Enabling Factors That Lead Educational Middle Leaders to an Effective Professional Performance

Elaine Aaltonen, University College London, United Kingdom

Abstract

Effective school leadership is made of senior and middle leaders who work effectively and collaboratively. More than ever, in the 21st century, there has been recognition that schools need knowledgeable, skilled, proactive and committed leaders, along with great teachers, to ensure outstanding education at all levels of schooling. The scope of this paper lies within the sphere of the work of middle leaders, who can make a great impact on student learning outcomes for having a direct influence on teachers and classroom teaching. It aims at sharing findings obtained through an academic qualitative case study carried out in 2021, by the same researcher, on the professional performance of educational middle leaders, applied to the context of the lower elementary school division of a private Brazilian school. The master´s dissertation research questions included one focused on discovering the enabling factors that lead middle leaders towards a professional performance of excellence. Through an electronic questionnaire and individual face-to-face interviews, whilst being supported by a solid body of research underlying the study, it was possible to find out evidence that four enabling factors are essentially important for middle leaders to play their roles with efficacy, which are: an 'inner drive', a 'specific knowledge and skills base', 'in-service professional development (PD) programme', and effective 'support by their senior leaders'. This paper aims at outlining the main aspects concerning the empiric research undertaken, and mainly at placing an emphasis on these enabling factors, approached in depth in the dissertation report.

Keywords: Educational Middle Leadership, Effective Professional Performance of School Middle Leaders, Enabling Factors

Introduction

In the first decades of the 21st century, effective school leadership has increasingly become an education policy priority around the world, along with high-standard teaching, as countries have made efforts to adapt their educational systems to the needs of contemporary society. Bush and Middlewood (2005) remark that the longstanding appreciation of the vital role of teachers is belatedly being matched by an understanding that effective school leaders are also essential if schools and colleges are to thrive. Hence, schools need committed, skilled and effective educational leaders (Bush, 2009, p. 375), as it is widely acknowledged that *"great teaching and great school leadership are the foundations of a world-class education system"* (DfE, 2020, p. 5) from preschool to university levels.

It is also true that, in many countries, including in Brazil, where this study has been carried out, school leaders hold leadership positions for many years, relying on an initial academic background and a work experience in the area of teaching. However, schools are complex organisations, and the growing complexity of problems faced by leaders demands from these professionals a set of knowledge and skills which differ from that of the classroom teachers (Irvine and Brundrett, 2016, p. 87). Studies such as one undertaken by Pont et al. (2008) for the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) have concluded that a teaching background does not in itself provide educators with the necessary repertoire to perform the roles of school leadership with efficacy.

Additionally, schoolteachers often do not receive an induction training when they assume a middle leadership position, nor can they count on a professional development (PD) programme for the leadership team in-service, through which their development needs can be identified and met.

The OECD Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) released in 2019 shows that the landscape of teaching and school leadership has changed since 2008, in terms of the profiles of these professionals, and on how they are expected to develop themselves (OECD, 2019a).

It is important to underline that school leadership is made of senior leaders and middle leaders, and that this paper is centred on the professional performance of middle leaders in schools, which is an under-researched topic worldwide (De Nobile, 2018).

This paper aims to present one of the topics approached in a master´s dissertation research, carried out by the same researcher in 2021, whose purposes included uncovering the enabling factors that are essential to ensure an effective professional performance by educational middle leaders.

The interest for the dissertation research was driven by a conviction that effective middle leaders are key components for schools to succeed (Bush, 2008), in a new era characterised by *"dispersed leadership and school change focused on the personalisation of learning and introduction of 21st century curriculum and pedagogy"* (Gurr and Drysdale, 2013, p.55), although this effectiveness is not often achieved, as these professionals face barriers preventing them from realising their full potential. Such barriers include not having a formal leadership position, nor their roles well-defined, and not being properly supported at work. By disseminating part of the academic study carried out, through this paper, the researcher

intends to draw attention to a current demand that is the advancement of the body of research on middle leadership in schools, despite of the increasing interest in it.

The scope of this study is the professional performance of middle leaders applied to the context of the lower elementary school division of a private mainstream school. The research question underpinning it is as follows: *What are the enabling factors that lead middle leaders to an effective professional performance?*.

Literature Review

The history of research on school leadership is long and insightful, but most of this is centred on the work of school principals, rather than middle leaders, as remarked by researchers like De Nobile (2018) and Grootenboer et al. (2015). However, there is a growing interest in educational middle leadership by scholars like Gurr (2021), De Nobile (2018), Gurr and Drysdale (2013), and Cranston (2009), among others, resulting from the fact of that competent middle leaders are regarded as key elements for effective schools (Irvine and Brundrett, 2016).

