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The impact of school leadership on school results - Exploring the foundations of a relationship

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1. Expectation setting with regards to school leadership?

Macro level: Education in an era of glocal challenges

- Rapid growth in scientific and medical discoveries, technology, including ICT, and the world's population
- Economic competitiveness and market share
- Sustainability; Identity within globalisation; Equity
- Stronger demands for technical performance, efficiency and productivity worldwide
- Key role of education, resolves not only social but also economic problems
- Strong demand for educational reforms
- Countries are seeking to adapt their education systems to the needs of contemporary society, preparation must be based on how work is being defined and organised in the 21st century
- New patterns of governance have become a priority in education policy agendas internationally

New Public Management (NPM) as main reference framework of New Educational Governance (NEG)

- Downsizing and decentralizing the public sector
- The imposition of the strongest feasible framework of competition and accountability on public sector activity
- Explicit standards and measures of performance, clear definition of targets and indicators of success;
- A greater emphasis on output control – a stress on results, not processes
- A shift from public funding to private sector provision

Restructuring of public schooling under the influence of NPM

- Decentralisation through school self-management
- Expanding the powers of school principals
- Increasing pressure for outcomes-based assessment
- Greater demands for financial accountability
- The injection of competition between schools
- An increase in consumer control through school governing councils

To sum it up

→ **Three main pillars** of New Educational Governance:

- a) School autonomy
- b) School accountability
- c) School choice and voice

Major expectations and challenges in redesigning the roles and responsibilities of school leaders with regards to NEG

a) ... Autonomy

Expectations	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• More democratic decision making	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lack of capacity building/lack of support systems
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• More relevant policies as school staff know their situation better	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Increase of administrative and managerial workload
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Less bureaucracy (in the sense of red tape)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Insufficient measures to strengthen the position of the head teacher
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Greater resource mobilization	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Roles and responsibilities within the decision making structure are not clear
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Positive implications of increased competition between schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Negative implications of increased competition between schools

Major expectations and challenges in redesigning the roles and responsibilities of school leaders with regards to NEG

b) ... Accountability

Expectations	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Greater influence of parents as schools can be held accountable for their results	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• No clear roles and responsibility structures with regard to the planning, administering and analysing the assessment
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identification of strengths and weaknesses of the school	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lack of coherency with regards to a system of evaluation
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Improved conditions for planning and effecting targeted improvements	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Evaluation overload
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Opportunity for Individual feedback on classroom level	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• An exaggerated focus on outcome criteria
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Teaching to the test
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lack of support systems
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Create competition between schools

Major expectations and challenges in redesigning the roles and responsibilities of school leaders with regards to NEG

c) ... free school choice

Expectations	Challenges
• More democratic decision making	• Roles and responsibilities within the decision making structure are not clear
• Less bureaucracy	• Create competition between schools
• Greater resource mobilization	• Lack of knowledge
• Create competition between schools	• Increase of parental expectations
• Fresh input	• Creaming effect

To sum it up

Larger and more demanding set of roles

- Once limited to functions of bureaucratic administrator and/or head teacher, the job is now increasingly **defined by a new, far larger and more demanding set of roles.**
- Enhanced administrative and managerial tasks
- Handle **financial** and human resources
- Manage public relations and build coalitions
- Engage in quality management and public reporting processes
- Provide leadership for training

To sum it up

Larger and more demanding set of roles

- The workload goes beyond what one single individual can possibly achieve successfully.
- Therefore..... recruit and develop a new generation of school leaders with the knowledge, skills and dispositions best suited to meet the current and future needs of education systems.
- In many countries there is the growing concern that the role of principal designed for the needs of a different time may not be appropriate to deal with the challenges schools are facing in the 21 century!!!

Obstacles for high quality leadership or “the reality check“

- There is a gap between the high demands on school leaders and the ways in which the profession is commonly conceived and regulated.
- In order to close that gap:
- As the roles and responsibilities of principals have evolved, the terms and conditions of service also need to be revised.
- Planned succession mechanisms
- Professionalised recruitment processes
- Preparatory training, mentoring of new leaders
- Approaches to school leadership policy need to be based on careful consideration of the context in which schools operate and their particular challenges. As expectations of what school leaders should achieve have changed, so must the definition and distribution of tasks, as well as the levels of training, support and incentives!!!

