2023

Visibility of School Leadership: Building Trust

Jessica Brooke Jack
Maranatha Baptist University, jessicabrookejack@gmail.com

Recommended Citation

Visibility of School Leadership: Building Trust

Cover Page Footnote

Many thanks to the educators whose insight and generosity made this research possible.

Visibility of School Leadership: Building Trust

Jessica Brooke Jack

Maranatha Baptist University

Abstract

This mixed methods study investigated teacher perceptions of the relationship between school leader visibility and teacher trust in that leader in two private Christian elementary and secondary schools of less than 1,000 students in California. A review of current available literature on this topic revealed three key themes: the positive effect a trusted leader has on an organization and school, the positive effect leader visibility has on building trust in leader-follower relationships, and the need for frequency and quality of leader visibility to build trust. In this study, three key themes emerged from an original survey and one-on-one, in-depth teacher interviews, which supported prior study findings and provided further insight. The three themes identified in this study include a strong relationship between leader visibility and teacher trust in that leader, teachers' desire for frequent visibility of their school leader, and teachers' emphasis on the critical role of high-quality visibility in increasing trust in their leader. Christian school leaders should maintain frequent, high-quality visibility in both unscheduled, informal and scheduled, formal interactions to cultivate trust and build relationships with teachers that furthers the success of their educational institution and its stakeholders.

Keywords: leadership, visibility, trust, frequency, quality

Background

The success of individual students and an entire school largely depends on an effective school leader. One key attribute of effective leadership is maintaining the trust of their followers. Trusted, effective school leadership is a critical factor contributing to the success of a school, staff, and student outcomes, as a myriad of studies have shown (Heck & Hallinger, 2014; Leithwood et al., 2014; Leithwood et al., 2020; Marzano et al., 2001; Spengler & Roberts, 2018; Waters & McNulty, 2018). Studies by Louis and Wahlstrom (2011) as well as Morris et al. (2020) point to the positive impact a principal can have on shaping the culture throughout the school community.

Some key attributes that have been linked to effective school leadership include instructional leadership, developmental responsiveness, communication and collaboration skills, and relationship building (Adams & Forsyth, 2009; Barkman, 2015; Day et al., 2009; Day et al., 2011; Gale & Bishop, 2014; Jackson, 2018; Lambersky, 2016; Leithwood et al., 2020; Marzano et al., 2001; Mitchell, 2019; Nichols, 2019; Nooruddin & Baig, 2014). The ability to build strong relationships with a high degree of mutual trust is an essential characteristic of school leadership that studies have found to boost positive school culture and teacher morale, commitment, and self-efficacy (Day et al., 2011), while lowering teacher stress levels and student behavioral issues, which affects student academic performance (Lambersky, 2016). Clearly, teacher trust in school leadership is paramount to ensure staff, student, and school success.

But how can leaders gain, increase, and maintain the trust of their followers, particularly the professional educators under their leadership? Often a school leader is sequestered behind closed doors in confidential meetings or behind their desk under piles of paperwork, and school leaders often forget how vital their visibility is in increasing the trust that teachers have in them. Accessibility, personal relationships, and professional support through visibility are critical to the success of the leader, the teachers, the school, and its students, and trust plays a strong role in these relationships.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore teacher perceptions of the relationship between the visibility of a school leader and the trust teachers have in that leader.

Relevance

This study provided educational leaders with insight into how teachers perceive their visibility and how that visibility affects their trust in leadership. School leaders, especially principals, may increase their effectiveness and acumen in their role by better understanding how frequent, quality visibility can build trust between teachers and leadership.

As trust in leadership increases in a school, teachers can benefit from higher levels of teacher morale, collective self-efficacy, job satisfaction, and commitment to the organization that is connected to mutual trust with school leadership (Atik & Celik, 2020), as well as build a stronger professional learning community (Hallam et al., 2015). Additionally, as trust in leadership increases in a school, students can benefit from higher student performance and attenuation of the negative relationship between low socioeconomic status and academic achievement (Adams & Forsyth, 2009; Forsyth et al., 2006). Clearly, the benefits of increasing trust in school leadership are plentiful, impactful, and worth pursuing through further research.

Research Questions

This study explored the following research questions through the responses of 21 professional educators in two private Christian elementary and secondary schools in California of less than 1,000 students.

Primary Research Question

What perceptions do teachers have of the relationship between their school leader's visibility and their levels of trust in that leader?

Secondary Research Question

What perceptions do teachers have of the roles that frequency and quality of their school leader's visibility play in increasing their trust in that leader?

Literature Review

This literature review aimed to summarize and synthesize current research on the role that school leader visibility has on the levels of trust followers have in that leader. The review of current literature found within peer-reviewed journal articles on the topic of school leadership visibility and its effect on trust first included a key theme of the role of trust in leadership and the organizational effectiveness and success in a school. Second, the literature emphasized the positive effect that visibility has on building trust in leader-follower relationships, which support school success. The third theme pointed to the need for school leadership to increase frequency of practices in quality visibility that can increase trust from their followers, particularly teachers under their leadership. The link between leader visibility and followers' trust in that leader emerged from the research conducted, but the need for further research on the role that visibility of a school leader can have on trust in the leader by school stakeholders and on the role that frequency and quality of leader visibility play in this dynamic is apparent.