Research on school leadership and management undertaken by authors like Harris and Jones (2016), Spillane et al. (2011) and Leithwood et al. (2007), throughout the past twenty years, has demonstrated that the enactment of a number of roles performed by school principals relies on the engagement of other leaders. Therefore, the importance of middle leadership to increase the school leadership capacity has been widely recognised, and school principals have often applied dispersed leadership, as underlined by De Nobile (2018) and Harris (2003), in order to meet the high goals set for their schools. For this reason, the workload of middle leaders has increased considerably, since they have assumed more duties, and because of a reduction in the number of professionals in middle leadership positions, due to financial crises (Lárusdottir and O'Connor, 2017).

Middle leaders lie hierarchically between the teachers (and other staff) and the senior leadership, and hold titles such as department head, school division coordinator, subject coordinator, year-level coordinator, and so forth, depending on the context, as pointed out by authors like Gurr (2021), Dinham (2016), and Fleming (2014), in schools where they are accountable for leading and managing departments, programmes, projects, processes, and staff members, as well as for implementing policies and improvement initiatives set by their senior leaders (Lárusdottir and O'Connor, 2017; Bennett et al., 2007), often in alignment with the wider school community (De Nobile and Ridden, 2014).

They can be non-teachers or teachers who still engage in classroom teaching (De Nobile, 2018; Edwards-Groves et al., 2016), and they normally strive to promote the smooth run of the area in their care within the school.

It is complex, though, to define middle leaders in terms of the roles that they play, since these are not necessarily implied in the title of their position, and there are no conventional criteria to categorise them, as remarked by De Nobile and Ridden (2014), who have noted an evolution of the roles played by middle leaders in schools, from trivial administrative tasks to strategic leadership roles. The authors share that they themselves have seen, while carrying out research, in different education systems, *"deputies who were given mundane administrative duties in one school, and coordinators who had significant strategic roles, similar to senior leaders, such as leading school change, in another school"* (p.3).

Enabling Factors that lead Middle Leaders Towards an Effective Professional Performance

The work of middle leaders is heavily dependent on how their leadership position and roles are defined and their daily work supported, as well as on how their knowledge and skills are acquired and developed within their contexts (Gurr and Drysdale, 2013), considering that skills are particularly sensitive to cultural nuances and underpinned by the core values of each individual (Coleman and Glover, 2010).

The key factors that enable middle leaders to perform their roles with efficacy include a formal leadership position, access to expertise, support by senior leadership (Gurr, 2021; Gurr and Drysdale, 2013), and an effective PD programme in service to address their development needs (Pont et al., 2008).

Irvine and Brundrett (2016, p.89) denominate as 'factors that enable the middle leader' a number of aspects of personal, professional and organisational nature, such as *"a clear objective; knowing where they want the department to go, and articulating it to their team"*, i.e 'a vision' for the area under their responsibility. De Nobile (2018, p. 401) identifies, in the literature, five factors which he names as 'inputs', in his Middle Leadership in Schools (MLiS) Model, considered to influence the work performance of middle leaders: principal support, school/system culture, professional development, enthusiasm/drive, and knowledge of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment. Similarly, the *"contributing strategies in middle leaders who promote success"*, contemplated in Gurr´s (2021, pp.7-8) analysis of a study undertaken by Dinham (2007), include being generally well-liked and trusted.

This study has identified four essentially important enabling factors that lead middle leaders to an effective professional performance (Figure 1): inner drive (or intrinsic motivator factors); a specific knowledge and skills base; in-service professional development (PD) programme; and effective support by senior leaders.

Figure 1. Enabling factors that lead middle leaders to an effective professional performance
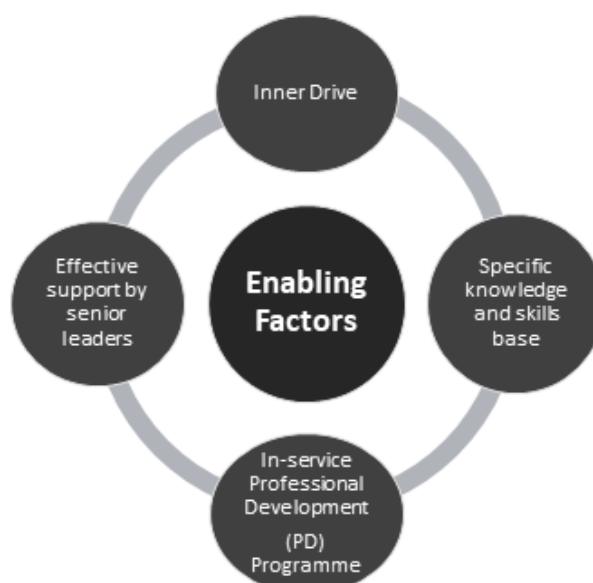
A. Inner Drive (also known as Intrinsic Motivation or Intrinsic Motivador Factors)

