



Teachers' and Supervisors' Views of Principal Power in Secondary Schools of Ethiopia

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Abstract

In order to better understand how teachers and supervisors view the uses and sources of power that principals favor, this study took a qualitative approach. Through interviews, qualitative data on three teachers' and three supervisors' views on the uses and sources of power is acquired. Principals employ legitimate power, reward power, coercive power, expert power, and referent power, according to the teachers' and supervisors' analyses of the uses and sources of power. The principal frequently exercised legitimate power, although the others hardly ever did. This study demonstrates that teachers' performance suffers when they only rely on legitimate sources of power, despite the fact that principals use a variety of power sources inequitably. Therefore, it is essential for effective leadership to inform school principals about how to employ various power sources depending on the situation.

1 Introduction

Schools use different techniques to be efficient and accomplish their intended objectives. The actions of the principals are crucial in defining the organizational politics and energizing the teachers. To inspire teachers, principals must be effective and efficient. The objectives of a high-quality education could be internalized to increase school effectiveness. It has to do with the power sources that school leaders in organizations ought to have (Fullan, 2007). Power has frequently been mentioned in literature in relation to concepts like hierarchy, authority, influence, and control. To avoid causing confusion in context, it is appropriate to define related concepts together with the word itself.

According to Barraclough and Stewart (2012), power develops relationally and in context. It is preferable to characterize individuals in relation to others and their connections than to give a clear-cut explanation. Power is defined in relation to its

senses and other people. Similar words for it include "control," "ability," "influence," and "authority." Power is simply defined as a source of authority or a tool for accomplishing tasks (Adam, Alsadi, & Suleiman, 2019). Additionally, Lukes (2021) defined "power" as the actual method by which one agent affects others. A person can only exert power in a society by swaying others and bringing about their desires. All three terms—power, authority, and influence—could overlap. Though sometimes confused with influence, power is sometimes described as a source of capability. Activating sources is a process of influence, which is frequently compared to power. On the other hand, legitimacy or power that has been formalized is known as authority. Generally speaking, authority is defined as lawful power, whereas power is only defined as informal authority (Buchanan & Badham, 2020).

Social psychology typically uses influence tactics as a transformative kind of power to persuade subordinates to take a certain action within an organization.

Influential acts and changes on the subject are typically derived from concepts like control, power, and authority. The term "influence" is used interchangeably depending on the objective (Alrowwad, Obeidat, Tarhini, & Aqqad, 2017). Power, according to Scott & Davis, is the capacity needed for influence. In this view, influence is the process of using power. For instance, if a student complied with a teacher's suggestion, he or she might have been motivated by the expectation of reward for their efforts or by the perception of their social position (Scott & Davis, 2015). As a fundamental idea in leadership, influence may be characterized as the manner of behaviour a leader employs to motivate followers. Thus, it is evident that influence—which is the act of leaders to change the behaviours of others and a type of influential capacity in organizations—is the end outcome of the power process.

Another concept associated with power is authority, which is widely accepted in social contexts as legitimate power. It is a quality of a generally and freely accepted deed because of its legitimacy in organizations (Beetham, 2013). The idea of authority and the process of establishing authority within management and structural subsystems are intrinsically linked to both compliance and disobedience. By definition, authority is simply defined as "rightful power that is vested in a particular person or position, acknowledged as such, and deemed suitable not only by the person who wields the power but also by those over whom it is exercised, as well as by the other participants in the system" (Wrong, 2017). In this sense, the terms "power" and "authority" have been used to refer to notions that are centered on authority, such as manager, supervisor, and subordinate.

Additionally, it is lateral as well as downward, which relies on an informal position as well. When people interact laterally, they are all on the same level of power, and their power-based behaviour is invisible. Depending on their level, downward power interactions could be seen if the individual gets promoted to a higher position (Allen, Porter, & Angle, 2016). There are many levels of legitimacy for authority, which is the use of power to legitimately affect others. This kind of "naked authority" has reportedly

nothing to do with legitimacy (Ricoeur, 2007). The exercise of authority by the group's formal leaders is symbolized by the word "authority." The degree of legitimacy is influenced by how closely it is connected to power. Its closeness to power determines how legitimate it is. In contrast to economic power, which is deemed to be of medium strength, coercion is the least lawful form of power.