Discussion of Key Terms

Leaders are known to play a key role in the health and success of an organization. Leadership is the position and act of leading and shaping behavior by followers in an organization and, in the case of school leadership, refers to superintendents, school administration, curriculum and instructional leaders, and principals, who are the primary focus of this study. These leaders hold a critical position in shaping and guiding teaching staff, students, and parents of the school to a successful future under the mission and vision of the school, and their visibility often varies by situation and individual. Visibility refers to the "the quality or state of being visible," which is "capable of being seen" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). More specifically, the visibility of school leadership refers to the capability of school leaders being visible to their followers or school

stakeholders, both formally in scheduled appointments, observations, assemblies, and meetings, and informally through unscheduled visits, hallway conversations, social events, and even sightings without personal interaction. Trust refers to the honesty, reciprocal faith, and loyalty between members of a human relationship (Kochanek, 2005). Frequency, which refers to the quantity and timing of interactions, and quality, which refers to the relational satisfaction and depth of the interaction, are both factors of visibility examined in research on this topic. School leaders need specific and practical guidelines for successful practices to build trust in order to be effective leaders, and the relationship between these factors requires more exploration and research.

Literature Review Method

This literature review gathered information from 47 sources, the majority being peer-reviewed journal articles published in the last 15 years, with a few articles published in the last 20 years, and two foundational articles published 23 and 25 years ago. A mix of qualitative, quantitative, mixed methods, and journal article studies were discovered on the topic in question. The key terms and phrases used to research and locate articles in Google Scholar, ERIC database, and Maranatha Baptist University's Cedarholm digital library included leadership, accessibility, visibility, trust, effective school leadership, and successful school leadership, as well as replacing leadership or leaders with administration or administrators. Furthermore, expanding on the topic of visibility with searches on quantity and frequency of leader visibility and trust yielded greater results in this specific vein of research. There is extensive research published on the topic of leadership and trust in leadership in general; however, this literature review aimed to synthesize the available research conducted on the visibility of school leadership in particular, in relation to followers' trust in that leader. Some research was located on the effect that visibility has on trust of leadership in a school setting, with a few articles exploring the importance of visibility of school leadership (Graham, 2018; Jackson, 2018; Marzano et al., 2001; Whitaker, 1997), one foundational article exploring the role that visibility plays in fostering a servant-leadership relationship requiring trust (Tucker et al., 2000), and a few articles researching the effect that visibility has on teacher perception of their trust in that school leader (Banwo et al., 2011; Boren, 2010; Hallam et al., 2013; Service, 2011).

Themes Found in Literature Review

Trust in Leader-Follower Relationships

Within the study of attributes of effective school leaders, one major theme to emerge from the literature was the important role that trust plays in leadership effectiveness through building strong leader-follower relationships (Adams & Forsyth, 2009; Adams, 2013; Atik & Celik, 2020; Barghouti, 2019; Bryk & Schneider, 2003; Dirks & Ferrin, 2001; Forsyth et al., 2006; Handford & Leithwood, 2013; Kennedy & Jury, 2016; Kochanek, 2005; Lesinger et al., 2018; Nooruddin & Baig, 2014; Tschannen-Moran, 2004; Tschannen-Moran, 2014).

Trust in Organizations

Trust is considered a vital component of human relationships that envelops honesty, reciprocal faith, and loyalty between the members of the relationship (Kochanek, 2005). Several studies have demonstrated that in organizations, employee trust in leadership is found to be linked to higher levels of participation, innovation, and motivation, which improves the organizational results as a whole and decreases staff burnout and turnover (Barghouti, 2019; Dirks & Ferrin, 2001; Kennedy, 2016).

Trust in a School Setting

In a school setting in particular, trustworthiness was deemed a critical characteristic of an effective school leader (Marzano et al., 2001; Kochanek, 2005). Mutual trust between leaders and followers was found to be a critical aspect of raising teacher morale, collective self-efficacy, job satisfaction, and commitment to the organization (Atik & Celik, 2020), while leader consistency to follow through on programs or promises enhances the trust that followers have in a school leader (Tschannen-Moran, 2014). Higher levels of collective parent and teacher trust perceptions were found to have a direct, strong effect on student performance (Adams, 2013), and trust attenuates the negative relationship between low socioeconomic status and academic achievement (Adams & Forsyth, 2009; Forsyth et al., 2006). According to a 2003 study by Bryk and Schneider, trust between stakeholders in a school improves routine procedures and is key for reform, and Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2015) found faculty trust in leadership "essential" in high-performing schools. Hallam et al. (2015) identified mutual trust as "critical" in developing a successful professional learning community and found that principals are best positioned to develop this trust in faculty. A leader can build trust through demonstration of honesty, personal character, integrity, mutual respect, clear communication, consistency, competency, and expertise in their core responsibilities (Bryk & Schneider, 2003; Kochanek, 2005). Handford and Leithwood (2013) furthermore identified perception of "competence, consistency and reliability, openness, respect and integrity" as key factors that teachers linked to trusting school leaders.

Leader Visibility and Building Trust

The second major theme to appear from the literature review was the positive role that visibility plays in building trust and relationships to form effective leadership in organizations generally and in school leadership particularly (Ellis, 2009; Graham, 2018; Hallam et al., 2013; Jackson, 2018; Kennedy & Jury, 2016; Marzano et al., 2001; Marzano & Waters, 2009; Tucker et al., 2000; Whitaker, 1997; Whitaker et al., 2009).

In Organizations

A 2016 study by Kennedy and Jury highlights the important role that visibility played in a hospital setting in building trust and relationship between hospital leaders and followers, such

as nurses; as leaders circulated the hospital, conversed with nurses, and engaged in more visible interactions on the hospital floor, nurses reported feeling that their leaders cared about their tasks and about them personally, and had a "finger on the pulse" of what was going on in the day-to-day operations. In a foundational study on visibility, Tucker et al. (2000) explores the role visibility plays in building trust through servant leadership and reports that visible action and visibility of a leader gives power to a leaders' vision, which greatly enhances follower trust and shared vision. Ellis (2009) also confirmed this view, reporting that leaders who are not visible are not able to effectively share their vision with followers.