Deci and Ryan (2008) define *intrinsic motivation* as a drive that comes from within, also known as an *inner drive*, which is a feeling boosting the worker to behave in positive ways. Fullan (2016, pp. 6-7) provides examples of *intrinsic motivator factors* that include a *"feeling that the person has a degree of autonomy in what he/she does; a sense of purpose; a growing mastery or expertise; a strong identity with colleagues; a sense that he/she is making a difference in the workplace"*. De Nobile (2018) and Dinham (2016; 2007) recognise *enthusiasm*, *passion for education,* and *strong commitment to perform the roles the best way possible* as important sources of intrinsic motivation for middle leaders.

B. Specific Knowledge and Skills Base

Middle leaders need to acquire and constantly update a specific set of knowledge. The research of Thorpe and Bennett-Powell (2014, p.54), undertaken in the U.K., reveals that the specific knowledge that effective middle leaders should have include: time management skills; knowing how to be accountable for others, especially for a disparate teaching team; monitoring and holding team to account; a better understanding of data analysis, mainly relating to student assessment; embracing the leadership of curricula of school subjects that are not their field of expertise; and providing effective PD for teachers, especially in terms of preparing and delivering adequate training sessions to the teaching staff.

In New Zealand, Highfield´s (2019) research uncovers that the middle leaders need to acquire and develop a breadth of knowledge of curricula and of current developments in their field. Likewise, Steward (2020) claims that middle leaders need to have a good understanding of how curriculum works, both at subject and at whole school level; a sophisticated understanding of contemporary pedagogy; and a clear comprehension of the whole school policy.

As for the specific skills of middle leaders, Highfield (2019) identifies a range of them: strong communication and interpersonal skills; ability to keep staff motivated; ability to take a leading role in programme design; leadership skills as a team leader; strong focus on academic and social outcomes for learners; ability to influence evidence-based department planning and organisation. Steward (2020) adds that middle leaders need to have the ability to align the objectives of the area they lead with the wider aims of the school. Dinham (2007) outlines the main skills and attitudes that enable middle leaders to have a positive impact on student learning, highlighted in Gurr´s (2021, pp. 7-8) analysis, as 'contributing strategies identified in middle leaders that promote success' (as mentioned before). The skills identified include: excellent communication skills; strong team leadership skills; ability to develop a culture of success, and of shared responsibility and trust; ability to develop a common purpose; and ability to keep the teaching staff motivated and committed with their own continuing learning.

C. In-service Professional Development (PD) Programme

Pont et al. (2008) claim that middle leaders need a PD programme in-service to respond to broadened roles and responsibilities, and that it should be approached as a continuum process rather than through their participation in sporadic activities and events. The authors claim that the PD programme should include an induction course when the middle leader assume his/her

position, in addition to training sessions on-site, and incentive for them to attend courses at external institutions when appropriate.

Irvine and Brundrett (2016, p.86), reporting on some perceptions shared by middle leaders on a study undertaken in England, claim that *"middle leaders taking on leadership roles need a different set of knowledge and skills to that of the classroom teachers, yet many of them not always receive appropriate training or guidance on leadership development"*, and argue that the factors that enable middle leaders to overcome various challenges that they face are those that can be learned through a well-structured leadership development programme.

In another study, Irvine and Brundrett (2017) state that, even when the professionals have a previous experience in middle leadership, they will need to learn, adapt, develop, and integrate a new set of knowledge and skills into their repertoire, reinforcing that educational leadership is contextual, and that a PD programme on-site is necessary to address a range of individual development needs.

Authors like Thorpe and Bennett-Powell (2014), Jones (2005), and Adair (2004) note that the capabilities required to lead high-performance teams effectively may not come naturally to many team leaders, so this is another reason why middle leaders should be provided with a PD programme at work.

Also, studies such as those carried out by Gurr (2021), Noman and Gurr (2020) and Drysdale (2011), focused on reviewing research on the effectiveness of middle leaders in more than twenty countries, claim that, even when middle leaders have a solid repertoire with a set of core practices, they will only succeed upon the enactment of such practices, in direct response to their own unique contexts.

Another aspect to consider, as Irvine and Brundrett (2016, p. 91) have noted, is that teachers appointed to formal leadership positions for the first time, known as 'emergent leaders', need a different set of knowledge and skills of that of the classroom teachers, which is distinct from that of a more experienced leader, which means that only a well-planned PD programme in-service would address such a range of needs.

