

Chapter 16

Advancing Wellbeing in Higher Education Through Instructional Leadership

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Abstract

This chapter highlights the close relationship between the wellbeing of faculty and students in higher education and the quality of teaching and learning. Improving teaching and learning is crucial for promoting the wellbeing of both faculty and students. As such, instructional leadership, an approach that focuses on enhancing teaching and learning, should be a priority for higher education leaders. However, the involvement of higher education leaders in instructional leadership is often limited. Therefore, a customized version of instructional leadership that considers the unique priorities, characteristics, and norms of this specific educational context should be implemented in higher education to prioritize the improvement of teaching and learning and, consequently, enhance the wellbeing of faculty and students.

Keywords: Wellbeing; higher education; instructional leadership; improvement of teaching and learning; promotion of enhanced quality of teaching

Introduction

The pursuit of wellbeing is a fundamental aspect of human existence. Wellbeing is a state of being that encompasses physical, mental, and emotional health, and it is essential for leading a fulfilling life (Diener et al., 2018; Tov, 2018). In the context of higher education, the importance of wellbeing is magnified as faculty and students navigate the demanding landscape of academia. Therefore, the role

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of higher education institutions in promoting the wellbeing of both faculty and students is essential (Schmidt & Hansson, 2018; Sood & Kour, 2023).

The question then arises, how can the wellbeing of faculty and students in higher education be enhanced? Apparently, this question has many correct answers. For example, higher education institutions can promote work–life balance by offering flexible work schedules (Franco et al., 2021). Higher education institutions can also provide resources and support to help students manage stress, anxiety, and other mental health issues (Pascoe et al., 2020). In addition, higher education institutions can foster a sense of community by promoting collaboration and teamwork among faculty and students, which creates a supportive and inclusive learning environment that enhances the wellbeing of all involved (Haar, 2018).

The common denominator among all these answers is that they do not directly relate to one of the main things that happen in higher education: teaching and learning. Therefore, the following section discusses the crucial role that teaching and learning play in promoting the overall wellbeing of faculty and students in higher education. This discussion will lay the groundwork for the central argument of the chapter, which focuses on highlighting how instructional leadership in higher education can yield positive outcomes not only in terms of teaching quality and academic results but also in enhancing the wellbeing of both faculty and students. Research has provided evidence that the implementation of instructional leadership in K-12 school settings can result in a significant enhancement in the quality of teaching and academic outcomes experienced by students. Higher education leaders who practice instructional leadership can improve teaching and learning and, in turn, contribute to the wellbeing of faculty and students in higher education.

The Connection Between Faculty and Students’ Wellbeing and Teaching/Learning

The quality of instruction, as well as the learning experience, significantly impacts the wellbeing of faculty and students. For faculty members, instruction is a central part of their professional identity and job satisfaction. Ineffective or unengaging instruction can lead to a sense of inadequacy, frustration, and burnout. On the other hand, successful instruction can lead to a sense of fulfillment, accomplishment, and increased motivation to continue improving teaching methods (Mudrak et al., 2018; Sood & Kour, 2023). Moreover, engaging in collaborative work on improving teaching skills creates a sense of belonging, social connectedness, and mutual support, which can lead to improved job satisfaction and the overall wellbeing of faculty in higher education. By working with colleagues, faculty can share ideas, receive feedback, and collaborate on improving teaching methods and outcomes, creating a sense of fulfillment and accomplishment (Castelló et al., 2017).

Likewise, the quality of the learning experience has a significant impact on the wellbeing of students. Engaging and relevant studies can lead to feelings of accomplishment, academic progress, and overall satisfaction (Govorova et al., 2020).

When students find the subject matter interesting and actively participate in the learning process, they are more likely to experience a sense of achievement. This sense of achievement, in turn, further enhances their self-confidence and serves as a motivation to continue their educational journey (Stanton et al., 2016). In contrast, monotonous or irrelevant studies can result in boredom, disengagement, poor academic performance, low self-esteem, and even mental health problems (Liu et al., 2019). Institutions have a responsibility to provide a learning environment that promotes student wellbeing, supports academic success, and encourages engagement. By enhancing the overall academic experience and creating an environment in which students can thrive, institutions can contribute to student wellbeing (Schmidt & Hansson, 2018; Sverdlik et al., 2018).

Given the critical relationship between teaching, learning, and the wellbeing of both faculty and students, this chapter will claim that higher education leaders must prioritize instructional leadership. Studies have gathered compelling evidence indicating that the implementation of instructional leadership in K-12 school settings can lead to a substantial improvement in both the quality of teaching and the academic outcomes achieved by students. Despite the proven benefits of instructional leadership in enhancing teaching quality and student achievement in school settings, its implementation in higher education has been largely lacking. This chapter aims to address this gap by advocating for the implementation of instructional leadership in higher education, emphasizing its potential to positively impact faculty development and student success and, therefore, their wellbeing. The concept of instructional leadership will be presented in the next section.