Every form of power usage, according to Weber, includes coercion, whereas legitimacy is what confers authority. The way that subordinates view the orders of superiors as legitimate is proof that authority, as opposed to sovereignty, is the capacity to control people freely (Gorun & Gorun, 2018). Purely authoritative relationships could no longer be sufficiently extensive and productive. According to Haber-Curran & Tillapaugh (2015), authority is defined as the process of creating learning organizations that involves dispensing with the conventional authority- and control-based organizational structure. Pfeffer (1992) also emphasized that although formal authority is not significant or effective, leaders could increase their power by employing it. As a result, authority is viewed as more legitimate in organizations and has a more limited definition than power. The statute and the majority of applicable sources of power support its legitimacy, and its members are compelled to submit due to its positional nature. The difference between democratic and authoritarian systems can be distinguished by the separation of the legislative and executive powers.

In democratic organizations, executive power is typically dispersed in accordance with the pyramidal system of authority (Gronn, 2002). According to Brass and Burkhardt (1993), organizations' hierarchical structures are what cause power relations. In an organization, every decision is simultaneously a means of exhibiting power. In this view, power is typically understood to be hierarchical and is described as the control that superiors have over inferiors (Jervis, 2002). Because hierarchy is based on subordinates' strict obedience to superiors, it can breed hostility, opposition, and unhappiness. However, the fundamental dynamics of organizations are hierarchical levels like leadership, control, accountability, and cooperation (Schein & Schein,

2018).

In line with paradigm shifts over time, power has transformed. The paradigms that have become more prevalent over time have changed the ways in which leaders utilize the power bases they need. Due to teamwork, post-positivist methods, and 21st century leadership, leaders favor knowledge over sources of authority-based power (Kilicoglu & Kilicoglu, 2020). Heath (2020) said that actors endeavour to control, decide, and manage organizational behaviour as a form of power play on behalf of the organization.

In order to understand organizational behaviour, it should be obvious who has influence, what it takes to have influence, and what can be done to best utilize power inside an organization. Modern times are more complicated and perplexing since the service sector is so broadly dispersed. Leadership styles shouldn't be rigid in a democratic, multicultural society, and leaders should have a wide range of appeals in their toolkits (Deszca, Ingols, & Cawsey, 2019). Instead of adopting authoritarian philosophies that consolidate all power and make all choices in one way, leaders may find that diverse, numerous, and situational approaches are more suitable.

2 Literature Review

The power source of a principal is a crucial element in influencing the shareholders of the school. Principals of schools frequently exercise their power to carry out instructional activities. However, relying simply on their authority is no longer adequate to meet the demands of our day and guarantee educational excellence. Personal power sources, or the advice and sway they exert over teachers through their expertise and charisma, are critical for improving teaching effectiveness in addition to their legitimate authority as school leaders (Mesfin, 2022).

Studies (Mesfin, 2022; Birhanu, 2020) indicate that school leaders in Ethiopia exclusively exercise the legal authority that comes with their position and do not seek to sway the teachers. This finding shows that school leaders do not use power sources and that the traditional view of management still

rules in schools. To ensure the quality of education, it is necessary to inform the principals about the power sources and how to use them effectively.

Power can be obtained from a number of sources. People can exercise power through their positions of authority, their skills, education, or physical attributes (Kotter, 2010). Focusing on interpersonal power relationships, French and Raven (1959) identified five different categories of power. Legitimate power, reward power, coercive power, expert power, and referral power are some of these power sources.

The ability of a leader in an organization to influence the behaviour of others as a result of their status within the organizational hierarchy is known as "legitimate power." The formal authorization for the use and control of organizational resources that is granted as a result of one's structural position within the organization is referred to as "legitimate power," also known as "official power."