In a School Setting

In an educational setting, visibility was found by a 2001 meta-analysis of 69 studies by Marzano et al. to be one of the top ten key characteristics of effective school leaders and is confirmed as a critical attribute of effective educational leaders in a 2009 study by Marzano and Waters. Whitaker (1997) writes in a foundational article on this topic that principal visibility and accessibility, both inside and outside of the classroom, and both scheduled, formal and unscheduled, informal interactions, are paramount to a school leaders' success, as their role is highly relational, and people-oriented. Whitaker et al. (2009) suggest in their book *Leadership by Walking Around* that being out and highly visible in the school environment provides a leader with "opportunities to support, reward, and acknowledge students and teachers in their environment." Furthermore, Nooruddin and Baig (2014) found that student behavior improved with increased leader visibility, adding to the importance of visibility in this role.

In 2018, Graham reports that to build a culture of trust, which is linked to effective schools, a school leader should be visible, always circulating to observe learning and teaching, to relate to and support staff, and to support teacher self-efficacy and accountability. A study by Jackson (2018) suggests that school management by visibility was an effective strategy for building trust in staff and students, as well as parents, and was perceived by staff as a strategy effective school leaders utilize to manage. Lasater (2016) emphasizes the need for explicit training in building rapport, trust, and communication as a school leader, and points to increasing visibility and accessibility as a critical facet of fostering rapport and trust through structuring both formal and informal methods of leader visibility.

Frequency and Quality of Visibility

Several studies provide insight into the role that frequency and quality of visibility play in a teacher's perception of trust in their leader. One study conducted in a Ugandan secondary school found that "teachers' perceptions of headteacher relational trustworthiness were strongly related to both the level of risk and formality of headteacher visibility" (Boren, 2010). In a related study at the same school, leader visibility was directly related to teacher perceptions of trustworthiness, while teacher personalities and types of visibility moderated the teacher perceptions of leader trustworthiness (Hallam et al., 2013). Particularly powerful was the finding that leader-teacher trust can be "substantially improved through low-risk

unscheduled visibility, and moderately through and low- and high-risk scheduled school leader visibility" (Hallam et al., 2013). A 2011 study by Service highlighted the quality of the leader's visibility, finding that one principal's intentional efforts to increase visibility through more professional conversations, interactions that show genuine interest for teachers, and specific feedback, teachers felt that community, professional learning, and relational trust in their leader grew. Additionally, Banwo et al. (2022) delineate in their findings that "dynamic, iterative, regular interactions over a long period" of time by district leadership with school leaders built trust and positive school leadership relationships, which emphasized both quality and frequency of visibility as useful in building trust in a school.

Summary

An educator's task is inarguably a monumental one; the role of an educator in shaping and preparing a young mind for a successful future is critical and requires effective leadership and support. School leaders need to recognize the important role that building trust plays in forging strong relationships, as well as the role that visibility plays in building this trust. After reviewing the available literature on this topic, several implications can be made which are beneficial for school leadership to apply. First, building trust and relationships plays a strong role in leader effectiveness, and leaders should find successful ways to build trust among staff. Second, visibility plays an important role in building trust in a school leader, and those leaders should cultivate valuable habits of being more visible, both scheduled and unscheduled, inside and outside of the classroom. Third, the quality and frequency of the visibility are important, as frequent, intentional, genuine visibility and interactions build trust in teacher relationships with school leaders. While there is ample research on effective school leadership, much of which points to trust and visibility as characteristics effective leaders demonstrate, more research on the relationship that visibility and trust have regarding school leader-follower dynamics is recommended. Additional research on what types of interactions and visibility are most effective in building trust may aid principals in becoming more effective leaders. Further qualitative study on this topic would be beneficial for the field, particularly to understand the nature and nuances of the relationship between leader visibility and trust.

Methodology

In order to better understand the relationship between a school leader's visibility and the trust teachers have in their leader, research was conducted to explore teachers' understanding and perception of this relationship. This section addresses the research design of the study, the selection of participants in the study, the setting of the study, the study method of data collection and procedure, as well as limitations of the study.

Study Design

This study followed a mixed methods research design, which "collects both the qualitative (open-ended) and quantitative (closed-ended) data in response to research questions or hypotheses" (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Through the qualitative research design, data were built inductively from particulars to build themes of a narrative, with the researcher interpreting the data's meaning (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). This was conducted through one-on-one, in-depth interviews of educators in this study, and open-ended questions in an anonymous electronic survey. Additionally, quantitative research, conducted through close-ended, scaled questions in the survey, provided a numeric description of "trends, attitudes or opinions of a population by studying a sample of that population" (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). This study, which obtained official Institutional Review Board approval from Maranatha Baptist University preceding research, followed a mixed methods research design to combine the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative research design methods, paint a fuller, richer picture of the opinions and insights of the sample of study participants, and put the findings into context in a meaningful way for beneficiaries of this study

Study Participants

The population of this study were professional educators who are currently or recently employed as teachers at two private Christian schools of less than 1,000 students in California. The sample size for this study included 27 educators, with 7.4% working at the preschool level (two), 40.7% working at the elementary school level (11), 29.6% working at the middle school level (eight), and 22.2% working at the high school level (six). The sample of study participants included a mix of genders and age demographics, and a variety of experience in teaching, with 40.7% educators with 1–5 years of experience (11), 14.8% educators with 6–10 years of experience (four), 25.9% educators with 11–15 years of experience (seven), 7.4% educators with 16–20 years of experience (two), and 11.1% educators with 21–30 years of experience (three). For the interviews, five female educators and one male educator, with a range of experience, were consulted. Interview participants, who were a subset of the survey population included a sample consisting of 16.6% educators with 1–5 years of experience (one), 16.6% educators with 6–10 years of experience (one), 16.6% educators with 11–15 years of experience (one), and 50% educators with 21–30 years of experience (three). Participants were recruited for this study through electronic mail requests, based on their professional networking relationships with the researcher and their qualification for the population of this survey, which was professional educators at two private Christian schools of less than 1,000 students. Educators who agreed to participate in the study were informed of the purpose, risks, benefits, anonymity, security, and procedure of the study and consented to participate in the study on a completely voluntary basis.