Lessons for Higher Education from PreK-12 Sector: Instructional Leaders

The role of the school principal has undergone significant changes throughout history. In the past, principals were primarily responsible for administrative and organizational tasks such as ensuring student safety, maintaining school policies, and overseeing facility maintenance. These principals were often occupied with day-to-day responsibilities such as ordering supplies and scheduling buses (Glanz, 2021). However, in today's education system, the principal's role has evolved. Instructional leadership has emerged as a critical responsibility for principals, and they are no longer seen solely as managerial administrators (Murphy et al., 2016; Shaked, 2023). The concept of instructional leadership refers to a school leadership approach that emphasizes school leaders' responsibility to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Effective principals recognize that focusing on instruction is the most impactful way to benefit students, despite the numerous administrative tasks that can distract them from this critical effort (Neumerski et al., 2018). As a result, they prioritize instructional leadership and dedicate themselves to enhancing teaching quality and fostering a culture of learning that promotes student success (Glickman et al., 2017). Thus, demonstrating instructional leadership is now an essential expectation for school principals in today's educational landscape (Hallinger et al., 2020; Walker & Qian, 2022).

The most commonly used framework of instructional leadership comprises three dimensions that include 10 functions (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Hallinger & Wang, 2015). The first dimension, defining the school mission, consists of two functions: (1) framing the school's instructional goals and (2) communicating those goals to all necessary parties. The second dimension, managing the instructional program, comprises three functions: (3) coordinating the school's curriculum; (4) supervising and evaluating instruction; and (5) monitoring students' progress. The third dimension, developing a positive school learning climate, incorporates five functions: (6) protecting instructional time from threats; (7) providing incentives to motivate teachers; (8) providing incentives to encourage students' learning; (9) promoting staff members' continual professional development; and (10) maintaining high visibility for quality interactions with teachers and students.

Shaked (2023) examined the main instructional leadership frameworks to identify the central components of instructional leadership, highlighting four key elements: (1) developing an instructional vision that fosters support for school goals and student learning outcomes; (2) coordinating, supervising, guiding, and monitoring the instructional program; (3) establishing a positive, achievement-focused academic climate; and (4) supporting teacher development to enhance their teaching practices throughout their careers.

Extensive research has shown the effectiveness of instructional leadership in achieving student outcomes and improving schools (Boyce & Bowers, 2018). Instructional leadership has been found to play a crucial role in facilitating and promoting academic progress among students (Murphy et al., 2016). A vast body of research literature has associated instructional leadership in principals with higher teaching quality and improved student achievements, regardless of organizational and geo-social contexts, including elementary, junior high, and high schools, public, private, and public charter schools, and urban and suburban schools (Day et al., 2016; Hallinger et al., 2020; Hou et al., 2019).

Since research has demonstrated that instructional leadership can positively impact teaching and learning outcomes in school settings, this chapter recommends implementing instructional leadership in higher education. The following section will discuss the potential benefits of this implementation, including improvements to the wellbeing of both faculty and students, fostering a conducive and thriving learning environment.

Instructional Leadership for Wellbeing in Higher Education

Studies have shown that implementing instructional leadership in K-12 school settings can lead to a notable improvement in the quality of teaching and academic outcomes for students. Therefore, this study suggests that instructional leadership be borrowed from the school setting and applied to higher education. Policy borrowing involves the introduction of an educational policy that originated in a different context with the aim of improving the receiving educational system (Nir et al., 2018). The practice of policy borrowing can reduce the need to "reinvent the wheel" when facing similar challenges, minimize uncertainties

associated with policy implementation, and provide a justification that can reduce resistance to change (Ng et al., 2015; Pan et al., 2017). However, it is important to consider the challenges that may arise from differences in institutional policies and values between the originating and receiving contexts (Qian et al., 2017; Steiner-Khamsi, 2016).

Although higher education differs from K-12 education in many ways, instructional leadership can still have a significant impact on improving teaching, learning, and results in higher education. Instructional leaders can play a vital role in enhancing the academic experience of students by promoting a culture of continuous learning and improvement among faculty members, who can reflect on their teaching practices and seek out opportunities for professional development. Additionally, instructional leadership can help create a supportive environment that enhances student learning and ensures that students receive the highest quality education possible, leading to improved outcomes for all involved.

