

FACTORS AFFECTING STRATEGIC INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP PRACTICES OF SCHOOL PRINCIPALS: TEACHERS' PERCEPTION

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Abstract. Instructional leadership is an important aspect of school principals. The roles of instructional leader in an educational organization are setting clear goals, managing curriculum, monitoring lesson plans, allocating resources and evaluating teachers regularly to promote student learning and growth. To improve the quality of an educational organization, an instructional leader should play his /her role and responsibility efficiently and effectively. The main purpose of this study was to identify the factors affecting instructional leadership practices of school principals. A quantitative method was used to collect the data. Accordingly, survey questionnaire was used as the main instrument to collect the data from the Youth Skills Training Institution randomly. The sample consisted of 100 teachers who are currently teaching technical and non-technical subjects in the training institution. Four domains were used as factors affecting the instructional practices, which are professional leadership, shared mission and clear goals, continued monitor of teacher progress and professional growth of the teachers. Findings shows that the four domain factors were really affect the instructional leadership practices. The findings of this study can be beneficial for policy and decision makers in the Ministry of Education, school management and administration as well as teachers.

Keywords: Strategic instructional leadership, School principals, Professional leadership, Education, Malaysia

1. INTRODUCTION

Principal is the main key person for an educational organization. Accordingly, principal plays a major role towards a successful school. Principal is well known as an instructional leader for the school community. Instructional leadership is the key ingredients toward improvement of learner achievement (Sekhu, 2011). A very good instructional leader will enhance the teaching and learning process in the school. According to Leech, Green and Smith (2005), effective schools research also recognized the importance of quality leadership by consistently identifying strong instructional leadership as instrumental in creating a positive school climate. Instructional leader will always emphasize the quality of teaching, because the core business for an educational organization is teaching. So that more emphasize should be given to the teacher instructional skills.

Principal as an instructional leader for the school facing a lot of challenges and obstacles achieve their vision and mission. According to Sharma, Sun and Kannan (2012), the principal is challenged to create the culture of quality that penetrates to the smallest elements, processes and the systems of an institution. They have to consider in the entire angle whether their decision will be affecting anybody or not. Especially when dealing with teachers, whether their instructional practice really gives impact to teachers or not. So as leader he/she should consider all these aspects.

In the current school scenario, principal is the most important person, not only to take care of any problems but also for achieving school's goals and objectives. Principal's role for the school is endless; among all the most important is instructional leadership practices. The reason researchers choose principal for this study is because, they are the one will influence the followers in the organization. Principal is the main person behind the successful teaching and learning process. School principals are the most visible and directly accessible representatives of the school who highly influence the job performance of teachers. Thus, teachers' job performance in the school system can positively or negatively be affected by their principals' leadership style (ROUL, 2012). According to Premavathy (2010), teachers are influenced by their school's leadership and they then have a direct influence on students' achievement.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Factors Affecting Strategic Instructional Leadership Practices of Principal

The finding of the study in Georgia, USA by Blasé and Blasé (2000) shows two important dimensions which principal encourage a reflection from teachers and promote staff development. The finding also shows that principals focus on six ways to promote the staff development among teachers. Similarly results of a study by Horng and Loeb (2010) revealed that principals strategically use professional development as a tool to reward and retain the effective teachers in school. Moreover, this study indicates that the variable of leadership shows the positive relation with the learning of the students. In addition, both shared and instructionally focused leadership are complementary approaches for improving schools (Louis, Dretzke & Wahlstrom, 2010).

According to the study conducted in Ontario, explored five leadership capabilities which is goal setting, resource allocation through priorities, collaborative learning cultures to be promoted, use data appropriately and make leaders engage in conversation with courage. According to Fullan (2006), professional learning communities should be applied to support the networks in building collaborative learning culture. This is to overcome the issue of resistance to change which Herold and Fedor (2008) advise leaders who are leading their followers towards change, to consider that they need a good relationship quality with their followers.

