



Principals' Instructional Leadership Practices and their Influence on Student Academic Performance in Secondary Schools of Pema Gatshel Dzongkhag

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Received: August 30, 2026

Published: September 30, 2026

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Abstract

This quantitative descriptive-correlational study examined principals' instructional leadership practices and their relationship with student academic performance across three secondary schools in Pema Gatshel Dzongkhag. Data were collected from 465 participants, comprising 396 students, 62 teachers, and 7 principals, using structured Likert-scale questionnaires. The findings indicated that leadership was associated with student learning primarily through indirect pathways. School Climate and Culture showed a statistically significant positive relationship with students' academic achievement ($r = .101, p = .045$), while Instructional Supervision and Monitoring was positively associated with School Climate and Culture ($r = .307, p < .001$). In addition, Administrative Communication was strongly associated with Teacher Support and Mentorship ($r = .883, p < .001$). The findings highlight the importance of strengthening a positive school climate, instructional supervision, effective communication, and teacher support as key aspects of instructional leadership.

Keywords: Instructional Leadership; School Climate; Academic Performance; Secondary Education; Bhutan

Introduction

School leadership is commonly perceived as an important factor that influences teacher performance and student academic achievement. In today's world, and particularly in Bhutan, school principals are mandated to follow the dual leadership model to provide transformational vision and instructional direction. The transformational leadership inspires a shared vision and fosters organizational commitment, and instructional leadership focuses on the core mechanics of teaching and learning.

But there are instances where people criticize school principals for not being included in the teaching timetable.

Many used to argue on this point that they indirectly play influential role in cultivating a safe, collaborative school climate, founding clear academic expectations, and engaging in supportive classroom observations and mentorship with teachers.

It has become difficult to determine how school principals' role influence school culture and student achievement. Even, academic performance across schools in Pema Gatshel Dzongkhag shows notable contradiction in which some schools perform academic high year after year, while some schools do not reach even to the expected academic expectation. Thereby, key questions arise: does this stem from weak instructional leadership, or is it due to a deterioration in academic interest among teachers and students themselves?

Therefore, understanding how school principals in Pema Gatshel balance national frameworks such as Gross National Happiness (GNH) and Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) against local demands is important for developing effective leadership practices that meaningfully support both teachers and students.

Problem statement

Despite ongoing efforts by the Ministry of Education and Skills Development (MoESD) to enhance educational standards across Bhutan, academic performance remains inconsistent among schools in Pema Gatshel Dzongkhag. While principals are expected to serve as instructional leaders by mentoring teachers, observing classes, and guiding student learning; this vision is rarely realized in practice. Instead, heavy administrative demands, routine paperwork, and conduct of frequent meetings consume time, leaving minimal opportunity to focus on classroom improvement.

The issue remains unaddressed due to the absence of local empirical data. While international literature confirms that teacher support and instructional guidance bring far greater results than routine paperwork (Guo., *et al.* 2024) [4] school leaders in Pema Gatshel Dzongkhag also lack the evidence to determine which specific practices drive academic success. Without the specific findings, policymakers are similarly left without a clear outline to assist principals in prioritizing their instructional roles.

Research objectives

The study aims to:

- Assess the current types of instructional leadership practices experienced by teachers and students in three sampled secondary schools in Pema Gatshel Dzongkhag.
- Examine the relationship between principal instructional supervision, school climate, administrative communication, and student academic performance.
- Identify the single instructional leadership practice that exerts the greatest influence on student academic outcomes.

Research questions

This study will address the following core questions:

- What are the main instructional leadership practices experienced by teachers in three sampled secondary schools in Pema Gatshel Dzongkhag?

- How strongly do principal's instructional supervision, climate, support, and communication compare with student academic achievement?
- Which specific leadership practice has the major impact on student academic performance?

Significance of the study

Primarily, this study will provide school principals with clear, actionable insights to enhance student learning, enabling them to prioritize instructional leadership over routine administrative tasks. For teachers, the findings will foster more collaborative environments, stronger professional learning communities, and more effective classroom support and mentorship. At the policy level, this research will offer firm data to assist the Dzongkhag Education Sector and the Ministry of Education and Skills Development (MoESD) in designing leadership training programs. Ultimately, revealing this empirical evidence will add a vital Bhutanese perspective to the broader literature on school leadership and student success.