The main argument of this chapter is that instructional leadership in higher education can have a positive impact not only on teaching quality and academic results but also on the wellbeing of faculty and students. Higher education leaders who demonstrate instructional leadership to improve teaching and learning practices can also create an environment that fosters the wellbeing of those involved. When faculty members feel supported in their teaching efforts and have access to professional development opportunities, they are more likely to feel fulfilled and engaged in their work. This, in turn, can have a positive impact on their overall wellbeing. Similarly, when students receive high-quality education and feel supported in their learning efforts, they are more likely to feel engaged and motivated, leading to improved academic and personal outcomes. Thus, by prioritizing instructional leadership, higher education leaders can create a more positive and supportive learning environment that benefits both faculty and students.

In other words, the significance of instructional leadership in higher education extends beyond its impact on teaching and learning outcomes. Instructional leadership can also improve the wellbeing of faculty and students. By enacting instructional leadership and supporting faculty members, higher education leaders create an environment that fosters professional growth and fulfillment. At the same time, when students receive high-quality education and feel encouraged in their learning endeavors, they are more likely to experience a sense of wellbeing that enhances their overall academic and personal experiences.

As will be noted below, while instructional leadership has been found to be beneficial in school settings, it has not been sufficiently implemented in higher education (Shaked, 2021). To facilitate a discussion on the limited implementation of instructional leadership in higher education, we will first examine some of the complexities of leadership in higher education.

Complexities of Leadership in Higher Education

In the research literature on higher education leadership, one of the key questions explored is the extent to which a hierarchical leadership structure is effective. Specifically, scholars have questioned whether the traditional pyramid-shaped

structure, with power centralized at the top, is the best approach to achieving higher education's mission or whether a flatter, more decentralized structure would be more effective (Goffee & Jones, 2009). Bryman's (2007) review of refereed journal articles revealed that fostering a collegial atmosphere is a recurring theme pertaining to leadership in higher education. This emphasizes the importance of involving faculty members in decision-making processes. Notably, research suggests that leaders of universities and colleges are more effective when they promote participatory decision-making (Jones et al., 2012). Distributed leadership, which emphasizes collective collaboration over individual power and control, is a proposed means for academics to develop shared responsibility in changing higher education cultures (Bolden et al., 2015; Jones, 2017).

Under the democratic, collegial atmosphere of the academic world, leadership in higher education institutions has long had its authority questioned, described by both leaders and subordinates as having limited legitimacy (Clegg & McAuley, 2005; Goffee & Jones, 2009). The prevalent perception is that leadership roles are "first among equals," with the leader having more responsibility or power but being on the same level as other faculty members and unable to impose a particular viewpoint on others (Altbach, 2011; Dopson et al., 2019). The situation is further complicated by the honorary nature of some leadership roles in academia, which are given to established or senior professors, as well as the temporary nature of higher education leadership positions, which often follow a rotation policy with faculty members assigned to roles for predetermined periods of several years (Burke et al., 2016; McCaffery, 2019).

The literature on leadership in higher education has also addressed the intricate relationship between teaching and research. For many years in academia, research has been given precedence over teaching, with the reward system in higher education primarily based on research outputs (Chen, 2015; Shin et al., 2014). As a result, leadership positions in higher education are typically occupied by faculty members with impressive research records (Goodall et al., 2014; Spendlove, 2007). However, critics have called for a renewed emphasis on the quality of the student experience and a broader definition of scholarship, including research, teaching, and service (Fitzgerald et al., 2016; Spowart et al., 2016). Research universities are now investing more in improving the quality of teaching (Lindblom & Kola, 2018) and moving away from traditional teacher-centered instruction to more innovative teaching approaches that have been shown to be more effective in terms of student learning and outcomes (Ebert-May et al., 2015; Gilboy et al., 2015). Therefore, more and more universities understand that academic leadership in higher education should not be focused on research only but also on teaching and learning (Grunefeld et al., 2017; Hofmeyer et al., 2015).

As mentioned above, although instructional leadership has been proven to improve school performance and student achievement, it has hardly ever been implemented in higher education (Shaked, 2021). The following section will use the characteristics of higher education leadership presented in this section to explain why instructional leadership takes only a secondary place in the role of higher education leaders.

The Limited Implementation of Instructional Leadership in Higher Education

According to Shaked (2021), the involvement of higher education leaders in instructional leadership activities is limited, with improving teaching and learning being of secondary importance in their leadership role. Interestingly, these leaders do not cite a lack of time or knowledge, as found in the literature on school principals (Goldring et al., 2015; May et al., 2012). Instead, they attribute their actions to a set of perceptions that reflect apparent inconsistencies between the instructional leadership framework and the nature of higher education. More specifically, they point out three contradictions between the instructional leadership framework and the abovementioned inherent characteristics of higher education.