Hence, it is unquestionable that an in-service PD programme especially tailored to meet the needs of the (middle)leadership team, as also advocated by Darling-Hammond and Richardson (2009) and Pont et al. (2008), at both individual and collective levels, in alignment with their context, is one of the main enabling factors capable of impacting the performance of middle leaders.

The research of Wells (2013, p.490) uncover that, to be effective, a PD programme needs to help the participants to build their knowledge and skills; be grounded in local knowledge and experience; be ongoing and personally active; be school-based; include input from experts when needed; promote research as a core practice, include investigations in which data are collected, analysed and acted upon to change practice; be embedded in the daily work of middle leaders; be collaborative, in nature, by building a culture of inquiry and reflective practice; be connected with the particular educational context; and provide support as needed, such as coaching and mentoring.

At last, Thorpe and Bennett-Powell (2014, p. 52) underline that the school context can either promote effective PD initiatives or limit them.

D. Effective Support by Senior Leaders

De Nobile (2018, p. 401) claims that the senior leadership´s support is the factor that has emerged as mostly impacting the professional performance of middle leaders, and argues that 'empowerment' and 'autonomy', underpinned by 'trust' should underlie this support.

Authors like Harris and Jones (2016) also claim that the quality of middle leadership is heavily determined by the extent to which they have 'autonomy' and 'responsibility' to engage with senior leaders and teachers in supportive and innovative ways.

Two other positive aspects are 'camaraderie' and 'collaboration', as many studies have shown, including the ones undertaken by Dinham (2007), Fullan (2016), and the OECD (2019b), which claim that collaborative work between senior, middle leaders and teachers, within a good school climate, can shape the quality of instruction and make a profound impact on students' learning outcomes.

Methodology

For the purpose of this research, a qualitative educational case study was undertaken, focused on increasing understanding about aspects concerning the professional performance of a team of educational middle leaders responsible for the lower elementary school division of a private mainstream school located in Brazil, within the time-frame of 2021.

Bassey (2012, p. 156) defines educational case study an empirical enquiry about a singularity, undertaken within a localised boundary of space and time, through an in-depth study on interesting aspects of an educational activity, programme, institution, system or work of individuals, mainly in their natural context, and within an ethic of respect for persons; whilst Merriam´s (1998, p. xiii) definition is that it is *"an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a bounded phenomenon such as a program, an institution, a person, a process, or a social unit"*.

Yin (2009) argues that case studies call for an intensive and in-depth focus on a specific unit of analysis, so they generally require a much smaller sample size than other methods. As such, the six the middle leaders and their senior leader were invited to participate in the research. Five middle leaders and the principal agreed to participate.

It is relevant to highlight that all the ethics related issues were considered quite carefully throughout the development of the case study. Also, the Ethics Form was submitted and approved (in advance) by the University College London (UCL). The study followed the ethical guidelines provided by the British Educational Research Association (BERA). The main ethical aspects considered were: Invitation Letter and Formal Consent; Information Letter and Informed Consent Form; Right to Withdraw; Confidentiality and Anonymity; Harm or Discomfort Arising from Research; Data Storage and Privacy of Participants; and Dissemination and Use of Findings. As such, the proper names of the participants used in this paper are not their real names.

Additionally, an important sampling aspect considered was that the researcher was no longer a member of the middle leadership team, after having worked in that context for a couple of years until the end of 2020, thus, in order to ensure that the data collected would not lead to uncomfortable feelings by the participants, as predicted by Hofstede (1997), only two

research tools were used: an electronic questionnaire and semi-structured individual face-to-face interviews.

For the electronic questionnaire, all the middle leaders were invited, whilst for the interviews, the researcher used her own judgment to select three interviewees among the five middle leaders available, as well as their senior leader, thus a purposive sampling has been carried out (Muijs, 2012; 2010).

Briggs et al. (2012) remind that questionnaires allow participants to anonymously express themselves; and advise researchers to clarify the questionnaire statements in order to increase their effectiveness, which the researcher did.

However, as Bell and Woolner (2012, p. 266) remark, it is actually quite challenging to design good questionnaires and to interpret their results, so the effectiveness in utilising them should never be taken for granted.

As for the interviews, they were all conducted on the same day, and the researcher recorded them by using two different electronic devices. The meeting room was next to the main entrance of the school, therefore, it was a bit noisy most of the time. Two interviewees took their face masks off (an accessory item that was necessary due to the coronavirus pandemic), and spoke closer to the electronic devices to help the researcher.