Obstacles for high quality leadership or “the reality check“

- It is the principal who carries the largest bulk of school-level leadership responsibilities.
- School-level differences or contextual factors have important implications for their leadership practice.
- “organizational or wider social context in which principals work that depress, neutralize or enhance the strength or nature of relationships between leadership practices and their effects on students and the school organization“ (Leithwood 2005).
- These features include: student background factors, school location, school size, government or public versus non-government designation of schools and school level.

→ When designing school leadership policy, it is important to governments to take account of contextual factors to respond more effectively to the different needs of principals in different types of schools!!!

Expectation setting with regards to school leadership?

- Acts as the **key intermediary** between the classrooms, the individual school and its community, and the educational system as a whole...
- Going beyond school borders, school leaders **can connect and adapt schools** to changing external environments
- At the school systems interface, **SL provides a bridge** between school improvement processes and externally initiated reform

Why should policymakers and practitioners care about the relationship between NGE and school leadership?

Practitioners should care about...

- the expansion and intensification of the principal's role (creating level of awareness)
- facing more complex challenges as a result of ongoing changes in social and family structures (environment)
- technological developments
- conflicts and clash of interests in school and community

Why should policymakers and practitioners care about the relationship between NGE and school leadership?

Researchers should care about...

- roles and responsibilities of school leaders under different governance structures
- what kind of New Educational Governance mix requires what kind of leadership styles mix (Situational governance versus situational leadership)
- promising policies and conditions in order to make school leaders most effective in improving school outcomes
- how effective school leadership can be best developed and supported
- policies and practices which are most conducive to these ends

Why should policymakers and practitioners care about the relationship between NGE and school leadership?

Policymakers should care about...

- Requirement of a new legal framework for practice, acknowledging the range of roles and responsibilities resulting from the new environment (NEG)
- Redefining and broadening school leaders' roles and responsibilities
- Changing the way school leadership is developed and supported
- Improving incentives to make headship in particular more attractive for existing heads and for those who will be taking up school leader positions in the future
- Strengthening the training and development approaches to help leaders face these new roles

2. Selected empirical findings on the relationship between school leaders and student achievement

Factors influencing student learning

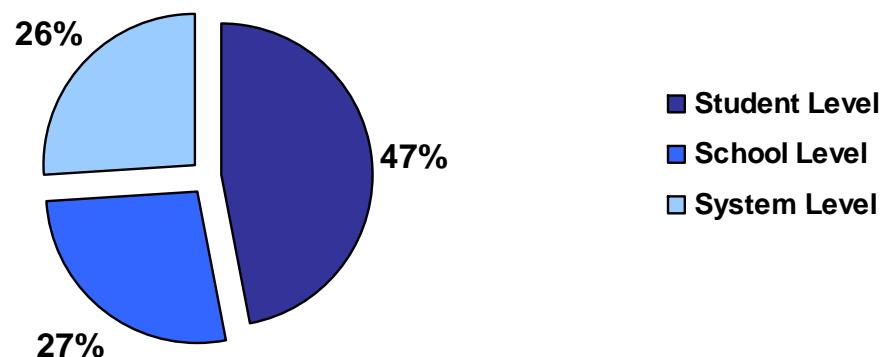
Three broad conclusions seem to emerge from the research analysing the factors influencing student learning

- 1.) Student background characteristics – especially social, economic and cultural background – frequently emerge as the most important source of variation in student achievement. Such student background characteristics cannot be influenced by educational policy in the short term.
- 2.) School related factors, which are more open to policy influence, explain a smaller part of the variations in student learning than student characteristics.
- 3.) Among school-level variables, the factors that are closest to student learning, such as teacher quality and classroom practices, tend to have the strongest impact on student achievement.

Research based evidence on NEG

Selected findings: NEG in PISA 2006

Decomposition of Performance Variance at Student, School and System Level



- 27 % at school level represents the field of action for school leaders
- 50% of the aforementioned variance still remains unexplained
- Difficult to differentiate between school and system level (gray area, intermediate range)

Why caring about the effect of school leadership when it is smaller than that of teaching?