According to summary written at Greensboro, the researcher has well documented understanding about leadership at the school level. Based on the 5 claims in those findings, the scholars conclude that leaders should have the appropriate values, background and connection within community in leading school in order to foster the diversity in educational leadership, (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). In the study conducted in Tasmania, the researcher also mentioned that the leader need to value and support teachers by working with them. Value here means recognition should be given and leaders need building teacher through the professional development, (Mulford, 2003).

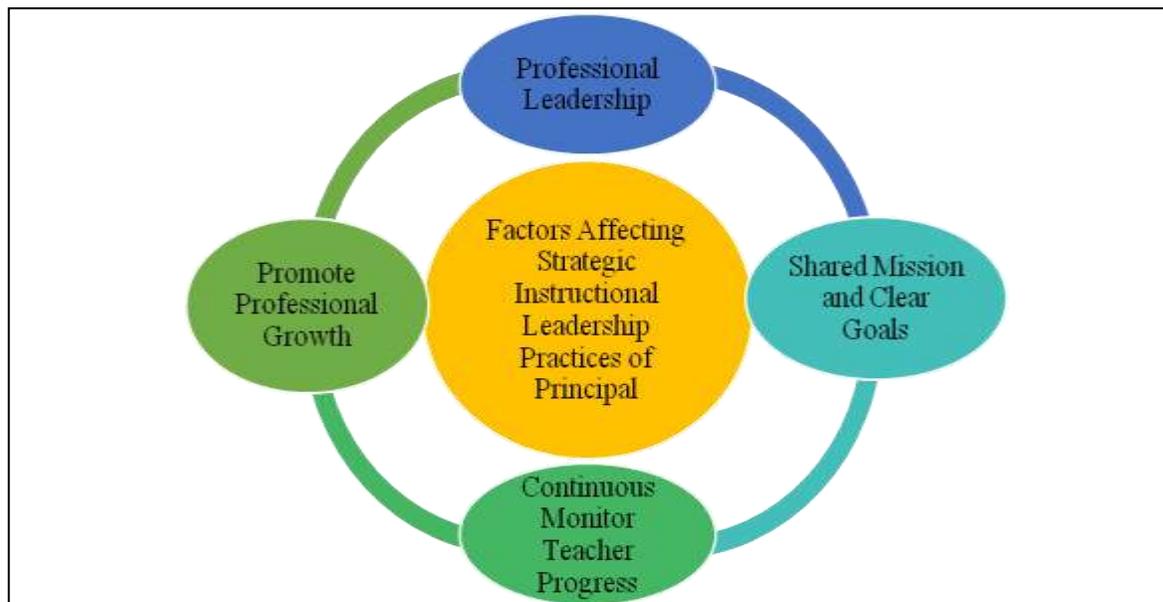


Fig. 1 . Instructional leadership Framework [source: Murphy, 1990 & Weber,1996]

Principals play an important role in improvement of instruction process. Principals need to organize professional development for teacher, as well as monitor teachers’ teaching practices. The model in figure 1 proposes four factors for instructional leadership role of the principal. The first dimension is shared mission and clear goals. This is the factor that affecting the instructional leadership of school principal where principals are responsible to share these school goals with school community. The second dimension is continuous monitor teacher’s progress. Principal needs to be more concern in supervising, encouraging and monitoring the classroom instructional practices. The third dimension is Promoting Professional Development. Principal needs to promote professional development through many programs such as peer coaching, peer-peer network which could help teachers’ classroom practices and learning of the students. The fourth dimension is professional leadership. This factor shows that how principals contribute to the effectiveness of school and student performance directly and indirectly with the ways used by principals through influencing classroom and school condition.

3. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES & QUESTIONS

The main purpose of this study is to identify the factors affecting instructional leadership practices of school principal. The research objectives of this study as below:

- i. To identify the factors affecting strategic instructional leadership practices of school principal
- ii. To explore the correlation between professional leadership and shared mission and clear goals
- iii. To explore the correlation between professional leadership and continued monitor teachers’ progress
- iv. To explore the correlation between professional leadership and promote professional growth.