Literature Review

Principal leadership and student achievement

Instructional leadership plays an important role in determining academic success across schools. Highlighting this effect, Seashore Louis., *et al.* (2010) [11] proved that school leadership ranks second only to direct classroom teaching, and student learning outcomes. Rather than teaching students directly in the classroom, Cai., *et al.* (2024) [1] along with Savage and Zhang (2025) [10] in addition stressed that principals exercise primary influence indirectly to teaching and learning. Intensifying on these conditions, Ozdogru and colleagues (2025) [9] noted that effective leaders achieve results by setting academic expectations, and maintaining a positive school environment. Consequently, understanding these indirect leadership mechanisms is essential for identifying how school principals can lead to real school improvement and student achievement.

Understanding Integrated Instructional Leadership

Researchers identify that combining leadership styles creates an influential context for a school's academic success. Marks and Printy (2003) [8] found that integrated leadership, for instance, the vision-building aspects of transformational leadership with

the hands-on academic focus of instructional leadership enhances overall school performance. In addition, instructional leadership specifically emphasizes curriculum oversight, classroom observation, feedback for teachers, and monitoring of student learning (Guo., *et al.* 2026; Kusumaningrum., *et al.* 2025) [4]. In the same vein, Guo and colleagues (2026) and Ligaya and colleagues (2024) [4] confirm that when principals prioritize these behaviors, both teacher job satisfaction and classroom execution improve considerably. In due course, principal practices in an integrated instructional framework provides a clear roadmap for driving continuous academic and professional growth.

Teacher support and school climate

Effective instructional leadership is vital to fostering a collaborative school culture. Research highlights that a trusting, transparent, and academically rigorous environment mediates the impact of principal leadership on student achievement (Ozdogru., *et al* 2025) [1]. Furthermore, supporting teachers through Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), continuous professional development, and collaborative decision-making enhances instructional quality (Debnath, 2025; Dimasindel, 2025; Hudson, 2025) [5]. In Bhutan, Yezer (2016) [12] noted that School Self-Assessment (SSA) and School Improvement Planning (SIP) set administrative priorities, strong principal leadership converting real classroom success. Integrating national educational policy with supportive leadership is thus important for improving student results nationwide.

Research methodology

This study employed a quantitative descriptive-correlational research design to examine principals’ instructional leadership practices and their relationship with students’ academic perfor-

mance. The study was conducted in three secondary schools in Pema Gatshel Dzongkhag: Yoechen Central School, Pema Gatshel Middle Secondary School, and Yurung Central School. Yoechen Central School was purposively selected, while teachers and students from the three schools constituted the study participants. Approximately 80–100 teachers teaching Classes IX–XII were included, while 200–250 students from Classes X and XII were selected through stratified random sampling. Data were collected using two structured questionnaires: the Principal Leadership Practices Questionnaire (PLPQ) for teachers and the Student Perception and Academic Performance Scale (SPAPS) for students, using a five-point Likert scale. Students’ academic performance was measured using official examination results, expressed as mean or overall percentage scores.

Following approval from MoESD, Pema Gatshel Dzongkhag, and the participating schools, data were collected through printed questionnaires during non-instructional hours. The instruments were reviewed by experts and pilot-tested to establish validity and clarity, while reliability was assessed using Cronbach’s alpha, with $\alpha \geq .70$ considered acceptable. The data were coded and analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics, employing descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and multiple linear regression to examine the relationships between leadership practices and academic performance and to determine the predictive contribution of leadership dimensions. Ethical principles, including informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality, anonymity, the right to withdraw, and secure data storage, were maintained throughout the study.

Findings

Participant demographics and profile

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Student participant	396	84.6	85.2	85.2
	Teacher Participant	62	13.2	13.3	98.5
	Principal Participant	7	1.5	1.5	100.0
	Total	465	99.4		
Missing	System	3	.6		
Total		468	100.0		

Table 1: Participant.

A total of 468 participants were included in the survey, of whom 465 (99.4%) provided valid responses, while only 3 (0.6%) responses were missing. The respondents were predominantly students, accounting for 85.2% (n = 396) of the total sample. Teach-

ers represented 13.3% (n = 62), while principals constituted the smallest group, with 1.5% (n = 7). This distribution indicates that the study primarily reflects the perspectives of students, with comparatively fewer responses from teachers and principals.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yoechen Central School	207	44.2	44.5	44.5
	PemaGatshel MSS	130	27.8	28.0	72.5
	Yurung Central School	128	27.4	27.5	100.0
	Total	465	99.4	100.0	
Missing	System	3	.6		
Total		468	100.0		

Table 2: School.