Coleman (2012) considers interviews as a key tool in qualitative research, whilst Cohen et al. (2011, p. 267) claim that interviews are intersubjective, since they enable both researcher and participants to discuss their interpretations of the world, and to express how they perceive their surroundings; therefore, this research tool is not merely concerned with collecting data about life, but it is actually part of life itself, as it fosters an immersion into human thought and emotions.

Alvesson (2003) advises qualitative researchers to consider the impact of the social setting in which the interview takes place, as well as the physical setting, and the impact of language on the interview, which means, for instance, that the use of expressions with which the interviewee is unfamiliar should be avoided.

Prior to the interview, the researcher spent 5-10 minutes creating a favourable environment by thanking each interviewee, explaining the purpose of the study, reading the instructions on how to respond the questions, and clarifying aspects previously stated in the informed consent form, including confidentiality, anonymity, voluntary participation, and the option to withdraw at any point. Then, the researcher asked for permission to voice record the conversation for transcription, and to take notes.

Data generated from the electronic questionnaire and interviews were recorded, transcribed, translated, coded and analysed, along with notes featuring non-verbal content taken by the researcher during the interviews, through thematic and constant comparative analysis.

Finally, when referring to the data analysis of case studies, Lincoln and Guba (2002, p.32) claim that *"it is far easier, and more epistemologically sound, simply to give up the idea of generalisation",* arguing that, in case any generalisation is considered, it should be time and context bounded, indeterminate and relative. In this case study, generalisations of all kinds were avoided.

Data Presentation and Analysis

In the electronic questionnaire, the set of questions posed to each participant included the following: *"What are the enabling factors that lead middle leaders like you to an effective professional performance?"*. Their answers revealed the enabling factors identified in the first phase of the data collection process.

Graphic 1. Enabling Factors Identified in the 1st Phase of the Data Collection Process
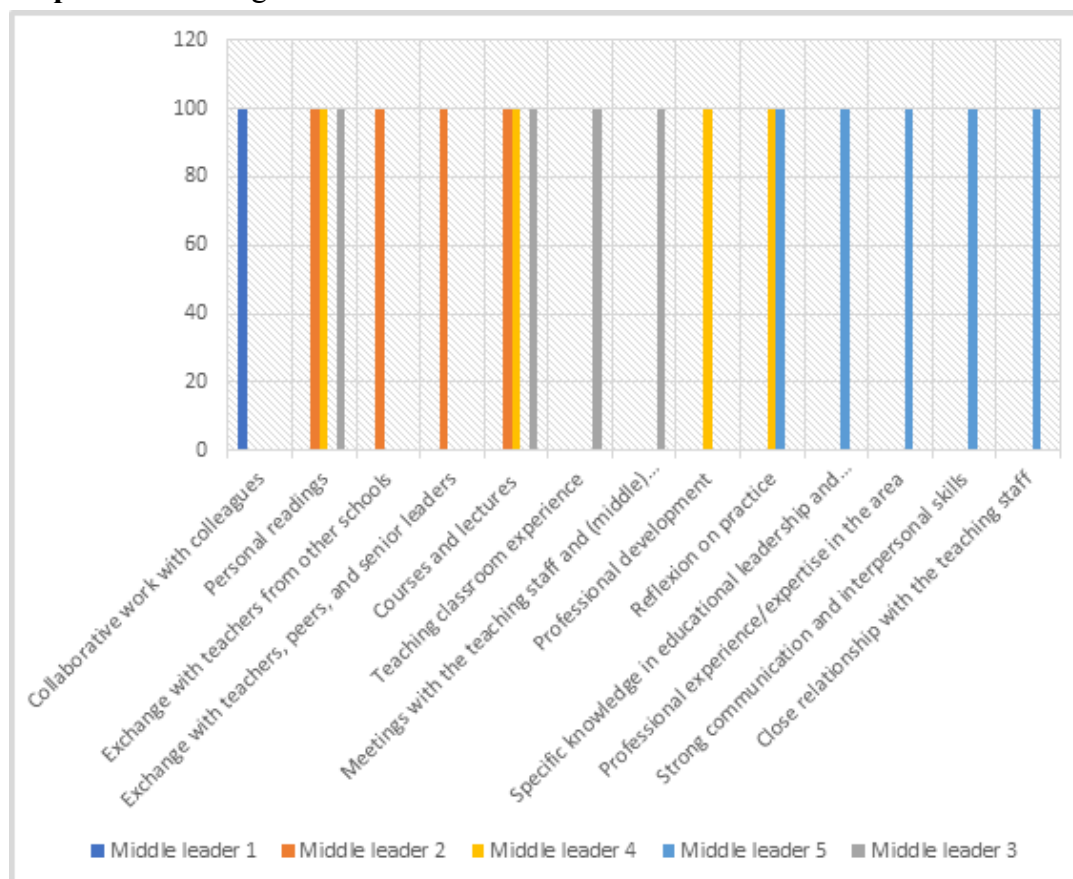
Thirteen factors were pointed out in the questionnaire (Graphic 1). The ones cited by more than one respondent were 'personal readings', 'courses and lectures', and 'reflection on practice', drawing the attention to the fact that the middle leaders were probably making their own efforts towards enhancing their professional performance.