Study Setting

The setting for this study intended to give space for educators to express their views honestly on the primary research question in a personal setting. The setting of the study for the first

phase was an anonymous electronic survey through an encrypted and secure electronic survey platform, Google Forms. Due to the intent of the qualitative research method of open-ended interview responses to allow data to emerge organically (Creswell & Creswell, 2017), the second phase of the study consisted of a one-on-one, in-depth interview setting with the researcher and participant, either in-person or virtually, in a quiet, private setting.

Study Data Collection and Procedure

Surveys and Interviews

The data for this study were collected in two phases: first, both qualitative and quantitative data were collected through an electronic survey administered to 27 participants through a secure, encrypted electronic survey platform. This electronic survey was collected completely anonymously, with identifiable factors remaining unknown, even to the researcher. This survey began with questions that established demographic information, such as "What is your current or most recent teaching position level? Choose 'preschool,' 'elementary,' 'junior high,' or 'high school.'" "How many years have you worked as a professional educator? Choose 'Less than 1 year,' '1–5 years,' '6–10 years,' '11–15 years,' '16–20 years,' '21–30 years,' '31–40 years,' or '41–50 years.'" Next, the survey gathered quantitative data on teacher insight and perceptions of leadership, trust, and visibility with closed-ended and scaled questions, such as "In your opinion, what are the top 5 characteristics that an effective school leader (administration, especially the principal) should demonstrate? Please check 5. Choose from 'Responsible,' 'Proactive/Problem solving,' 'Caring,' 'Competent/Knowledgeable,' 'Communication skills,' 'Strong relationship skills,' 'Furthers mission and vision of the school,' 'Visible to teachers, students, parents,' 'Promotes positive school culture,' 'Strong academic leadership,' 'Strong discipline policy and enforcement,' 'Academic resource and support for teachers,' or add another response." "On a scale of 1 to 5, 1 being of no importance and 5 being of extreme importance, how important is it to you that you trust your school leader?" "As a teacher, do you feel your current or most recent school leader is visible to you enough on a weekly basis? Choose 'I do.' or 'I don't.'" "On average, how many times a week would you prefer to see your school leader, both in scheduled settings (meetings, assemblies, classroom observations, etc.) and unscheduled settings (hallway, courtyard, breaks, sightings from afar)? Choose '0 times per week,' '1–2 times per week', '3–4 times per week,' '5–6 times per week,' '7–8 times per week,' '9–10 times per week,' or 'More than 10 times per week.'" "Do you see your school leader more often in scheduled settings, or unscheduled settings? Choose 'Scheduled settings' or 'Unscheduled settings.'" "In which setting would you prefer more visibility and interaction with your school leader? Choose 'Scheduled settings' or 'Unscheduled settings.'" "Do you find increased visibility of a school leader to increase your levels of trust in them? Choose 'Yes,' 'No,' 'Maybe,' or other." "Do you trust a school leader more because of the frequency or quality of their visibility and interaction? Choose 'Yes,' 'No,' 'Maybe,' or other." "Do you find increased visibility of a school leader to increase their effectiveness as a leader? Choose 'Yes,' 'No,' 'Maybe,' or other." The survey also included open-ended quantitative questions to gather deeper insight into teacher perceptions of leader visibility and trust, such as "What do you want most from the visibility of and interactions with

your school leader? Please briefly describe." "What other insight do you have on the way that visibility of a school leader affects your trust in that leader? Please briefly describe." As both open-ended and close-ended data were collected from the survey, themes were codified and organized according to topics and ideas as they emerged, allowing for unbiased analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

Finally, qualitative data were collected through in-person, in-depth interviews with six individual teachers in order to gain deeper insight into their perceptions on the relationship between the school leader's visibility and their trust in that leader. These interviews allowed participants to express their views without the constraints of survey responses, using their own language and voice to respond more powerfully and personally (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). As interviews were conducted with teachers, themes were codified and organized according to topics and ideas, which added to the themes and ideas collected from the electronic survey in phase one. This process took four weeks, and all interview participants were asked the same focused questions for each interview.

Data Analysis

The coded data and ideas that emerged from the data collection were subsequently organized and studied to gain understanding of the common meanings and significance that emerged from the data. Similarities were noted and grouped, while common themes and insights were recorded, sorted, and analyzed for results and meaning. Results of the quantitative and qualitative survey were analyzed alongside results from open-ended interview responses to corroborate findings and add depth to the survey results.

Study Results

Trust in School Leaders

Survey Results

As a result of the electronic survey of 27 professional educators, the researcher discovered the high degree of importance the teachers placed on their trust of their school leader, as 100% of participants stated that it is "very important" or "extremely important" that they trust their school leader. Of the participants 70.7% stated that "trustworthy" or "strong relationship skills" are among the top five characteristics that an effective school leader should demonstrate, along with being proactive and problem solving (70.4%), and having strong communication skills (70.4%). Several traits that had the same result (40.7%) of inclusion in the top five characteristics of an effective school leader included furthering the mission and vision of the school; visibility to teachers, students, and families; and promoting a positive school culture. This confirms literature review findings in previous studies, which point to

trust in furthering strong relationships as critical traits of an effective school leader (Marzano et al., 2001; Kochanek, 2005; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015).