The largest proportion of valid responses was received from Yoechen Central School, accounting for 44.5% (n = 207) of the total responses. This was followed by Pema Gatshel MSS with 28.0% (n = 130) and Yurung Central School with 27.5% (n = 128). The

distribution indicates that Yoechen Central School contributed the highest number of respondents, while the responses from Pema Gatshel MSS and Yurung Central School were relatively similar in proportion.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Grade IX	148	31.6	37.4	37.4
	Grade X	138	29.5	34.8	72.2
	Grade XI	72	15.4	18.2	90.4
	Grade XII	37	7.9	9.3	99.7
	5.00	1	.2	.3	100.0
	Total	396	84.6	100.0	
Missing	System	72	15.4		
Total		468	100.0		

Table 3: Grade.

Among the 396 student participants, the majority were from the lower secondary level, with Grade IX accounting for 37.4% (n = 148) and Grade X for 34.8% (n = 138). Upper secondary students

comprised a smaller proportion, with Grade XI representing 18.2% (n = 72) and Grade XII 9.3% (n = 37). Overall, the student sample was predominantly composed of lower secondary students, particularly those in Grades IX and X.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	50-59%	11	2.4	2.8	2.8
	60-69%	139	29.7	35.1	37.9
	70-79%	187	40.0	47.2	85.1
	80% and above	59	12.6	14.9	100.0
	Total	396	84.6	100.0	
Missing	System	72	15.4		
Total		468	100.0		

Table 4: Previous year score.

A considerable proportion of the student respondents reported strong prior academic performance. Nearly half of the students, 47.2% (n = 187), achieved scores between 70–79%, while 14.9%

(n = 59) scored 80% and above. In contrast, only 2.8% (n = 11) reported scores below 60%. Overall, the findings indicate that the majority of student respondents had relatively strong academic performance prior to the study.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	.00	403	86.1	86.7	86.7
	Classes from IX-XII	38	8.1	8.2	94.8
	Classes from PP-VIII	24	5.1	5.2	100.0
	Total	465	99.4	100.0	
Missing	System	3	.6		
Total		468	100.0		

Table 5: Teaching Class Level.

Among the staff respondents, 62 were teaching staff, of whom 38 (8.2%) taught Classes IX–XII and 24 (5.2%) taught Classes PP–VIII. The remaining 403 respondents (86.7%) comprised students

and other non-teaching respondents. Overall, the sample was predominantly represented by students, with a smaller proportion of teaching staff.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	.00	396	84.6	85.2	85.2
	Teaching experience less than one year under current Principal	12	2.6	2.6	87.7
	Teaching experience between 1-3 years under current principal	30	6.4	6.5	94.2
	Teaching experience more than 3 years under current principal	27	5.8	5.8	100.0
	Total	465	99.4	100.0	
Missing	System	3	.6		
Total		468	100.0		

Table 6: Teaching under current principal.

Among the 69 non-student respondents, 30 (6.5%) had worked under the current principal for 1–3 years, while 27 (5.8%) had more than three years of experience. A smaller proportion, 12 respondents (2.6%), had less than one year of experience under the current principal. Overall, the respondents were fairly evenly distributed between those with 1–3 years and more than three years of experience.

School leadership and environment constructs

Students generally expressed positive perceptions of instructional supervision. A total of 43.9% (n = 174) agreed and 13.1% (n = 52) strongly agreed with the statements related to instructional supervision. Meanwhile, 29.5% (n = 117) remained neutral, while 12.3% (n = 49) expressed disagreement or strong disagreement. Overall, the findings suggest that most students viewed instructional supervision positively, although a considerable proportion remained neutral.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree (15 above)	52	11.1	13.1	13.1
	Agree (13-14)	174	37.2	43.9	57.1
	Neutral (11-12)	117	25.0	29.5	86.6
	Disagree (9-10)	33	7.1	8.3	94.9
	Strongly Disagree (8 below)	16	3.4	4.0	99.0
	10.00	1	.2	.3	99.2
	12.00	2	.4	.5	99.7
	15.00	1	.2	.3	100.0
	Total	396	84.6	100.0	
Missing	System	72	15.4		
Total		468	100.0		

Table 7: Instructional Supervision and Monitoring.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree (15 above)	341	72.9	86.1	86.1
	Agree (13-14)	23	4.9	5.8	91.9
	Neutral (11-12)	21	4.5	5.3	97.2
	Disagree (9-10)	8	1.7	2.0	99.2
	Strongly Disagree (8 below)	3	.6	.8	100.0
	Total	396	84.6	100.0	
Missing	System	72	15.4		
Total		468	100.0		

Table 8: School Climate and Culture.