- **Pivotal role of school leaders** (Scheerens and Bosker, 1997; Teddlie and Reynolds, 2000; Townsend, 2007)
- **School leadership** makes a difference in student learning (Leithwood et al. 2006)
- Two types of empirical evidence: **Case study** evidence and **large scale quantitative studies** (Leithwood and Riehl, 2003)
- **Case study** literature shows that successful schools have leaders who make a significant contribution to the effectiveness of their schools. However the results of such studies are difficult to generalise.
- The empirical evidence emerging from **large-scale quantitative studies** aiming to measure the impact of principals on student learning outcomes appears to be more ambiguous and inconsistent, with effect sizes ranging from non-existent to very significant.

Conclusion from more than 40 studies

- School leaders have a measurable, mostly indirect influence on learning outcomes.
- The impact of school leaders on student learning is generally mediated by other people, events and organisational factors (Hallinger and Heck, 1998).
- School leaders influence the motivations, capacities and working conditions of teachers who in turn shape classroom practice and student learning.
- Empirical research on the factors influencing student learning is conceptually and methodologically challenging. Student learning is shaped by a range of extra- and intra- organisational factors.
- Studies measuring the impact of different factors on student achievement tend to use data sets and methodologies providing limited measures of learning and partial indicators of the range of factors influencing it. The consequences and policy implications of such research may be questioned, especially when studies tend to generalise results across different contexts.

Table I: Leadership practices from studies of effects of leadership on student

Leadership practice	Meaning of dimension
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establishing goals and expectations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Includes the setting, communicating and monitoring of learning goals, standards and expectations, and the involvement of staff and others in the process so that there is clarity and consensus about goals
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strategic resourcing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Involves aligning resource selection and allocation to priority teaching goals. Includes provision of appropriate expertise through staff recruitment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Planning, Coordinating and evaluating teaching and the curriculum 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Direct involvement in the support and evaluation of teaching through regular classroom visits and provision of formative and summative feedback to teachers. Direct oversight of curriculum through school-wide coordination across classes and year levels and alignment to school goals
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promoting and participating in teacher learning and development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leadership that not only promotes but directly participates with teachers in formal or informal professional learning
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensuring an orderly and supportive environment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Protecting time for teaching and learning by reducing external pressures and interruptions and establishing an orderly and supportive environment both inside and outside classrooms.

Source: Robinson, Vivian M.J. (2007): *The impact of leadership on student outcomes: Making sense of the evidence* [Policy Brief]. Aurora, CO: mid-continent Research for Education and Learning. Available online at www.mcrel.org

From Table I: Leadership practices studies of effects of leadership on students

The 21 Responsibilities of school leaders that increase student achievement

1. **Situational awareness:** The leaders' awareness of the schools' dynamics and their "use of this information to address current and potential problems."
2. **Flexibility:** The leaders' ability to "adapt their leadership behaviour to the needs of the current situation" and their ability to accept dissenting opinions.
3. **Discipline:** School protect "teachers from issues and influences that would detract from their instructional time or focus."
4. **Outreach.** The leader is "an advocate and a spokesperson for the school to all stakeholders."
5. **Monitoring/Evaluating.** School leaders create "a system that provides feedback."
6. **Culture.** The leader "fosters shared beliefs and a sense of community and cooperation among staff."
7. **Order.** The school leader "establishes a set of standard operating principles and routines."
8. **Resources.** School leaders provide "teachers with materials and professional development necessary for the successful execution of their duties."
9. **Knowledge of Curriculum, Instruction & Assessment.** The school leader "is aware of the best practices in these domains. The focus here is on the acquisition and cultivation of knowledge."
10. **Input.** School leaders involve "teachers in the design and implementation of important decisions and policies."