First, higher education leaders perceive instructional leadership as incompatible with the fundamental norm of lecturer autonomy in higher education. Unlike in schools where instructional leadership is often portrayed as a hierarchical approach that requires teachers to achieve predetermined goals that have been set by the authorities, leaving them with limited independence (Aas & Brandmo, 2016), faculty members in higher education have autonomy to teach in the way they see fit. Given the collegial atmosphere prevailing in higher education (Bryman, 2007; Jones et al., 2012), higher education leaders believe that directing teaching and learning is neither feasible nor desirable as it would require them to undermine the autonomy deeply embedded in higher education institutions.

Second, higher education leaders perceive instructional leadership as incongruent with the emphasis on teaching quality in higher education. They view universities as places where research is prioritized over learning (Light & Calkins, 2015; Tight, 2016). Thus, the idea of instructional leadership, which places teaching and learning at the forefront of education (Bush, 2013; Hallinger, 2019), does not align with the mission of universities. While schools prioritize student learning and achievement (Biesta, 2009; Pritchard, 2013), and thus require instructional leadership (Shaked, 2019), the main objective of higher education has typically been to generate new knowledge through research.

Third, although not explicitly stated, the actions and practices of numerous higher education leaders reflect their unspoken beliefs that the focus of instructional leadership on enhancing teaching quality is inconsequential in the context of higher education. For these leaders, implementing innovative teaching approaches is unnecessary and unsuitable for the academic context, as traditional teacher-centered methods are already effective. According to them, adults learn differently than children, and while active learning may benefit younger learners, older ones can and should learn through passive listening.

How to Promote the Application of Instructional Leadership in Higher Education

Borrowing instructional leadership policy from schools and implementing it in higher education presents challenges due to the differences in context. To

address this, a customized version of instructional leadership should be implemented in higher education, a version that considers the unique priorities, characteristics, and norms of the context while still prioritizing the improvement of teaching and learning. This version of instructional leadership should take into account the contradictions between the traditional instructional leadership framework and the features of higher education, as mentioned earlier. Adaptations must be made accordingly to ensure that the framework is effective in the higher education context.

First, a customized version of instructional leadership can allow significant autonomy for lecturers and enable multiple individuals to influence leadership and instructional contexts. To do this, it is essential to distinguish between the core essence and the elements of instructional leadership. The primary focus should be on deepening the leaders' involvement in improving teaching and learning while adapting the authoritative or directive aspects to align with the norms of higher education. Additionally, research has shown that instructional leadership should involve many leaders within an institution rather than a single administrator (Hallinger, 2011; Leithwood et al., 2010). Therefore, it should be a distributed approach in which faculty members can take the lead in adopting innovative teaching methods to promote the assimilation of quality teaching practices.

Second, a customized version of instructional leadership can consider the importance of research in higher education. Research is highly valued and respected in higher education, and this has contributed to the underdevelopment of instructional leadership. However, many universities are now committed to enhancing teaching quality (Lindblom & Kola, 2018), and there is increased recognition of the significance of effective teaching in higher education. The customized version of instructional leadership can be based on the idea that improving teaching and learning is vital, even if it is not the primary goal of research universities. The customized framework can emphasize that research excellence and instructional improvements can be mutually beneficial. Enhancing teaching practices can provide research staff with knowledge and skills that can promote their academic research. Thus, instructional leadership can be viewed as an essential component that complements research excellence in higher education, ultimately leading to improvements in faculty members' wellbeing.

Third, a customized version of instructional leadership must take into consideration the distinct needs and characteristics of higher education when it comes to innovative and active teaching methods. The principles of adult education (Andragogy) differ from those of children's education (Pedagogy) (Loeng, 2018), which means that the teaching strategies and techniques that work well for schools may not be as effective in higher education. However, this does not mean that adults are suited to passive learning. In fact, adults require more autonomy in their learning process because their self-concept of dependency changes to independence (Clardy, 2005). They want to have control over their learning experience and exercise their power and influence (Ozuah, 2016). Although traditional teacher-centered methods are still commonly used in higher education, they are not as effective as student-centered instruction (Gilboy et al., 2015). Therefore, a customized version of instructional leadership should promote innovative and

active teaching methods that suit the needs and characteristics of higher education while allowing for greater autonomy and control over the learning experience.

Conclusion

The correlation between the wellbeing of faculty and students in higher education and the quality of teaching and learning is emphasized in this chapter. To promote the wellbeing of both parties, it is crucial to improve the quality of teaching and learning, making instructional leadership a top priority for higher education leaders. However, the extent of the involvement of higher education leaders in instructional leadership activities is often inadequate. Thus, a tailored approach to instructional leadership should be implemented. Instructional leadership in higher education may be quite different from the model used in schools, and yet may still be very useful for learning and results. This will prioritize the improvement of teaching and learning and, in turn, enhance the wellbeing of faculty and students.

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