The respondents expressed highly positive perceptions of the school climate. A substantial majority, 86.1% (n = 341), strongly agreed with the statements related to school climate, while 5.8%

(n = 23) agreed. Thus, a combined 91.9% of respondents expressed positive agreement, indicating a very favorable perception of the overall school culture and climate.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	NA	395	84.4	84.9	84.9
	Strongly Agree (15 above)	56	12.0	12.0	97.0
	Agree (13-14)	5	1.1	1.1	98.1
	Neutral (11-12)	8	1.7	1.7	99.8
	Strongly Disagree (8 below)	1	.2	.2	100.0
	Total	465	99.4	100.0	
Missing	System	3	.6		
Total		468	100.0		

Table 9: Teacher Support and Mentorship.

This item was primarily targeted at staff respondents, with 395 students coded as not applicable. Among the 70 valid non-student respondents, 56 (12.0%) strongly agreed that teacher support and

mentorship were effective. This indicates a generally high level of satisfaction with the support and mentorship provided to staff.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	NA	395	84.4	84.9	84.9
	Strongly Agree (15 above)	58	12.4	12.5	97.4
	Agree (13-14)	3	.6	.6	98.1
	Neutral (11-12)	1	.2	.2	98.3
	Disagree (9-10)	5	1.1	1.1	99.4
	Strongly Disagree (8 below)	3	.6	.6	100.0
	Total	465	99.4	100.0	
Missing	System	3	.6		
Total		468	100.0		

Table 10: Administrative Communication.

This item was primarily targeted at staff respondents, with 395 students coded as not applicable. Among the valid respondents, 58 (12.5%) strongly agreed that administrative communication was positive and effective, while only 8 (1.7%) expressed disagreement

or strong disagreement. Overall, the responses indicate a generally positive perception of administrative communication among staff.

Priority practice rankings

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	.00	396	84.6	98.3	98.3
	most influential	1	.2	.2	98.5
	influential	1	.2	.2	98.8
	Neutral	2	.4	.5	99.3
	least influential	3	.6	.7	100.0
	Total	403	86.1	100.0	
Missing	System	65	13.9		
Total		468	100.0		

Table 11: Clear administrative communication.

Only seven non-student respondents evaluated this practice. Of these, 0.2% rated it as most influential, 0.2% as influential, 0.5% as neutral, and 0.7% (n = 3) as least influential. The responses were

therefore distributed across the different rating categories, with the largest proportion indicating that the practice was least influential.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	.00	396	84.6	98.3	98.3
	Influential	2	.4	.5	98.8
	Neutral	5	1.1	1.2	100.0
	Total	403	86.1	100.0	
Missing	System	65	13.9		
Total		468	100.0		

Table 12: Professional Learning Community

Among the seven non-student respondents who evaluated Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), 2 respondents (0.5%) perceived them as influential, while 5 respondents (1.2%) remained

neutral. This indicates that the majority of respondents were neutral about the influence of PLCs.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	.00	396	84.6	98.3	98.3
	Most influential	4	.9	1.0	99.3
	influential	2	.4	.5	99.8
	Neutral	1	.2	.2	100.0
	Total	403	86.1	100.0	
Missing	System	65	13.9		
Total		468	100.0		

Table 13: Fostering School Climate.

This practice received strong endorsement among the leadership priorities. Of the respondents, 1.0% (n = 4) rated it as most influential, while 0.5% (n = 2) rated it as influential. This indicates

a generally positive perception of the practice among the respondents who evaluated it.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	.00	396	84.6	98.3	98.3
	Most influential	3	.6	.7	99.0
	Influential	1	.2	.2	99.3
	Neutral	2	.4	.5	99.8
	least influential	1	.2	.2	100.0
	Total	403	86.1	100.0	
Missing	System	65	13.9		
Total		468	100.0		

Table 14: Instructional Supervision and Classroom Feedback.