Interview Results

In one-on-one interviews with six teachers at two private Christian elementary and secondary schools in California of less than 1,000 students, all six teachers expressed a deep need to trust their school leaders, which also confirmed prior studies on this topic (Marzano et al., 2001; Kochanek, 2005; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015). Many teachers expressed a desire to work with a school leader with classroom experience, who knows the true challenges a teacher faces. One elementary teacher with six years' experience commented that experience and competence is "so important" for their trust because she knows their decisions will be made "to benefit us all and look out for the teachers." One elementary teacher with 10 years' experience expressed the impact that a trusting relationship has on their job:

> I need to have rock-solid trust in them that they will do their job well, so I can do my job well. You keep the lights on and school running well, and I will bring the magic in the classroom.

Other teachers echoed this sentiment in their interviews, expressing a desire for a leader who will "have my back" and support them, especially with issues regarding parents and student behavior. As a 22-year veteran teacher stated:

> Trust is important because I would like to be in partnership with my leader, which would make us stronger to achieve a common goal. When we trust one another, we can be more authentic with each other and we can encourage one another. When you trust someone and they trust you, they can correct you and you can receive correction from them. It is easy to grow weary as a teacher, so to have a leader you trust who encourages you is important.

This insight confirmed the findings of Hallam et al. (2015), which identified mutual trust as "critical" in developing a successful professional learning community.

The teachers interviewed revealed three common leader practices that built their trust in a school leader, which substantiated the conclusions of studies analyzed in the literature review (Bryk & Schneider, 2003; Handford & Leithwood, 2013; Kochanek, 2005): open communication, honesty/integrity, and good decision-making for the school. All the teachers mentioned open communication as a trust-building practice, which included supportive listening; clear, timely, and detailed communication; quality feedback; constructive criticism; directly discussing issues that involve or affect them; avoiding or squashing gossip; hearing all sides of a situation; and avoiding jumping to conclusions.

One teacher commented, "It builds trust when I see them take the time to hear all the sides of a situation and are not easily persuaded." Another said that their trust was fostered when their leader "informed us of the 'whys' behind the 'whats'" and gave them useful information

about decisions she made that affected them. Trust was built by school leaders who showed honesty and integrity, such as a high character, maintaining confidence, and leading in their calling with humility and care for their staff. The final way teachers stated a leader cultivates trust is through a proven track record of good decision-making skills that further the vision and mission of the school and benefit students and teachers alike, which confirms findings by Tschannen-Moran (2014).

Visibility of School Leaders

Survey Results

The original survey found that teachers desire more unscheduled, low-risk interaction with their leaders than they currently experience. According to the original survey, 66.7% of teachers surveyed stated they see their school leader most often in scheduled settings, and 63% reported a preference for increased visibility and interaction with their school leader through unscheduled settings.

Interview Results

In interviews, teachers expressed a desire to experience more leader visibility through personal, quality interactions that built relationships. One teacher with 10 years' experience stated:

> If we are on mission as a Christian school, we need our leader to be visible to build relationships to help our mission move forward. We need leaders who show us they care about these relationships, and know their teachers, parents, and students well. We need our leader to drive the culture of the school.

A teacher with six years' experience elaborated that they wanted a principal who was out and about, greeting staff and students, and showing their presence as a caring, engaged leader, which "sets the tone for the school" and shows "we are not alone." Another 24-year veteran teacher expressed the need to see their leader more often:

> You are the glue to your staff as an administrator, and we want to see you more. God has not called you to lead a Christian school without leading your flock with your presence, not just emails and meetings. Imagine if Jesus was leading his disciples and only saw them once a year in a big meeting. Is that what he would do as a leader? No, he knew them, he was with them.

Teachers' desire for greater visibility of their leader reinforces results of studies in the literature review, which highlighted visibility as a key practice of effective school leadership (Graham, 2018; Jackson, 2018; Marzano et al., 2001; Whitaker, 1997).

Visibility of School Leaders and Trust

Survey Results

The researcher found a strong link between school leader visibility and teacher trust in that leader, as 81.5% of teachers polled reported that they find increased visibility of a school leader increases their levels of trust in that leader. Two teachers chose to add their own option, which stated that "integrity increases my trust in leaders" and "one's proven work ethic tends to affect my trust most." Clearly, visibility of a school leader plays a strong role in affecting their followers' trust in them as a leader, which supports literature review findings in studies conducted by Graham (2018), Jackson (2018), and Lasater (2016).

Interview Results

In interviews, teachers discussed how visibility builds their trust in their leader, with one teacher commenting, "A trusted school leader is often visible. They realize there is valuable relational currency in being visible often." This link between school leader visibility and trust by their followers was highlighted in the literature review findings of Graham (2018), Jackson (2018), and Lasater (2016) and confirmed by teacher interview responses. A 24-year veteran teacher commented:

> You don't build rapport with someone you don't know. You can't have that trust without that rapport. Rapport in relationships is not built on problems. You have to build that on a positive foundation first, so when the problems occur, you have good rapport to build on and solve problems from.

Similarly, a 22-year veteran junior high teacher reported:

> Availability and visibility are both important to build trust. I need a leader to be as supportive as they are corrective. I want to grow and be more fruitful, as well as cultivate a relationship of encouragement, so if I am corrected, it does not crush me.

Frequency and Quality of Visibility

Survey Results

In terms of frequency versus quality of a leader's visibility, 44.4% of teachers surveyed reported that quality is a greater factor in increasing their trust in their school leader, and 40.7% of teachers reported that frequency and quality of leader visibility matter equally. No responses indicated that frequency of visibility alone is a greater factor in increasing their trust in their school leader. Two teachers responded that neither frequency nor quality of leader visibility has an effect on their trust in that leader, while two teachers responded with

their own options: "Frequency leads to quality," and "Of the two, quality is more important to me, but frequency matters as well," which express concepts reflected in some teacher interviews as well. The importance of frequent visibility of a school leader was also highlighted in studies by Marzano et al. (2001), Marzano and Waters (2009), Whitaker (1997), and Whitaker et al. (2009).

