in very effective ways.

Even though this study provides helpful information about the future school leaders' perception of leadership preparedness. There are still some problems remain unresolved and these findings arise new questions and challenges. For instance, the results indicated that the aspiring school leaders reported relatively high perception of readiness about climate and culture domain. However, this study cannot answer which specific instructional strategies and leadership development activities help school leader candidates to build their confidence and skills to serve as an effective educational leader. Since the authors only used a quantitative method in this study, as a follow up study, both quantitative and qualitative methods should be combined in order to provide a broader perspective. For instance, based on the quantitative results, follow up interviews might help readers to learn more detailed information about the feelings of future school leaders through exploring how the aspiring school leaders describe their leadership preparation experiences.

Conclusion

In the effort to improve educational outcomes for all students, effective school leadership is a key component towards achieving this goal. How readiness levels of learning are accomplished and developed informs the personal and structure leadership of the aspiring school leader. A well designed leadership program can provide an opportunity for future school leaders to better understand and practice school-based leadership while gaining the necessary tools to lead a school community and feel confident in their abilities. However, not everyone who goes through a leadership training and development program will benefit equally. As shown throughout this study, some aspiring school leaders show low levels of preparedness in critical leadership areas. Low level of preparedness is what leads to ineffective leadership and a broken, disorganized schools. Consequently, the leadership programs are responsible to make certain future school leaders as comprehensively prepared in all areas of leadership practice this includes: (1) Instructional Leadership, (2) Talent Management, (3) Organizational System, (4) Culture and Climate.

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