Among the seven respondents who ranked this practice, 3 respondents (0.7%) rated it as most influential, while 0.2% rated it as influential, 0.5% remained neutral, and 0.2% rated it as least influ-

ential. Overall, the responses indicate that the practice was viewed favorably by the largest proportion of respondents.

Comparative Cross-School Analysis

	Cases					
	Included		Excluded		Total	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
Instructional supervision and monitoring * School	396	84.6%	72	15.4%	468	100.0%
Administrative communication * school	465	99.4%	3	0.6%	468	100.0%
Teacher support and mentorship * School	465	99.4%	3	0.6%	468	100.0%
School climate and culture * School	396	84.6%	72	15.4%	468	100.0%

Table 15: Case Processing Summary.

The analysis included 396 valid cases for the student-focused dimensions of instructional supervision and school climate. For the broader staff-related dimensions, namely administrative commu-

nication and teacher support, 465 valid cases were included. This variation in the number of valid cases reflects the different respondent groups targeted by the respective dimensions.

		Instructional supervision and monitoring	Administrative communication	Teacher support and mentorship	School Climate and culture
Yoechen Central School	Mean	2.9775	.1739	.1932	1.4607
	N	178	207	207	178
	Standard Deviation	1.75941	.50116	.53185	.92126
PemaGatshel Middle Secondary School	Mean	2.1930	.2000	.1923	1.0614
	N	114	130	130	114
	Standard Deviation	.78568	.67514	.64815	.27539
Yurung Central School	Mean	2.2308	.3125	.2344	1.1154
	N	104	128	128	104
	Standard Deviation	.88384	.88514	.56797	.52709
Total	Mean	2.5556	.2194	.2043	1.2551
	N	396	465	465	396
	Std. Deviation	1.38324	.67534	.57534	.71377

Table 16: Report.

The school-wise results show differences across the four dimensions. Yoechen Central School recorded the highest mean scores for both Instructional Supervision and Monitoring ($M = 2.98$, $SD = 1.76$) and School Climate and Culture ($M = 1.46$, $SD = 0.92$), compared with Yurung Central School and Pema Gatshel MSS.

For Administrative Communication, Yurung Central School recorded the highest mean score ($M = 0.31$, $SD = 0.89$), followed by Pema Gatshel MSS ($M = 0.20$, $SD = 0.68$) and Yoechen Central School ($M = 0.17$, $SD = 0.50$). Similarly, Yurung Central School had the high-

est mean score for Teacher Support and Mentorship ($M = 0.23$, $SD = 0.57$), while Yoechen Central School and Pema Gatshel MSS both recorded $M = 0.19$. Overall, the findings indicate that Yoechen Central School had higher mean scores in the student-focused dimensions, whereas Yurung Central School recorded higher mean scores in the staff-related dimensions.

Key Statistically Significant Relationships: Correlations

		Supervision and monitoring	Administrative communication	Teachers Support and mentorship	School Climate and culture	Previous Year score	Teaching Class level	Teaching Under Current principal
Instructional supervision and Monitoring	Pearson Correlation	1	-.020	-.020	.307**	.026	. ^b	. ^b
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.688	.688	.000	.600	.000	.000
	N	396	396	396	396	396	396	396
Administrative communication	Pearson Correlation	-.020	1	.883**	-.018	.018	.475**	.639**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.688		.000	.721	.728	.000	.000
	N	396	465	465	396	396	465	465
Teacher support and mentorship	Pearson Correlation	-.020	.883**	1	-.018	-.051	.597**	.756**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.688	.000		.721	.315	.000	.000
	N	396	465	465	396	396	465	465

Table 17

Narrative interpretation of correlation results

The correlation analysis showed several significant relationships among the study variables. At the student level, Instructional Supervision and Monitoring had a moderate positive relationship with School Climate and Culture ($r = .307$, $p < .001$), indicating that higher perceived supervision was associated with a more positive school climate. School Climate and Culture also showed a weak but significant positive relationship with Previous Year Score ($r = .101$, $p = .045$), suggesting a slight association between a positive school climate and higher academic performance.

At the teacher level, Administrative Communication was very strongly associated with Teacher Support and Mentorship ($r = .883$, $p < .001$). Teaching Class Level was positively related to both

Teacher Support and Mentorship ($r = .597$, $p < .001$) and Administrative Communication ($r = .475$, $p < .001$). Similarly, Teaching Under the Current Principal showed strong positive relationships with Administrative Communication ($r = .639$, $p < .001$) and Teacher Support and Mentorship ($r = .756$, $p < .001$). Teaching Class Level also had a very strong relationship with Teaching Under the Current Principal ($r = .841$, $p < .001$).