During the interviews, the same question was made by the researcher on a face-to-face format. Following, an analysis on the responses and reactions of the middle leaders and the principal during the interview, concerning the research question of this paper: *"What are the enabling factors that lead middle leaders like you to an effective professional performance?"*.

Anna exclaimed "Wow!", and gave a giggle whose meaning was hard to interpret. The researcher paraphrased the question. Then, Anna provided a long answer perceived as redundant and vague, which helped with the interpretation of the initial interjection of surprise as if Anna was not keen on talking about the topic: *"I think that **time** for being with the teachers; **time** for discussions between the middle and senior leaders (...) **time** for the meetings to promote these exchanges and conversations (...) **time** with teachers for training, discussion, talking about the students (...) **time"**.

The researcher explored the topic a little more by asking Anna: *"As you're placing an emphasis on the need for time to take care of so many issues, could you tell me whether you think that you have managed your time with efficacy?"* Anna quickly answered "Yes!", and cited all the different meetings that she had with her colleagues (and she started snapping her fingers, and turning around a ring that she had on one of her fingers): *"Yes, yes...I have meetings with the teachers every other week. (...) there are our meetings between the senior and middle leadership teams (...).*

Unlike Anna, **Ellie** seemed quite comfortable with the question. She contextualised her middle leadership position as someone lying between the top and the bottom of the pyramid, and highlighted aspects such as 'being listened to' and 'having the needs attended (those of hers and of her team)', and 'working with freedom and autonomy' as the main enabling factors in her opinion: *"Listening to what the team demands, right? Besides being a representative of the institution, I represent the team of educators that I lead, right? So, an enabling factor is having the opportunity of being listened to, of having the needs met, as well as having freedom and autonomy to work... I think these are the most important things".*

Alike Ellie, **Bea** seemed excited with the opportunity to discuss about that topic. She cited that having self-confidence and some skills including 'flexibility' and 'active listening', in addition to having the work valued by the institution were important enabling factors: *"Having flexibility and good listening skills (...) believing that your role can contribute with the progress of the school work (...) the school valuing the work of middle leaders..."* Then, she mentioned other aspects, such as 'support', 'recognition' and 'credibility by the different stakeholders': *"(…) the resources that the school provides, so that the work can be executed... the credibility of parents, families and the team (...) they are facilitators. I think that they all make the difference".* She concluded by emphasising the relevance of having specific knowledge on the curriculum taught to the school graders in her care: *"One thing that is also an enabling factor is having the project of the school grade in your hand…this is a great facilitator, essential too".*

The question posed to **Eve**, the lower elementary school principal, was quite similar*: "What are the enabling factors that are crucial to determine an effective professional performance by the middle leaders under your supervision?"*

Eve pointed out 'inner drive' and 'initiative to keep studying' as the two main enabling factors capable of leading the middle leaders to an excellent professional performance: *"Research… they need to study, they should not accommodate themselves, right? Study inside and outside of the school, join forums with other people, engage in conversations in interschool forums, so that they don't get stuck in their own standards, in their own way of doing things, right?"* Eve finished her response by emphasising that *"there's nothing ready, there´s no technique, thus the middle leaders should take the initiative of keep studying".* Her viewpoint was interpreted as if it was 'incompatible with the expectations demonstrated by the middle leaders', mainly those expressed by Bea and Ellie.

Conclusions

This paper has originated from a qualitative educational case study carried out in 2021 in Brazil, and submitted to the UCL in 2022, which was centred in the professional performance of a group of middle leaders, led by a senior leader, applied to the context of the lower elementary school division of a private mainstream school.

It seems that it has fulfilled its main purpose, consisting in outlining how the specific topic *enabling factors that lead middle leaders to an effective professional performance* had been approached in the academic study.

As shown throughout the paper, four enabling factors were identified and addressed in depth in the academic study: an inner drive or motivator intrinsic factor(s), a knowledge and skills base in leadership and management, an effective support by the senior leadership, and a well-structured PD programme for the middle leadership team in-service.

Regarding the enabler *inner drive*, the main factors uncovered as impacting the professional performance of the middle leaders who participated in the empiric research were a 'strong identification with the institution', 'a sense of belonging and proud', and 'freedom and autonomy to work'.