Reward power, which is based on the notion that teachers in schools are rewarded by their principals when they exhibit the desired conduct. It is the principal's authority to reward teachers who do well and follow the rules (Sergiovanni, 2015). Principals usually employ wage, promotion, incentive, or admiration when using their reward power (Marshall & Hooley, 2006), and their power is centered on their control over the reward mechanisms (Friedman, 2002).

The ability to reprimand others is known as coercive power (Lewis, 2013), and principals frequently use coercive power to manage punishment. As a result, other teachers in the school follow the principal's orders out of fear of the consequences. The principal downgrades teachers, appoints them to unpleasant positions, fires them, and leaves without saying goodbye or showing them any gratitude (Jones, 2019).

Competence, expertise, or knowledge are the foundations of expert power (Härtel & Fujimoto, 2014). Expertise is the capacity to exert control over behaviour by using any information, experience, or judgment that other teachers lack and that they see as necessary (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2015).

Referral power is the ability of a principal to affect the behaviour of teachers on the condition that he or she is liked or loved by them (Botha & Fuller, 2021). The teachers in an organization tend to trust and admire a principal with referral power (Berson, Da'as, & Waldman, 2015) and try to resemble him/her or identify with him/her as a result of this respect and admiration (Starratt, 2003).

Power is an important tool in schools that helps teachers work together toward a common objective while also guiding them and maintaining leadership continuity. The manner in which the school leader uses the power source that he or she owns determines the effectiveness of the leadership in the schools (Shields, 2010). Several studies conducted in Ethiopia on the use of power by school leaders have found an increase, which is not surprising given that the usage of power sources in schools has a considerable impact on teachers' effectiveness (Mesfin, 2022; Sintayehu, 2020). According to research on the power sources used by school principals, using power sources not only ensures the school's successful leadership but also increases teacher effectiveness, which benefits educational quality. As a result, a serious issue is raised by the principals' and teachers' opinions on the use of power. The following questions are raised within the context of this research:

1. How far may the principals use their power—legal, coercive, reward, referral, and expert power—and to what effect?
2. What are the teachers' and supervisors' opinions on the power source that the principals use?

3 Research Design and Method

A research design is the research's blueprint. It constitutes how the research is to be conducted, giving answers to the basic questions such as what, when, how, and who, as well as related questions in the research process (Gog, 2015). This research employs a qualitative-instrumental case study research design, which allows the researchers to understand the feelings and interpret the lived experiences of study participants. According to Stake (1995), a qualitative-instrumental case study research design is important to investigate a particular case in order

to gain an in-depth investigation into the researched issue.

By using a qualitative methodology, the researchers can refine their preconceived ideas and extrapolate their thought processes, assessing and evaluating the problems from a comprehensive angle. Because it enabled researchers to learn in-depth details about participants' actions, emotions, wants, routines, feelings, experiences, and a range of other information, a qualitative study design was employed to explain the entire phenomenon (Madrigal & McClain, 2012). In a relaxed situation, the researchers conducted a semi-structured interview to get the data. The interpretive paradigm was employed because it made it easier to comprehend the social environment through individual experiences and subjective meanings.

In this qualitative research, methodology appropriate for investigating and identifying the research problems was included, including population and sampling. The data collection instrument and data analysis technique were presented in the following sub-sections.

3.1 Population and Sampling

The study area is SNNPR, Ethiopia. The study was conducted in three government secondary schools that are found in three zonal towns of the SNNPR: Durme (Kembata-Tembaro zone), Wolkite (Gurage), and Jinka (South Omo). Government secondary school supervisors and teachers were the target population of the study. Thus, the participants of this research were teachers and supervisors of the government secondary schools that are found in the three zones, namely the Kembata-Tembaro, Gurage, and South Omo zones of the SNNPR. The sample for the study was selected by purposive sampling, which allows the researcher to perform a qualitative investigation under study (Creswell, 2013). In this research, six participants were selected, i.e., three teachers and three supervisors, from the three schools.

3.2 Instrument

The interview was conducted in Durme, Wolkite, and Jinka secondary schools with teachers and prin-

cipals working in the three zone towns. Before the commencement of data collection, piloting of the interview was conducted with three participants to revise and refine the interview tool and to minimize the unclear items in the interview questions. The research participants were interviewed using the semi-structured interview instrument prepared for this study, conducted in *Amharic*. We were introduced to the head teachers of these schools by a contact at the EDDA/district education office.