However, several relationships were not statistically significant, including those between Instructional Supervision, School Climate, and Previous Year Score and the teacher-level variables. These findings indicate that no significant linear associations were observed for these pairs.

The “b” footnote indicates that correlations involving student-level variables and teacher demographic variables could not be computed because the demographic variables were constant or had no variance in the student-level dataset. Therefore, these relationships should be considered not estimable rather than non-significant.

Discussion

The findings showed that School Climate and Culture was positively associated with students' academic performance, with a statistically significant relationship with Previous Year Scores ($r = .101, p = .045$). A large proportion of students (86.1%) perceived their school climate positively, supporting the views of Cai, *et al.* (2024) and Ozdogru, *et al.* (2025) [1] that effective school leadership contributes to academic achievement by promoting a safe, structured, collaborative, and academically focused environment. Instructional Supervision and Monitoring also showed a moderate positive relationship with School Climate and Culture ($r = .307, p < .001$), suggesting that visible instructional monitoring and feedback may reinforce a positive school environment.

At the teacher level, Administrative Communication was very strongly associated with Teacher Support and Mentorship ($r = .883, p < .001$). Similarly, teachers' length of service under the current principal was strongly related to Administrative Communication ($r = .639, p < .001$) and Teacher Support and Mentorship ($r = .756, p < .001$). These findings suggest that consistent leadership may be associated with stronger communication, teacher support, and mentoring practices, consistent with integrated leadership perspectives (Marks & Printy, 2003; Guo, *et al.* 2026) [8].

The comparative findings also indicated differences among the three schools. Yoechen Central School recorded higher mean scores in student-focused areas such as Instructional Supervision ($M = 2.98$) and School Climate ($M = 1.46$), while Yurung Central School recorded higher scores in staff-focused areas, including Administrative Communication ($M = 0.31$) and Teacher Support ($M = 0.23$). Overall, the findings indicate that leadership practices were associated with both school climate and teacher support, although the pattern varied across schools.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, MoESD and the Dzongkhag Education Sector should consider reducing administrative and reporting bur-

dens on school principals to allow greater focus on instructional leadership, including classroom observations, feedback, and academic monitoring. Schools should also institutionalize regular Professional Learning Community (PLC) sessions to strengthen teacher collaboration, peer mentoring, lesson planning, and the analysis of student performance data. In addition, school leaders should continue integrating GNH values with academic expectations by promoting student well-being, mutual respect, positive relationships, and supportive disciplinary practices.

The findings also suggest the importance of leadership continuity in strengthening communication and teacher support. Where feasible, education authorities may consider maintaining reasonable stability in principal appointments to support sustained communication, mentorship, and professional learning systems. Such measures could contribute to more consistent instructional leadership, stronger teacher support, and a positive school environment conducive to student learning.

Limitations

The study had some limitations related to sample composition and data structure. Although the student sample was relatively large ($n = 396$), the staff ($n = 62$) and principal ($n = 7$) samples were comparatively small, which may have limited the statistical power of staff- and principal-level analyses. In addition, teacher demographic variables could not be directly correlated with individual student academic scores because the student and teacher datasets were analysed separately without student-teacher pairing codes.

Academic performance was also based on student-reported score ranges rather than standardized official examination records, which may have introduced some reporting bias. Furthermore, the study was conducted in only three secondary schools in Pema Gatshel Dzongkhag; therefore, the findings should be interpreted cautiously when applying them to schools in other Dzongkhags or to urban settings with different educational contexts and resources.

Conclusion

This study provides key empirical evidence on how principals' instructional leadership practices influence school climate and student academic outcomes within secondary schools of Pema Gatshel Dzongkhag. The analysis confirms that while direct teaching falls outside a principal's routine daily duties, their leadership footprint

is deeply felt through indirect channels. Fostering an encouraging, value-based school climate and conducting active instructional supervision emerge as pivotal drivers of student achievement. Simultaneously, strong administrative communication and leadership longevity cultivate effective teacher support networks. By prioritizing instructional oversight and climate-building over routine paperwork, school leaders can effectively bridge achievement gaps and elevate standards across Bhutanese secondary education.

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