The three remaining enabling factors were perceived as either missing or insufficient. The school did not have a PD programme in place for their middle leaders, whose members were quite skilled and experienced in the field of teaching, among other areas, but were aware that lacked from a set of specific knowledge and skills in leadership and management, which would likely benefit them at work.

Additionally, although the middle leaders demonstrated an ethical and positive attitude in relation to their senior leader, with whom they seemed to maintain a good interpersonal relationship, it is pertinent to emphasise that it has been perceived that the principal was not used to providing her middle leaders with effective support, within a demanding context where all middle leaders were encouraged (by her) to be highly committed with their own professional development, as well as with that of the faculty staff members in their care.

The improvement initiative of having a structured PD programme as a common goal within their school division, through which they would be able to develop together, would likely enable them to maximise their individual learning achievements, and best impact their professional performance.

Acknowledgement

References

Adair, J. (2004). *(The Concise) Adair, On Teambuilding and Motivation*. Edited by Neil Thomas, Thorogood Publishing, London, U.K.

Alvesson, M. (2003). *Beyond neopositivists, romantics, and localists: A reflexive approach to interviews in organizational research*. Academy of Management Review, 28(1), pp. 3-33.

Bassey, M. (2012). *Case Studies*. In: *Research Methods in Educational Leadership and Management*, Sage Publications, 3rd Edition, pp. 155-169, DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781473957695

Bell, J. and Woolner, P. (2012). *Research Tools: Developing and Using Questionnaires.* In: *Research Methods in Educational Leadership and Management*, Sage Publications, 3rd Edition, pp.266-280, DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781473957695

Bennett, N., P. Woods, C. Wise, and W. Newton. (2007). *Understandings of Middle Leadership in Secondary Schools: A Review of Empirical Research. School Leadership and Management*, pp. 453-470, DOI: 10.1080/13632430701606137

Briggs, A., Coleman, M., and Morrison, M. (2012). *Research Methods in Educational Leadership and Management,* 3rd Edition, London: SAGE Publications.

Bush, T. (2009). *Leadership Development and School Improvement. Contemporary Issues in Leadership Development, Educational Review*, 61(4), pp. 375-389, DOI: 10.1080/00131910903403956

Bush, T. (2008). *Leadership and Management Development in Education*. London: Sage Publishing.

Bush, T. and Middlewood, D. (2005). *Leading and Managing People in Education. Educational Leadership for Social Justice Series*. London, Sage.

Cohen, L., Marion, L. and Morrison, K. (2011) *Case Studies, in Research Methods in Education* (7th edn). Abingdon, Routledge .

Coleman, M. (2012). *Research Tools: Interviews. In: Research Methods in Educational Leadership and Management*, Sage Publications, 3rd Edition, pp. 250-265, DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781473957695

Coleman, M. and Glover, D. (2010). *Educational Leadership and Management: Developing Insights and Skills*. Open University Press, London, U.K.

Cranston, N. (2009). *Middle-level School Leaders: Understanding Their Roles and Aspirations.* In: *N. Cranston and L. Ehrich (Eds), Australian School Leadership Today (pp.217-241).* Australia: Australian Academic Press.

Darling-Hammond, L. and Richardson, N. (2009). *Teacher Learning: What Matters? Educational Leadership: Journal of the Department of Supervision and Curriculum Development,* 66(5) pp. 46-53. University of Stanford, U.S.A.

Deci, E., and Ryan, R. (2008). *Self-determination theory: A macro-theory on human motivation, Canadian Psychology.*

De Nobile, J. (2018). *Towards a Theoretical Model of Middle Leadership in Schools. School Leadership and Management.* 38(4), pp. 395-416, DOI: 10.1080/13632434.2017.1411902

De Nobile, J. and Ridden, P. (2014). *Middle leaders in schools: Who are they and what do they do? Australian Educational Leader*, 36(2), pp. 22-25.

Department for Education (DfE). (2020). *The National Professional Qualification (NPQ) Framework.* Education Endowment Foundation (EEF), England, U.K., In: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk, Accessed on February 28, 2021

Dinham, S. (2016). Leading Learning and Teaching. Camberwell: ACER Press.

Dinham, S. (2007). The Secondary Head of Department and the Achievement of Exceptional Student Outcomes. Journal of Educational Administration, 45(1), pp. 62-79.

Drysdale, L. (2011). Evidence from the new cases in the International Successful School Principalship Project (ISSPP), Leadership and Policy in Schools, 10(4), pp. 444-455.