Interview Results

All teachers interviewed expressed a desire for frequent visibility of their leader, with comments such as:

- "We need to see you more."
- "Don't sit in an ivory tower pushing emails. . . . We need relationships."
- "I want to see my leader often."
- "Being present in unscheduled ways shows me that they are building relationships with teachers, students, and parents."
- Students need to "know who the principal is and that they know what is going on in the school."

However, frequent visibility alone was not enough to cultivate trust in leadership, as one teacher stated:

> Quality is more important to me than frequency in building trust, because if I do need insight or help into a situation, I need them to take the time to listen to me so I know I can trust them. Their intentionality shows me that they care. . . . I need them to listen and show they care, but also actually help me solve problems. I need results, as well as reassurance and support.

Several teachers expressed that quality and frequency in visibility are connected for building their trust, with one teacher commenting that "frequency builds quality for me. . . . Quality doesn't come without seeing them often; you have to develop that frequency first to build the quality."

Teachers expressed wanting to see their leaders frequently, in situations that are less scheduled and less formal, such as hallway greetings, social events, and unscheduled classroom visits, which often build relationships that lead to higher quality interactions that continue to build trust. The need for high-quality interactions to build trust was highlighted in studies by Graham (2018), Lasater (2016), and Service (2011) in the literature review.

One teacher stated that "if the only interaction we have with a leader is a formal evaluation as a teacher or a discipline issue as a student, then there is not that trust and relationship built up already from positive interactions," highlighting the need for a relationship built on more casual, personal, unscheduled interactions.

This finding supports earlier study results by Banwo et al. (2022), which found that "dynamic, iterative, regular interactions over a long period" of time by district leadership with school leaders built trust and positive school leadership relationships, and results of studies by Boren (2010) and Hallam et al. (2013), which emphasized the need for low-risk, unscheduled, high-quality, personal leader visibility to build trust from teachers.

The importance of high-quality visibility in building trust in a leader was highlighted in many interviews, including comments that "their presence should be engaging and quality. They don't always have to be everywhere, but when they are present, it makes an impact." Another commented, "Quality is more important to me. Frequency is not enough because you can be around often, but not making an impact. I need a leader's presence to always affect the atmosphere of the school, and not merely a figurehead." A teacher with 11 years' experience commented on the role of high-quality interactions to temper negative effects of lack of frequency:

> Even if I don't see our principal often, we have a good rapport and have had some high-quality, personal interactions, so I know that he knows me and appreciates me out of the crowd of teachers. If I know they are available when I ask, frequency is less important, but that is a fine line, and both are important.

Study Implications

According to the results of this study, the researcher found that teachers desired more frequent visibility of their school leader, as well as high-quality interactions that build relationships with mutual trust. One implication of this study included the need for school leadership to practice frequent visibility, especially in low-risk, unscheduled, personal interactions, such as greeting staff in the hallway, celebrating birthdays and milestones with teachers, "popping in" to classrooms without formal observations on the schedule to check in and converse casually, and being visible in the daily routine of the school. Leaders should build time into their schedule to walk around without an event, agenda, or task at hand, simply to interact and build relationships with teachers and students. Of equal significance is the need for school leadership to cultivate high-quality interactions with their teaching staff, such as connecting on a personal level, offering congratulations, encouragement, supportive listening, or constructive and specific feedback, and problem-solving together.

Recommendations for Further Study

The need for further investigation of this topic is apparent, as several aspects of the topic of leader visibility and follower trust can be explored more deeply. Conducting a similar study on a larger scale would be helpful, as one major limitation of this study is its small scale. The quality of visibility and interactions that teachers desire from a school leader can be a vague or nuanced concept that requires more specific definition. Further study on the effects that gender, age, experience level, academic subject or department, cultural background, and cultural values have on their views of leader visibility and trust in their leader is needed in

order to better understand their implications to guide school leader practices. For example, studying whether more experienced teachers desire less detailed instruction, oversight, and less frequent visibility from their school leader than a new teacher may desire would be an interesting future topic of research. Additionally, the relationship between the visibility of a school leader and the effectiveness of that leader requires further study, as well as this issue applied to a secular school setting and its implication in a public or non-Christian setting.

Conclusion

School leaders have an indelible impact on the well-being of their staff, school, and its students, and building relationships with mutual trust is a critical aspect of effective school leadership. Building trust through frequent and high-quality leader visibility, in both formal, scheduled and informal, unscheduled interactions, is one way a principal can make a greater impact on the success of their school and its stakeholders.

Findings

The significant findings of this study include: school leader visibility plays a strong role in fostering teacher trust in that leader, confirming findings of previous studies on this topic (Banwo et al., 2022; Boren, 2010; Hallam et al., 2013; Service, 2011). As several studies have shown, the quality and frequency of leader visibility are both important and are interrelated, as many teachers reported that frequent visibility builds quality in relationships (Banwo et al., 2022; Service, 2011). Formal, scheduled interactions as well as informal, unscheduled interactions are needed to build trust in school leaders; however, teachers more strongly desired an increase in low-risk, informal, personal interactions to build relationships and trust in leadership, confirming findings of a previous study by Hallam et al. (2013).

Areas of Further Research

Further research on this topic is recommended in the following related areas: What are the results of a similar study conducted on a larger scale? How do teachers define and view trust in their school leader? How can a school leader effectively build their teachers' trust in them? How does gender, age, experience level, subject or department, cultural background, or cultural values of a teacher affect their perceptions of leader visibility and their trust in that leader? What are teacher perceptions on high-quality visibility of a school leader? Exactly what makes visibility high-quality and effective to teachers in building trust and leader effectiveness? What is the relationship between visibility of a school leader and their effectiveness as a leader? Would the findings and implications of this study hold true in a public, non-Christian school setting?