We conducted two semi-structured, in-depth interviews with most of the participants. Interviews with study participants, teachers, and supervisors were transcribed from the audio recordings in the Amharic language, and then the verbatim texts were translated into English. The researchers frequently checked the translations with the actual recorded audio to ensure that the translations were correct and relayed the same concept as the actual audio-recorded document. The interviews, lasting about an hour each, were conducted at the school sites during school hours. Thematic analysis was used to use the sub-dimensions of the power sources of their applicability. Included in the interview guide were questions on the power use and sources of principals that were generally geared towards quality education.

3.3 Data Analysis

Our analytical approach included data immersion, coding, and meaning making through abduction. I reflected on the social dynamics among the agents, how they each contributed to the usage of power, and their perceptions. We noticed repetitions, tensions, and inconsistencies. We re-read the transcripts and wrote short observations and reflections on each participant and school, identifying two objectives and ideas that diverged from the theory and literature. Further analysis drew on theoretical frameworks that had not been considered prior to data generation.

4 Results and Discussions

During the data analysis, two key objectives were taken into consideration. First, the opinions of teachers and supervisors regarding the amount of power used by principals; second, the opinions

of the two participants on the sources of power. The discussion that follows is founded on verbatim quotes. Each quotation is preceded by the codes "teacher 1, 2, and 3" and "supervisor 1, 2, and 3."

Power Applications

Teacher 1 claimed that when it comes to the power that principals exert, it is common for them to do so excessively. This is as a result of the principal power coming from above (a political appointee). His assignment was not made by colleagues. The principal who abuses this position tends to take on an authoritarian personality. Ethiopia's principal appointment and selection process has been decentralized for the past 30 years. Principals are chosen by the district or *wereda* education office depending on their affiliation with the ruling Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF).

Supervisor 1 clarified that principals in positions of authority are given a dual duty after they are appointed to the post in relation to this point. The first task is to carry out their regular government duties, such as their administrative or teaching and learning duties. The second objective is to implement the policies and strategies of the ruling party in the school environment. I and my colleagues believed that the members of the ruling party holding various positions in the schools were spies. We think that the principal's main responsibility is to collect information from the school community and provide it to the party official. The influence of ruling party politics on school leadership tends to prevent them from exercising discretionary authority. Political body intervention in school leadership is considered a challenge in the teaching-learning process since every managerial activity and teaching-learning process are carried out under the close supervision of the political bodies.

Teacher 2 added the following clarification:

Principals are unable to completely discharge their duties due to politics. Teachers and principals have less authority to make judgments and implement changes in schools because all decisions pertaining to the business of the school are made by higher-ranking government authorities. Additionally, there are political bodies at the school that

will rule on a few minor issues.

From the above data, it can be said that the education system is not autonomous. As a result, both the principals and teachers may hesitate to relinquish their power to empower students through the affordance of spaces for students to exercise creativity, independent thought, and critical reflection on the structures and norms that shape their lives out of a possible fear that their status or power may be undermined. This could cripple the teaching and learning process. Moreover, such practices go against the education and training policy (MOE, 1994). The policy clearly articulated that education is secular. Despite not being politically secular, the school is ironically secular in terms of religion.

Supervisor 2 describes the extent to which principals bully, harass, or verbally abuse teachers. His influence is unwavering. Teacher 3 overestimated the degree of personal power used by principals while underestimating the reliance on positional power. He asserts that the overwhelming majority of teachers are very unhappy with their principals.

The principle was similarly described by supervisor 3 as follows:

When you are not responsive to his influence, he is verbally abusive, embarrasses you in front of others, and is less supportive. You have no idea what is expected of you, and if you do something wrong, you are in big danger. He acts impulsively, and no one is consulted before making decisions. He favors a few people.

