THE EFFECT OF ELEMENTARY PRINCIPALS’ SELF-PERCEIVED
INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP BEHAVIORS ON READING AND MATH
STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

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Dissertation
Submitted In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement
For the Degree of Doctor of Education

Regent University
April 2011
Abstract

As the nation endeavors to leave no child behind, more than 12 million of the U.S. children who live in poverty continue to be at risk of school failure. Having significant learning deficiencies, many of these children are substantially behind their more affluent peers and historically never catch up (Barr & Parrett, 2007), creating a daunting challenge for America’s public schools, especially in this age of high stakes and high accountability. With a national focus on increasing student achievement, the principal comes to the forefront as the instructional leader responsible for improving the quality of education for all children (Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, Meyerson, Orr, & Cohen, 2007). The literature has consistently promoted instructional leadership as the most significant antecedent in not only improving schools but also in increasing student achievement (Cotton, 2003; Dinham, 2004; Fisher & Frey, 2002; Gamage, 2009; Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Kearney, 2005; Janerette & Sherretz, 2007). Utilizing Larsen’s (1985) 36-item Instructional Activity Questionnaire (IAQ), this study investigated the self-perceived instructional leadership behaviors of 37 elementary principals in Distinguished Title I and non-Title I elementary schools in one metropolitan Atlanta school district consisting of more than 150,000 students, while also examining the moderating effects of principal tenure, gender, age, race/ethnicity, district-led leadership training, and school size. Subsequently, this study further explored whether principal instructional leadership behaviors predicted the aggregate achievement levels of students in Grades 3 through 5 in reading/language arts and mathematics on the Georgia Criterion-Referenced Competency Test (CRCT) over a 3-year period. At the conclusion of a 47-day data collection period,
37 out of 39 principals responded, yielding a 95% response rate, categorizing this study as a near-census. Results revealed minimal and nonsignificant differences in the instructional leadership behaviors of principals, regardless of whether the school was Title I or non-Title I. In addition, the aggregate of the principals’ self-perceived instructional leadership behaviors yielded no effect on the aggregate levels of student achievement. The implications of this study revealed that principals, aiming to increase student performance, frequently employed instructional leadership behaviors based on the context of the school. Furthering the research on instructional leadership and student achievement, this study provided a basis for the discussion of instructional leadership behaviors, school status (Title I and non-Title I), and student achievement as concepts for further examination.