References

Adams, C. M. (2013). Collective trust: A social indicator of instructional capacity. *Journal of Educational Administration, 51*(3), 363–382. https://doi.org/10.1108/09578231311311519

Adams, C. M., & Forsyth, P. B. (2009). The nature and function of trust in schools. *Journal of School Leadership, 19*(2), 126–152. https://doi.org/10.1177/105268460901900201

Anyon, Y., Atteberry-Ash, B., Yang, J., Pauline, M., Wiley, K., Cash, D., Downing, B., Greer, E., & Pisciotta, L. (2018). It's all about the relationships: Educators' rationales and strategies for building connections with students to prevent exclusionary school discipline outcomes. *Children & Schools, 40*(4), 221–230. https://doi.org/10.1093/cs/cdy017

Atik, S., & Celik, O. T. (2020). An investigation of the relationship between school principals' empowering leadership style and teachers' job satisfaction: The role of trust and psychological empowerment. *International Online Journal of Educational Sciences, 12*(3). https://doi.org/10.15345/iojes.2020.03.014

Banwo, B. O., Khalifa, M. A., & Seashore Louis, K. (2022). Exploring trust: Culturally responsive and positive school leadership. *Journal of Educational Administration, 60*(3), 323–339. https://doi.org/10.1108/jea-03-2021-0065

Barkman, C. (2015). The characteristics of an effective school leader. *BU Journal of Graduate Studies in Education, 7*(1), 14–18. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1230685.pdf

Barghouti, Z. (2019). The power of trust in organizations: Two studies on the importance of building trusting relationships in an organizational setting. Universitat Jaume I. http://repositori.uji.es/xmlui/bitstream/handle/10234/185952/TFG_2019_Barghouti_Zina.pdf?sequence=1

Berkovich, I., & Bogler, R. (2021). Conceptualizing the mediating paths linking effective school leadership to teachers' organizational commitment. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership, 49*(3), 410–429. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1741143220907321

Boren, D. M. (2010). Headteacher visibility, teacher characteristics, and headteacher trustworthiness: Perceptions of secondary school teachers in Mukono District, Uganda. *Brigham Young University.* https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/etd/2464/

Bryk, A. S., & Schneider, B. (2003). Trust in schools: A core resource for school reform. *Educational leadership, 60*(6), 40–45. https://www.ascd.org/el/articles/trust-in-schools-a-core-resource-for-school-reform

Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2017). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches.* Sage Publications.

Day, C., Sammons, P., Hopkins, D., Harris, A., Leithwood, K., Gu, Q., & Kington, A. (2009). The impact of school leadership on pupil outcomes. Final report. National College for School Leadership. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13632430701799718

Day, C., Sammons, P., & Leithwood, K. (2011). Successful school leadership: Linking with learning and achievement: Linking with learning. McGraw-Hill Education. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED614324.pdf

Dirks, K. T., & Ferrin, D. L. (2001). The role of trust in organizational settings. *Organization science, 12*(4)*,* 450–467. https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.12.4.450.10640

Ellis, B. A. (2009). *Leader visibility: A case study approach*. The Jethro Project.

Forsyth, P. B., Barnes, L. L., & Adams, C. M. (2006). Trust-effectiveness patterns in schools. *Journal of Educational Administration*. http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/09578230610652024

Gale, J. J., & Bishop, P. A. (2014). The work of effective middle grades principals: Responsiveness and relationship. *RMLE Online, 37*(9), 1–23. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/19404476.2014.11462112

Graham, K. (2018). Effective leadership in education: A brief analysis. *National Teacher Education Journal, 11*(1), 23–26.

Hallam, P. R., Boren, D. M., Hite, J. M., Hite, S. J., & Mugimu, C. B. (2013). Headteacher visibility and teacher perceptions of headteacher trustworthiness: A comparison of the Ugandan context to existing theory. *International Journal of Educational Development, 33*(5), 510–520. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2012.08.003

Hallam, P. R., Smith, H. R., Hite, J. M., Hite, S. J., & Wilcox, B. R. (2015). Trust and collaboration in PLC teams: Teacher relationships, principal support, and collaborative benefits. *NASSP bulletin, 99*(3), 193–216. https://doi.org/10.1177/0192636515602330

Handford, V., & Leithwood, K. (2013). Why teachers trust school leaders. *Journal of Educational Administration*. https://doi.org/10.1108/09578231311304706

Hauserman, C. P., & Stick, S. L. (2013). The leadership teachers want from principals: Transformational. *Canadian Journal of Education, 36*(3), 184. http://www.cje-rce.ca/index.php/cje-rce/article/view/963

Heck, R. H., & Hallinger, P. (2014). Modeling the longitudinal effects of school leadership on teaching and learning. *Journal of Educational Administration*. www.emeraldinsight.com/0957-8234.html

Jackson, Sonya L. (2018). Perceptions of principal leadership skills in high-achieving elementary schools. Walden University. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED586905

Kennedy, B. (2016). Leader visibility: What's your view? *Nursing Management, 47*(7), 34–39. https://doi.org/10.1097/01.NUMA.0000484477.29478.f9

Kochanek, J. R. (2005). *Building trust for better schools: Research-based practices*. Corwin Press.