The information above indicates that the principals exercise an excessive level of power. Negative power is used when teachers and students only express their fear for the person in control and refuse to communicate in any other way. Such a misuse of power could make principals feel uneasy and make their colleagues disrespect him. The power that principals should strive for, however, is that of those who recognize that they have the ability to positively influence students and teachers on a daily basis (Smith & Squires, 2016).

Sources of power

Teacher 1 described how the school principal understood the sources of power:

The principal's legitimacy served as the main source of power. Compared to other power sources, this sort of expression appeared more frequently at top levels, and this power reflected administrative chores and activities while also providing a legal foundation granted by their positions.

According to the data presented above, legitimate power was the most frequently used organizational power source in schools, as determined by principals. These results demonstrate that Ethiopian secondary schools are supported by legal power. Principals use this power to carry out tasks and direct others to carry out activities that are necessary for their roles as leaders of the school. Teachers are aware that the principle has the power to provide directives and directions within the range of this power. Teachers are therefore required to follow these instructions. Even if lawful power makes it easier to apply management procedures in the school, its overuse can lead to conflict, opposition, and dissatisfaction.

In a similar vein, Supervisor 1 provided the following justification for the legitimate sources of principal power:

A school principal cannot afford to overlook every issue. Due to this, the practice of tolerance, which aims to sustain teachers' cooperative behaviour by evoking feelings of reciprocity, has the drawback of potentially damaging the principal's reputation as an impartial leader.

Accordingly, the school's culture of cooperation may be harmed by the abuse of power there. The results may be detrimental to morale and collaboration. Excessive use of legitimate power can take many different forms, such as asking teachers to perform personal favors or errands for you, forcing teachers to falsify information, interfering with a colleague's capacity to execute their job well, and bullying.

In general, both of the above participants (under objective 2) come to an agreement on the most applied

power sources being legitimate power. Schools are organizations where informal relationships are more intensive and where superior-subordinate relationships are more flexible compared to other organizations. Leading the legitimate processes required by the directives and guidelines required at schools is critical for the schools' survival (Rapaport & Ashkenazi, 2019). However, when the legitimate power required to operate the process rises to levels that can damage the informal relationships at school, it will harm the school structure and make it harder for teachers and administrators to find middle ground. Therefore, school leaders should be careful when using legitimate power and abstain from its excessive use.

Generally, within the boundaries of their legitimate power, principals have the power to reward teachers in a variety of ways. This power also extends to non-monetary awards, so it is not just restricted to monetary ones. Utilizing this kind of power is crucial if we want to keep teachers' passion alive, improve their performance, and identify the teachers who stand out. However, it's critical to remain consistent and remember your own requirements. Excessive usage of reward power may have a negative effect on teachers' interactions and job satisfaction. In fact, teaching has become a challenging profession in recent years.

Teacher 2 provided the information below on the school principal's use of coercive power:

Principals are more likely to talk their way out of issues at the school. When he noticed an undesirable behaviour, the principal invited the teacher to speak with him one-on-one in an effort to determine the cause of the issue. Additionally, he chooses to discipline by using his body language when he sees a teacher who does not put much effort into the school, is late for class, or does not complete a task. He gives the teacher a hard look.

Similarly, Supervisor 2 explained the principal basis of coercive power in the following way:

Most of the time, principals prefer to discuss an issue with the teacher rather than solve it right away, waiting for the problem to be forgotten with the passage of time. He relates this to the fact that when

you intervene shortly after a problem emerges, the teacher has a propensity to overreact, which makes the arguments worse. The school's principal keeps walking through the halls, stopping by the teacher's room to provide an oral warning. Another teacher claimed that rather than go through the issue with the principal, who becomes insulted, the principal chooses to avoid interaction with the teacher.

The two participants above strongly emphasize that excessive use of coercive power can occasionally lead to the predicted behaviour. Even though it is one of the less frequently used power sources, using rewards excessively can encourage people and maintain desired behaviours. Indeed, it should come as no surprise that principals' rewards play a critical role in motivating the teaching-learning process to increase student performance and make greater contributions to school improvement.