Edwards-Groves, C., Grootenboer, P. and Ronnerman, K. (2016). Facilitating a Culture of Relational Trust in School-Based Action Research: Recognising the Role of Middle Leaders. Pp.369-386. DOI: 10.1080/09650792.2015.1131175

Fleming, P. (2014). *Successful Middle Leadership in Secondary Schools*. London: Routledge, London.

Fullan, M. (2016). *Coherence: The Right Drivers in Action for Schools, Districts, and Systems.* In: Fullan, M., and Quinn, J. (2015). Corwin and Ontario Principals' Council, Canada.

Grootenboer, P., C. Edwards-Groves, and K. Ronnerman (2015). Leading Practice Development: Voices from the Middle. Professional Development in Education, pp. 508–526, DOI: 10.1080/19415257.2014.924985

Gurr, D. (2021). A Review of Research on Middle Leaders in Schools. Pre-publication paper submitted for publication in the 2022 Elsevier International Encyclopedia of Education. University of Melbourne, Australia.

Gurr, D. and Drysdale, L. (2013). Middle-level secondary school leaders: Potential, constraints and implications for leadership preparation and development. Journal of Educational Administration, 51(1), pp.55-71.

Harris, A. (2003). *Building Leadership Capacity for School Improvement*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press.

Harris, A. and Jones, M. (2016). *Middle Leaders Matter: Reflections, Recognition, and Renaissance. School Leadership and Management* 37(3), pp. 213-216.

Highfield, C. (2019). *Management, Leadership, and Governance in Primary Education* (New Zealand). Bloomsbury Education and Childhood Studies, Bloomsbury Publishing.

Hofstede, G. (1997) *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind*, London, McGraw-Hill.

Irvine, P. and Brundrett, M. (2017). *Negotiating the next step: The part that experience plays with middle leaders' development as they move into their new role*. Sage https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143217720457

Irvine, P. and Brundrett, M. (2016). *Middle Leadership and its Challenges: A Case Study in the Secondary Independent Sector. Management in Education*. 30 (2), pp.86-92. DOI: 10.1177/0892020616643158

Jones, J. (2005). *Management Skills in Schools: A Resource for School Leaders.* London, Paul Chapman Publishing.

Lárusdottir, S., and O'Connor, I. (2017). *Distributed Leadership and Middle Leadership Practice in Schools: A Disconnect? Irish Educational Studies*: 1-16. DOI: 10.1080/03323315. 2017.1333444

Leithwood, K. and Day, C. (2007), *What we learned: a broad view. Successful School Leadership in Times of Change*, Springer-Kluwer, Dordrecht, pp. 189-203.

Lincoln, Y., and Guba, E. (2002*). The only generalization is: There is no generalization.* In: R. Gomm, M. Hammersley, and P. Foster (Eds.), *Case study method* (pp. 27-44). London, Sage, 97t8.

Merriam, S. B. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education*. San Francisco, California, Jossey-Bass.

Muijs, D. (2012). *Surveys and Sampling*. In: *Research Methods in Educational Leadership and Management*, Sage Publications, 3rd Edition, pp. 140-154, DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781473957695

Noman, M. and Gurr, D. (2020). *Contextual Leadership and Culture in Education. Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Education*, New York: Oxford University Press,dx.doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190264093.013.595

OECD. (2019a). *TALIS 2018 Results (Volume I): Teachers and School Leaders as Lifelong Learners*, OECD Publishing, Paris. https://doi.org/10.1787/1d0bc92a-e

OECD. (2019b). *Future of Education and Skills 2030. OECD Learning Compass 2030*. https://www.oecd.org/education/2030-project, Access date: 10 March 2021

Pont, B., Nusche, D., and Moorman, H. (2008). *Improving School Leadership. Volume 1: Policy and Practice*. OECD Publishing.

Spillane, J, Healey, K, Mesler Praise, L. and Kenney, A (2011) *A Distributed Perspective on Learning Leadership.* In R. Robertson and H. Timperley Eds), *Leadership and Learning* (pp. 159-172), London: Sage Publications.

Steward, R. (2020) *A Curriculum Guide for Middle Leaders: Intent, Implementation and Impact in Practice*. 1st Edition, London: Routledge, https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003104100

Thorpe, A. and Bennet-Powel, G. (2014) *The perceptions of secondary school middle leaders regarding their needs following a middle leadership development programme*. Management in Education. 28(2), pp. 52-57, University of Roehampton, London, U.K. DOI: 10.1177/0892020614529808

Wells, M. (2013) *Elements of effective and sustainable professional learning. Professional Development in Education*, School of Education, Deakin University, Australia. DOI: 10.1080/19415257.2013.838691

Yin, R. K. (2009). *Case study research: Design and methods*, 4th Edition, Thousand Oaks, California, Sage Publications.