In this study researcher aims are to answer all these four research questions.

- i. What are the factors affecting instructional leadership practices of school principal?
- ii. What is the correlation between professional leadership and shared mission and clear goals?
- iii. What is the correlation between professional leadership and continued monitor teachers' progress?
- iv. What is the correlation between professional leadership and promote professional growth?

5. METHODOLOGY

5.1 Research Design

This study, used survey as the main method for the research. This method is also known as descriptive research or quantitative approach because it describes the existing conditions. This method is suitable to be carried out because the data were collected in a short period through selected respondents. This quantitative approach is also defined as a method for gathering information by delegating set of questions on a sample selected from the population that to be studied. The survey method used in this study would gain information from the respondents which represent the number of samples of a population study.

5.2 Sampling

The selected sample must have the characteristics or features of the population to be studied, so that the data obtained via the survey can give a brief statement and an overview of the entire population studied. The sample consisted 100 of teachers who are currently teaching technical and non-technical subjects in the National Youth Skills Institute. This institution is located in the district of Hulu Langat, Selangor, Malaysia. The institution was established by the Ministry of Youth and Sport which designed to provide formal technical training to school leavers who lack the academic distinction and hence transform them into skilled and semi-skilled workers to cater country's demands in job sector.

5.3 Instrumentation

This study was conducted using a questionnaire as the main instrument. The questionnaire was chosen because it is more practical, easy and efficient to use for a larger populations. According to the study conducted by Majid (2009), the ability of a sample questionnaire will greatly improve the accuracy of estimates of sample statistics to estimate the population.

The instrument consists of five sections. Section A consists of respondents' personal information (teachers' background). Section B, C, D and E contain the items in the questionnaire that consists of four major dimensional such as frequency of professional leadership, frequency of shared vision and cleared goals, frequency of continued monitor on teachers' progress and frequency of promote professional growth. Each dimension consists of three items in the questionnaire that measured using 5-point Likert scale, ie, 1 'strongly disagree', 2 'disagree', 3 'uncertain', 4 'agree' and 5 'strongly agree' (*refer to Table 1*). For questions in the form of an inverse or negative, each response analyzed the translated value of 1 is converted into 5, 2 is converted into 4 and 3 were unchanged.

Table 1
Likert Scale Scoring

<i>Degree of Agreement</i>	<i>Positive Statement</i>	<i>Negatif Statement</i>
Strongly Disagree (<i>SD</i>)	1	5
Disagree (<i>D</i>)	2	4
Uncertain (<i>U</i>)	3	3
Agree (<i>A</i>)	4	2
Strongly Agree (<i>SA</i>)	5	1

According to Hidayah (2004) the use of minimum score needed to be changed to three points to ease the process of data analysis as shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2
Mean Score Level Determination Table

Score Min	Measurement Level
3.01 - 5.00	High Level
3.00	Modest Level
0.00 – 2.99	Low Level

Table 3 below, shows the Guilford's Rule of Thumb as referencing tool to interpret relation between the two variables.

Table 3
Guilford's Rule of Thumb

Correlation Values (r)	Interpretation Relation
Perfect correlation	0.90 - 1.00
High correlation	0.70 - 0.89
Moderate correlation	0.40 - 0.69
Low correlation	0.20 - 0.39
Very low correlation	< 0.2

Table 4 below shows the distribution of the questionnaire items based on four key dimensions.

Table 4
Distribution of the questionnaire items based on dimensions

No.	Dimensions	Question Number	Total Questions
1.	Frequency Of Professional Leadership	B1, B2 and B3	3
2.	Frequency Of Shared Vision And Cleared Goals	C1, C2 and C3	3
3.	Frequency Of Continued Monitor Teachers' Progress	DI, D2 and D3	3
4.	Frequency Of Promote Professional Growth	EI, E2 and E3	3

Table 5 below shows the distribution of questions to the positive and negative items.