From Table I: Leadership practices studies of effects of leadership on students

The 21 Responsibilities of school leaders that increase student achievement
11. Change Agent. The school leader embodies a “disposition to challenge the status quo.”
12. Focus. The leader “establishes clear goals and keeps those goals in the forefront of the school’s attention.”
13. Contingent Rewards. School leaders “recognize and reward individual accomplishments.”
14. Intellectual Stimulation. The leader “ensures that faculty and staff are aware of the most current theories and practices regarding effective schooling and makes discussions of those theories and practices a regular aspect of the school’s culture.”
15. Communication. The school leader “establishes strong lines of communication with and between teachers and students.”
16. Ideals/Beliefs. The school leader’s behaviors include “possessing well-defined beliefs about schools, teaching, and learning; sharing beliefs about school, teaching, and learning with staff; and demonstrating behaviors that are consistent with beliefs.”
17. Involvement in Curriculum, Instruction, & Assessment. The principal is “directly involved in the design implementation of curriculum, instruction, and assessment activities at the classroom level.”
18. Visibility. The school leader “interacts with teachers, students, and parents.”
19. Optimizer. The leader “inspires others and is the driving force when implementing a challenging innovation.”
20. Affirmation. The school leader “recognizes and celebrates school accomplishments – and acknowledges failures...At its core this responsibility involves a balanced and honest accounting of a school’s successes and failures.”
21. Relationships. The school leader “demonstrates an awareness of the personal lives of teachers and staff.”

Source: Waters, J.T., Marzano, R.J., McNulty, B.A. (2003): *Balanced Leadership: What 30 years of research tell us about the effect of leadership on student achievement*. Aurora, CO: Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning.

Effectiveness enhancing teaching conditions

- Opportunity to learn (match between content taught and content tested, or examined)
- Time on task per subject
- Structured teaching
- Reflection on learning strategies (or meta-cognition)
- Formative assessment and feedback

Intermediary variables in “indirect effects models” of school leadership

Reference of study	Significant intermediary variables
• Hallinger and Heck, 1998	• Learning climate • Principal's instructional efforts
• Hallinger, Bickman and Davis, 1996	• A clear school mission • Students' opportunity to learn • Teachers' expectations
• Hill, Rowe, and Holmes-Smith, 1995	• Teacher student interactions • Professional climate
• Bosker, De Vos and Witziers, 2000	• Teachers' job satisfaction • Teachers' achievement orientation • Evaluation and feedback practices
• Kythreotis and Pashardis, 2006	• Teachers' commitment to the school • Teachers' academic emphasis • Personal achievement goal orientations • Classroom performance-goal structure

3. From PISA to LISA: searching for the right leadership-cocktail mix

Three main models

... of principals' leadership effects on student achievement

1. The model of **direct effects**
2. The model of **indirect effects**
3. The model of **reciprocal effects**

Research and inspection evidence demonstrates the close correlation between the quality of teaching and the achievements of pupils, and the correlation between the quality of leadership and the quality of teaching.

These kinds of presumed links have prompted the definition of national or system-wide standards of effective leadership.

Overall purpose of LISA is ...

- ... to explore how school leadership, directly or indirectly, affects student achievement.
- ... meant to uncover relevant differences between countries against the background of differences between national educational systems.
- ... to find a common core, which might be interpreted as a European dimension in school leadership.
- ... to promote cooperation and collaborative research activities between school leaders and researchers in a learning environment at a European level.

Two main issues

Generally speaking, in the study of School Leadership and its Effects, two main issues have arisen:

1. What **positions or roles** do leaders have in a school organization?
2. Under **what conditions** does school leadership affect student achievement, and to **what extent?**

Research questions of LISA

Core question: role that principals' leadership styles, attitudes and practices can play in contributing to the improvement and effectiveness of the school (especially educational outcomes like PISA)

Core question subdivided into **three research guiding questions**:

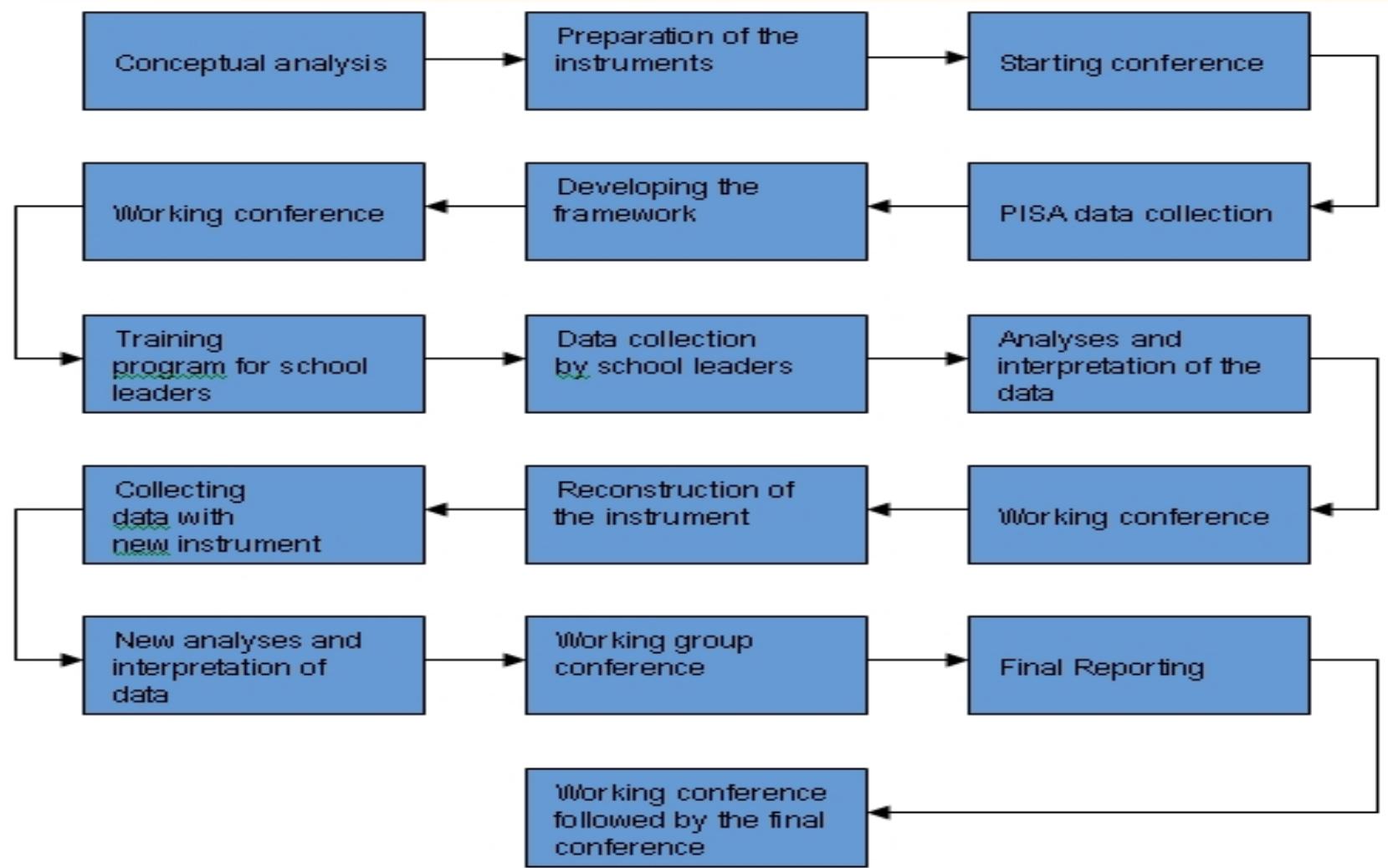
1. How is the role of secondary school principals positioned in the educational system of the country?
2. How do secondary school principals perceive their role, preferred leadership style, and their effectiveness in enhancing the overall quality of education?
3. Through which intermediary factors and mechanisms can school principals have an impact on the improvement of the well-being and achievement of students?