On the contrary to the above two participants, teacher 3 described the principal's sources of power:

At each event where teachers are present, the principal acknowledges them. Teachers frequently receive certificates from the principal, while administrators frequently recognize the best students. Treatment is given fairly. Everyone who works hard is rewarded.

Similar to teacher 3, supervisor 3 said that principals use coercive power. Since it is often used, coercive force leaves people with a bad impression. There have been reports of discontent and aggressiveness following coercion-based behaviour in schools. In educational institutions, coercion is also not viewed favorably. Since the majority of power rests with the principals in overly bureaucratic organizations, teachers may feel less empowered (Mathibe, 2007).

In general, teachers must be respected as professionals and given recognition for the academic success of their students if we are to preserve our profession and our children's futures. Many things need to be fixed and enhanced. As a school leader, you can influence some of these variables. It is within your power to reward your personnel. Moshel and Berkovich (2021) argue that top leaders use more legitimacy, coercion, and rewards than middle-level leaders. Hence, as school leaders assume positions

of power and dominance relative to teachers and students, it is essential that they conceptualize their roles and responsibilities in relation to the position of power they occupy relative to other members of the school community. They must also develop the skills necessary to act effectively in these roles.

5 Conclusion

Power plays a fundamental role in school organization. Some principals behave in such a way that teachers' lived experiences indicate that they are abusing their position or the privileges they have in the schools. The misuse of power has an impact on teachers' interpersonal relationships, emotional health, and leadership abilities and disempowers them. As a result, the teaching profession is essentially unprofessionalized. A social capital structure that enables collaboration between principals and teachers is what is required. As a result, they will be better able to use power in a way that is advantageous to all students and behave meaningfully in their own, distinctive school circumstances.

The way forward

The development of a national educational leadership program is essential. We advise that the MOE continue the discontinued school leadership program for principals, which is of more immediate importance. The program ought to provide a nuanced understanding of power rather than taking a "one size fits all" stance. The significance of picking exercise strategies that best fit the unique "historical, cultural, and institutional backdrop" of their school must become clear to principals. In addition, principals must foster a culture free from fear and treat teachers fairly. This ought to inspire the latter to seek guidance or administrative assistance on issues like taking risks and considering potential growth while keeping certain goals or objectives in mind. Principals' lack of emotional intelligence can be addressed by in-service training programs that deal with the complex concerns of many forms of power, both on a personal and a social level.

The development of principals' self-awareness, self-management, internal locus of control, emotional and leadership competences, leadership styles,

building and maintaining successful relationships, and human rights are a few examples of possible topics. This should cover how the abuse of power endangers efforts to establish secure workplaces, lowers productivity, and erodes trust. It should also emphasize how strong relationships between leaders, teachers, and students are facilitated by effective leadership that values diversity and upholds social justice. Teachers should have at least annual opportunities to express their views on issues relating to leadership in the school. They could then raise problems related to the principals' use of power through mechanisms such as annual job satisfaction external committees to create and maintain a school climate that supports teachers and ensures that their morale remains high.

A wellness program for teachers is also necessary to aid them in overcoming the challenges brought on by incidents of disrespect, conflict, and exploitation. A framework for social capital should be used to create effective social networks that can involve both internal and external stakeholders. These could encourage teamwork and motivate staff to build the social capital required to develop into leaders who can be held accountable for high-quality education. This may help us comprehend and interpret why some principals are able to "get it right" while others lack the skills necessary to form a habit that denotes an embodied style of carrying out leadership.

Teachers will be more capable of overseeing and enhancing teaching and learning if principals distribute power and provide them with chances to grow and realize their leadership potential. Principals will gain a better grasp of how a lack of positive power relationships can impede progress.

Declaration of Competing Interest

This research was exclusively funded by Dilla University. The university will not take any responsibility for the results beyond reporting purposes. The researchers are affiliated to Dilla University as teaching and research staff. We also confirm that intellectual property rights (IPR) and other ethical principles were adhered.

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Availability of the Data

We would like to inform the journal managers that a set of field data is available and will be shared whenever requested.

Ethical Approval

Consent was sought from the research participants. Confidentiality was maintained in reporting information.

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