Table 5
Positive and negative item of questionnaires

No. Positive Item	No. Negative Item
B1, B2, B3, C1, C2,C3, D1, D2, D3, E1, E2 and E3	-

5.4 Data Collection Method

In order to ensure that the research does not run into problems, the researchers took several steps as follows:

1. Researchers request permission from their lecture to conduct their research at the National Youth Training Institution, Hulu Langat, Selangor.
2. Next, the researchers sought permission from the National Youth Training Institutions to conduct the study.
3. Upon receiving the letter of authorization from the institution researchers embarked the study by conducting an orientation session with the participants.
4. Later, researchers distributed the set of questionnaire.
5. Finally, the researchers gifted a pen as a token of appreciation for the participants.

5.5 Data Analysis

Researchers did a number of ways to analyze the data after the data revision process of the samples were collected. Questionnaires were coded and the data collected were processed using programming 'Statistical Packages for the Social Science' version 21.0 (SPSS) to find the relationship and differences between variables in the study.

6. FINDINGS

6.1 Discussion of findings

In this study all the data was collected and analyze by using SPSS software. These make researchers easier to analyze the data based on their needs. All the findings presented by the researchers were categorized and themes that into four domains as stated in theoretical framework. The entire four domains were used to find the correlation. All the findings will be discussed based on the research objectives and research questions.

6.1.1. Research Question 1: What are the factors affecting instructional leadership practices of school principal?

Based on the data analysis, all the four factors which mentioned in the theoretical framework, have the mean score from 3.00 – 4.20. First factor indicate about Professional leadership. Finding shows that, instructional leader is practicing professional leadership styles as one of the factors that influence their practices. Almost all the participants said that this is one of factors that affecting instructional leadership practices. If their leader didn't has the professional leadership style, than very hard for the leader to delegate the task to the subordinates. Second domain or factor is shared vision and clear goals. This is one of the important factors that really affect the instructional leadership practices. This is because, through sharing the vision and mission with all the staff, the subordinates will understand their workflow and the objectives that they should achieved. Through sharing the goals, the subordinates will come up with their own strategy to achieve the common goals. Otherwise all the staff members will work on their own objectives without having a common goal to achieve for the organization. M.s Sekhu (2011) stated in his study that as an instructional resource, the principal should have a vision and make sure that the vision is well understood and followed by all stakeholders.

Third domain or factor is continued monitoring of teachers' progress. In this study, the teachers said that their leader is practicing this domain in their instructional leadership practices. Through this continuous monitoring, teachers' performance will be monitored and if there is any needs for improvement, then that particular teacher can be send for the teachers. From there the teachers can improve their weaknesses and also a leader, they identified the strength of each of their teacher's. This will make the leader easy to delegate the task based on the teacher's capability and strength. Fourth domain is promoting professional growth. Teachers in this study said that their leader always emphasize professional growth of each staff. As an instructional leader, he/she should always encourage his/her staff to improve their skills and knowledge. If the teachers are high knowledgeable and skillful, the task delegate to them will easily done by them. This will make the leader's job easy with the minimal supervision. It shows that this factor correspondingly affecting the instructional leadership practices at school.

All the four domain shows that, instructional leadership really plays a major role towards teacher's performance. According to the study conducted by Enueme and Egwunyenga (2008), indicates in their study that there is a significant relationship between the principals' instructional leadership and the teachers' job performance.

6.1.2. Research Question 2: What is the correlation between professional leadership and shared mission and clear goals?

From the findings shows that $r=0.178$, which mean very low correlation between professional leadership and shared mission and clear goals. There is no strong positive relationship between professional leadership and shared mission. Both domains are worked as independent factors that affect instructional leadership. In order to share the mission and goal of an organization, the principals don't need to follow the professional leadership style. Professional leader are not significant to the shared goals. Professional leadership factors are more to produce a safe and productive learning environment. According to the study conducted by Louis, Dretzke and Wahlstrom (2010) said that professional leadership is complementary approaches for improving schools. Same goes to the share mission factors, which create continuous progress toward achieving the goals.