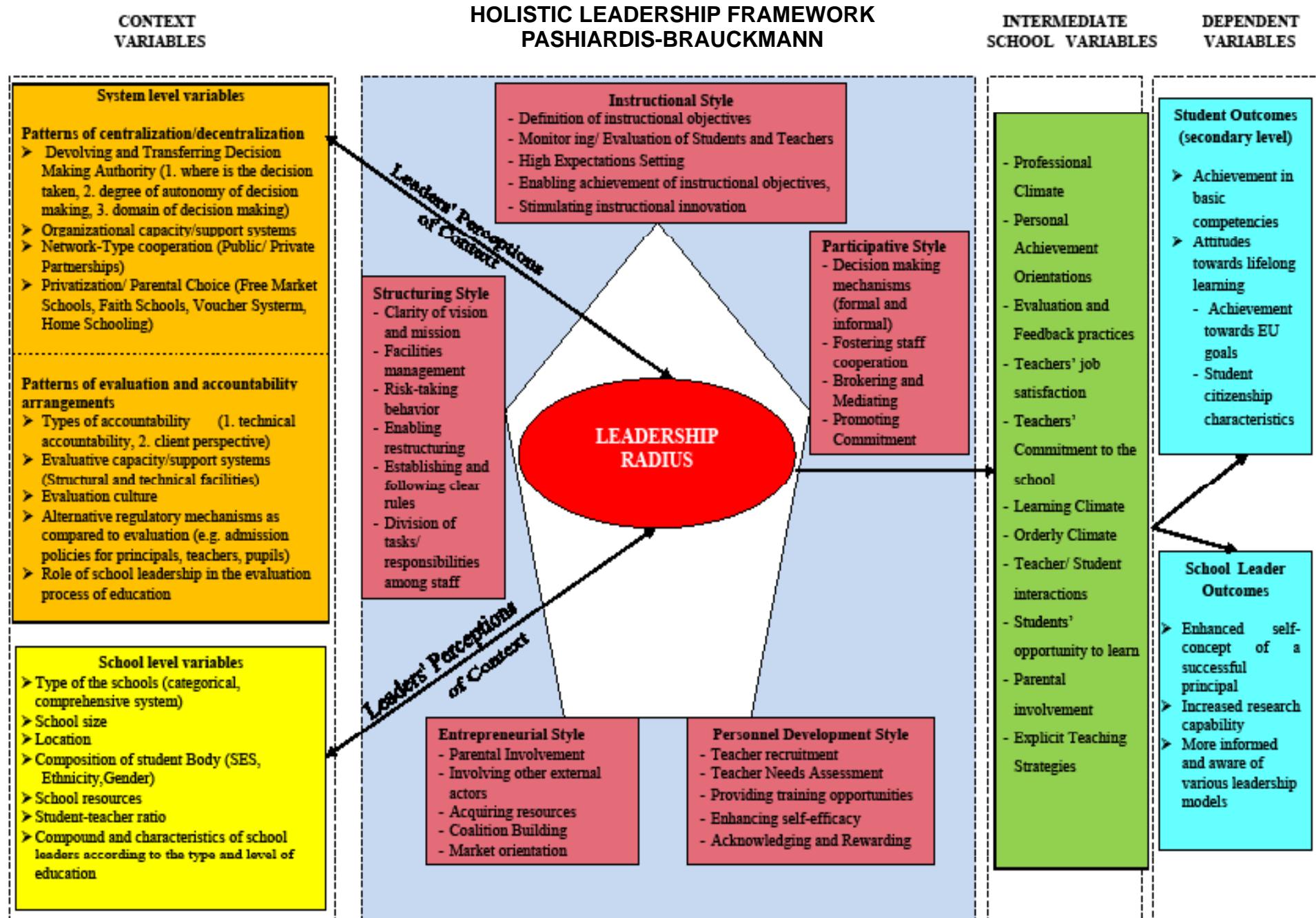
Tasks (T) and methods (M) according to those three guiding research questions

1. **T:** To study the way the functions of school leaders in secondary education in the participating countries are shaped by patterns of decentralization and centralization as well as accountability requirements.
M: Documentary analyses, questionnaires, semi-structured interviews
2. **T:** To develop our own conceptual framework for measuring the effectiveness of school leadership in an international context.
M: Hypothetical model building, operationalization based on model guided self-perception instruments
3. **T:** To specify intermediary factors between school leadership characteristics and student outcomes.
M: Quantitative secondary analysis of international data-sets, resulting in numerical estimates of path coefficients for each participating country

Current state of LISA?

Working stages of the project:





What are we intending to do next?

- Validation of the instruments
- Training school leaders in order to become co-researchers (workshops)
- Data collection through the validated instruments in the seven participating countries
- Analyses of our data and cross-comparisons between the countries in an effort to reach some generalizable results
- Setting the stage for a larger scale pan-European research, as this is an exploratory, outlier research study

What to keep in mind for the mutual LISA learning process?

For practitioners:	For researchers:
research problems are narrow	difficulties in meeting the so-called accuracy standards of empirical research, particularly reliability and objectivity
research methods lack ecological validity	Lack of knowledge on empirical research method to function well as collaborators of researchers
difficulties in the functioning of diffusion	

Agree on a working theory (creating a working platform)
Feedback processes (creating a working language, common understanding)
Cooperation in defining the research and development targets
to discuss together the research outcomes (sense making process)

Becoming a learning professional community!!!