Lambersky, J. (2016). Understanding the human side of school leadership: Principals' impact on teachers' morale, self-efficacy, stress, and commitment. *Leadership and Policy in Schools, 15*(4), 379–405. Chicago. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/15700763.2016.1181188

Lasater, K. (2016). School leader relationships: The need for explicit training on rapport, trust, and communication. *Journal of School Administration Research and Development, 1*(2), 19–26. https://doi.org/10.32674/jsard.v1i2.1915

Leithwood, K., Sun, J., & Schumacker, R. (2020). How school leadership influences student learning: A test of "The four paths model." *Educational Administration Quarterly, 56*(4), 570–599. https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X19878772

Lesinger, F. Y., Altinay, F., Altinay, Z., & Dagli, G. (2018). Examining the role of leadership, trust for school culture and policy. *Quality & Quantity, 52*(2), 983–1006. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-017-0553-0

Louis, K. S., & Wahlstrom, K. (2011). Principals as cultural leaders. *Phi Delta Kappan, 92*(5), 52–56. Chicago. https://doi.org/10.1177/003172171109200512

Marzano, R. J., Waters, T., & McNulty, B. A. (2001). *School leadership that works: From research to results.* The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Marzano, R. J., & Waters, T. (2009). *District leadership that works: Striking the right balance.* Solution Tree Press.

Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). Visibility. In Merriam-Webster.com dictionary. https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/visibility

Mitchell, R. M. (2019). Enabling school structure & transformational school leadership: Promoting increased organizational citizenship and professional teacher behavior. *Leadership and Policy in Schools, 18*(4), 614–627. https://doi.org/10.1080/15700763.2018.1475577

Morris, J. E., Lummis, G. W., Lock, G., Ferguson, C., Hill, S., & Nykiel, A. (2020). The role of leadership in establishing a positive staff culture in a secondary school. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership, 48*(5), 802–820. https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143219864937

Nichols, C. (2019). Administrators' leadership characteristics that impact school climate. California State University, Bakersfield. https://scholarworks.calstate.edu/downloads/6q182n81b

Nooruddin, S., & Baig, S. (2014). Student behavior management: School leader's role in the eyes of the teachers and students. *International Journal of Whole Schooling, 10*(2), 1. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1030577.pdf

Service, B. (2011). It is action-love: An evaluation of the impact of a New Zealand secondary school principal's increased visibility around the school. *Journal of Educational*

Leadership, Policy and Practice, 26(1), 70–83.
https://search.informit.org/doi/epdf/10.3316/informit.271775814195991

Siswanto, S., & Yuliana, I. (2022). Linking transformational leadership with job satisfaction: The mediating roles of trust and team cohesiveness. *Journal of Management Development, 41*(2), 94–117. http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/JMD-09-2020-0293

Spengler, M., Damian, R. I., & Roberts, B. W. (2018). How you behave in school predicts life success above and beyond family background, broad traits, and cognitive ability. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 114*(4), 620. https://doi.org/10.1037/pspp0000185

Tschannen-Moran, M. (2004). What's trust got to do with it? The role of faculty and principal trust in fostering student achievement. In UCEA Conference Proceedings for Convention.

Tschannen-Moran, M. (2014). *Trust matters: Leadership for successful schools.* John Wiley & Sons.

Tschannen-Moran, M., & Gareis, C. R. (2015). Faculty trust in the principal: An essential ingredient in high-performing schools. *Journal of Educational Administration, 53*(1), 66–92. http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/JEA-02-2014-0024

Tucker, B. A., Stone, A. G., Russell, R. F., & Franz, G. P. (2000). The importance of leader visibility in servant-leadership. *Journal of Biblical Integration in Business, 6*(1). https://cbfa-jbib.org/index.php/jbib/article/view/329/331

Whitaker, B. (1997). Instructional leadership and principal visibility. *The Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues and Ideas, 70*(3), 155–156. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/00098655.1997.10543916?journalCode=vt ch20

Whitaker, T., Whitaker, B., & Lumpa, D. (2009). *Leadership by Walking Around.* Routledge Publishing.

Appendix: Participant Survey

Questions

1. What is your current or most recent teaching position level? Choose "preschool," "elementary," "junior high," or "high school."
2. How many years have you worked as a professional educator? Choose "Less than 1 year," "1–5 years," "6–10 years," "11–15 years," "16–20 years," "21–30 years," "31–40 years," or "41–50 years."
3. In your opinion, what are the top 5 characteristics that an effective school leader (administration, especially the principal) should demonstrate? Please check 5. Choose from: "Responsible," "Proactive/Problem solving," "Caring,"

"Competent/Knowledgeable," "Communication skills," "Strong relationship skills," "Furthers mission and vision of the school," "Visible to teachers, students, parents," "Promotes positive school culture," "Strong academic leadership," "Strong discipline policy and enforcement," "Academic resource and support for teachers," or other.

4. On a scale of 1 to 5, 1 being of no importance and 5 being of extreme importance, how important is it to you that you trust your school leader?

5. As a teacher, do you feel your current or most recent school leader is visible to you enough on a weekly basis? Choose "I do." or "I don't."

6. On average, how many times a week would you prefer to see your school leader, both in scheduled settings (meetings, assemblies, classroom observations, etc.) and unscheduled settings (hallway, courtyard, breaks, sightings from afar)? Choose "0 times per week," "1–2 times per week", "3–4 times per week," "5–6 times per week," "7–8 times per week," "9–10 times per week," or "More than 10 times per week."

7. Do you see your school leader more often in scheduled settings, or unscheduled settings? Choose "Scheduled settings" or "Unscheduled settings."

8. In which setting would you prefer more visibility and interaction with your school leader? Choose "Scheduled settings" or "Unscheduled settings."

9. What do you want most from the visibility of and interactions with your school leader? Please briefly describe.

10. Do you find increased visibility of a school leader to increase your levels of trust in them? Choose "Yes," "No," "Maybe," or other.

11. Do you trust a school leader more because of the frequency or quality of their visibility and interaction? Choose "Yes," "No," "Maybe," or other.

12. Do you find increased visibility of a school leader to increase their effectiveness as a leader? Choose "Yes," "No," "Maybe," or other.

13. What other insight do you have on the way that visibility of a school leader affects your trust in that leader? Please briefly describe.