6.1.3. Research Question 3: What is the correlation between professional leadership and continued monitor teachers' progress?

The correlation between professional leadership and continued monitor teacher's progress is $r = 0.084$. The study also noted there is a very low correlation between the professional leadership and teachers' progress. Continued monitor teacher's progress will make improve teacher's skills and knowledge. It will give a room for the improvement to teachers and produce excellent and specialist in subject matter expects. Because of this reason there is low relationship between professional leadership and monitor teacher's progress.

6.1.4. Research Question 4: What is the correlation between professional leadership and promote professional growth?

The correlation between professional leadership and promote professional growth also show very low correlations which is $r = 0.042$. By promoting professional growth, it will bring towards improvement of excellences in teachers' knowledge, attitude, skills and delegation towards their profession. As mentioned earlier professional leadership not really contribute towards promoting professional growth. Both are two different factors that influences instructional leadership practices at school.

6.2 Implication

Professional leadership factor is fundamental in instructional leadership. A leader must develop his/her professionalism and should deal with the staff members as professionally. Professional leader is needed in all the sense of leadership role especially when dealing with stakeholders' problems. An instructional leader must act professionally to solve the problems. It could enhance his/her leadership styles among the staff members. They way staff look at their leader will change and they will give more respects towards their leader. Between principal and staff members should have some boundary, so as a leader should

behave professionally, so that not crossing the boundary. If an instructional leader able to maintain their professionalism, then it enhances them to delegate the task for the subordinate frequently.

Shared vision and clear goals will motivate the staff to work harder to achieve the desire goal and objectives. Pamela (2012), sated in her articles that effective leadership begins with the development of a school wide visions of commitment to high standards. She is trying to said that when sharing the vision with all the members in the organization, will improve staff members' commitment towards their job. All the staffs should know the vision and mission of their organization so that they could work on it effectively and efficiently.

Teacher's performance should continuously be monitored. This is to ensure that they are doing the right things, especially when comes to classroom practices. This is not more to point out teacher's mistake but give them suggestion to improve their classroom practices. A teacher cannot be in the safe zone for all the time, because the world is changing and students also changing accordingly. So as a teacher, they also should change towards betterment. As an instructional leader should monitor the teachers' progress and give them a room for the change as well.

Professional growth is very important for the teachers. As an instructional leader he or she always emphasizes teachers' professional growth. If the teachers a fully competent enough, principal can easily delegate the task for them. Furthermore students' performance also will improve if the teachers are well trained and knowledgeable. Students' success relies on teachers competent and teachers success rely on principal's competent. So a leader should always motivate staff's professional growth for the sake of the school improvement and at the same time to ensure that instructional practices go well.

6.3 Recommendation

As an instructional leader she or he should put their self on the staff's shoes, so that they are feeling free to understand what are the basic needs, interest and demands of their stakeholders. Otherwise it's very hard to practice a successful instructional leadership. As a leader he/she should always think for the betterment of the organization. From there they can identify what are variables that they have to manipulate or change. For example to improve student's performance, the variable that they have to consider is teacher. Improve teachers' competency first, then student's performance will improve from there. Leader cannot treat all the staff as equal, must treat them based on their academic qualification and expertise.

7. CONCLUSION

This study was discussed on factors that affecting instructional leadership practices at school. Researchers were able to find four factors through a qualitative study. Questionnaire was used as an instrument for this study and manages to find the relevant output for the study such as

- i. Professional leadership
- ii. Shared mission and clear goals
- iii. Continued monitor teachers' performance and
- iv. Promote professional growth.

Instructional leadership is essential character for a principal. So as a principal, he or she should to know how to use the instructional leadership effectively and efficiently among their stakeholders.

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