THE IDEOLOGY OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP AMONG PRINCIPALS ON STUDENT ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

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Abstract
Malaysian education system has come under public scrutiny and debate, their concern regarding not only the system but also the teachers and administrators to adequately prepared young Malaysian for the 21st century. The purpose of the study is to explore the knowledge base or the ideology about effective instructional leadership among the principals and with this ideology how they practice their instructional leadership on student achievement. The study also want to investigate is there any changes on principals instructional leadership practices due to the astonishing impact of ICT and globalization. This study is hoped to be able to assist the principals in reevaluating the strengths and weaknesses of their instructional leadership practices so that not only can increase student achievement in Malaysian Education System but also increase in global standard. The methodology is a qualitative study in which interviews were conducted with 3 purposive principals in Seremban district. Result indicated that purposive principals were understood instructional leadership as synonymous with clear vision and goal, be a role model, classroom supervision, supporting and listening but they not elaborated about school climate. However their goal and vision is not toward globalization but still answerable to the system of exam-oriented and lacking of culture on learning and professional behavior which been too long in Malaysian society.

Keywords: Instructional leadership, Principal, Academic achievement

Introduction

Education plays a central role in any country's pursuit of economic growth and national development. There is no better predictor of a nation's future than what is currently happening in its classrooms. In today's global economy, a nation's success depends fundamentally on knowledge, skills and competencies of its people. In recent years, the Malaysian education system has come under increased public scrutiny and debate, as parents' expectations rise and employers voice their concern regarding the system's ability to adequately prepare young Malaysians for the challenges of the 21st century (Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025). The Ministry of Education launched Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025 which offers a vision of the education system and students that Malaysia both needs and deserves. A fundamental objective of any education system is to ensure that its students are being equipped with the knowledge and skills required for success in life. The leadership of a school shapes the school's character (Sergiovanni, 2000), orchestrates people's efforts within it, sets a common direction, and establishes the expectations for student achievement as well as the means and the motivation to achieve them (Murphy 1994). Along with the quality of teaching and teachers, the quality of leadership is the key human factor that shapes the future of all students and the fortunes of everyone in schools (Starratt, 1993).

One of the most significant influences on school improvement is the quality of school leadership (Leithwood et al. 1993). And one consistent factor in most of the effective schools research is an emphasis on strong, instructional leadership (Edmonds, 1979ab, 1982; Purkey & Smith, 1983; Weber, 1971; Brookover & Lezotte, 1979) in Jana Michelle Alig-Mielcarek. Most of the transformational changes to the role of the principal have been focused toward the technical core responsibility of the school. Hoy and Miskel (2008) stated this technical core is the process of educational leaders focusing on the teaching and learning of the school. This focus on teaching and learning has led to the development of a popular leadership construct called instructional leadership. The paramount focus of instructional leadership is to foster students' attainment of basic core skills and knowledge (Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008). Being an instructional leader is a hallmark of effective principals. Effective principals are more likely to provide their teachers with the support and motivation they need to be effective teachers. For example, although both effective and ineffective principals claimed to frequently observe their teachers,

effective principals make more unscheduled observations and provide immediate feedback (The Wallace Foundation 2012).

Over the past two decades, international student assessments, such as the Programmed for International Student Assessment (PICA) and the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), have emerged as a means of directly comparing the quality of educational outcomes across different systems. This two international assessment suggest that Malaysian student performance is declining in absolute term while other systems are improving student performance more rapidly, and have found ways to sustain that momentum. The results from PICA 2009 + shows Malaysia ranking in the bottom third of 74 participating countries, below the international average (see Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025). The performance of public examination in Malaysia for secondary school which is PMR (Lower Certificate Education) and SPM (Malaysia Education Certificate) are getting better and better every year. This result is not parallel with the international assessment which is discussed earlier. The result for public examination is increase but compare to international assessment, Malaysian result is declining in absolute term. Instructional leadership was driven in large part by the effective schools movement of the 1970s and 1980s and has since been renewed because of the increasing demands that school leaders be held accountable for student performance (Hallinger 2005). Principals, as instructional leaders, are called to evaluate the effectiveness of curriculum, and develop the academic culture of the school. Thus, principals need to understand and articulate what is required to be effective and successful in these responsibilities. During the past 20 years there have been many portentous changes, both within and beyond education. One of these is the astonishing impact of information and communications technology (ICT). Another, stimulated by ICT, is globalization. However, while broad agreement exist the essential of instructional leadership, what instructional leadership ideology among principals in Malaysia actually is?

The purpose of the study is to explore the knowledge base or the ideology about effective instructional leadership among the principals and with this ideology how they practice their instructional leadership on student achievement. The study also want to investigate is there any changes on principals instructional leadership practices due to the astonishing impact of ICT and globalization.

The primary research questions which guided this study are as follows:

a. What is principal's understanding and belief of instructional leadership?
b. How do principals in district of Seremban, Negeri Sembilan practice their instructional leadership on student achievement?
c. What changes made by principals on instructional leadership practices due to the astonishing impact of ICT and globalization.

This study explored the instructional leadership practices among 3 type of principals included from high performance school. This study is hoped to be able to assist the principals in reevaluating the strengths and weaknesses of their instructional leadership practices so that it can increase student achievement in Malaysian Education System but also increase in global standard. The selection of the population is three (3) secondary schools in Seremban district and the sample is three (3) types of principals. One principal who receive new deals rewards from Ministry Of Education from 2010 until 2011, one principal from High Performance School (granted by Ministry of Education) and one principal from effective school (granted by the State Education Department). Primary schools and private schools are not included in this study. For this study it's only focus Principals' instructional Leadership Strategies in communicating goals, supervising instruction and providing resources. Hence the findings of this study cannot be used to generalize for all principals in the country.

Methodology

The methodology is a qualitative study in which interviews were conducted with principals and the selection of the participants is from effective school (principal A), High Performance School (principal B) and school that receive new deals rewards from Ministry Of Education (principal C). The interview protocols for the principals were open-ended and semi-structured as described by Merriam (1998). The interviews were bilingual in nature, conducted in

both the Malay Language and in English depending on the interviewees' ease and comfort with a particular language. All the formal interviews were audio tape- recorded, while a few informal conversations were recorded in the researchers' personal notebooks during and after the conversations.

Findings and Discussions

Hallinger and Murphy (1985) created a framework of instructional management with three dimensions; defines the mission, manages instructional program, and promoting school climate. Participants in this study basically get the idea about the instructional leadership and with and without their knowledge are practicing it day by day in the school. However some principal emphasize certain dimension more than the other dimension. In their views, principals are supposed to run the school smoothly as assigned by Ministry of Education, expertise in financial and in communication. Participants' accounts reflect the idea of 'man in power', a principal at the top of the hierarchy, who decides, set goals, vision, supervision, supportive and foster positive interpersonal relationships. However, their views never mentioned about school climate and their role on teachers changes instruction in the class room due to globalization. The finding is to discuss about two part, first part is in participants view what is the basic understanding of instructional leadership and how the principals practices and the second part is what is the changes that the principals did on their practices due to new technology and globalization.

Principal basic understanding of instructional leadership and their practices

'Role Model'

Participants in this study state that they must be example to the teachers if they want the teacher and the staff to shares beliefs about schools, teaching, and learning. A Principal must 'walk the talk', demonstrate behaviors that are consistent with beliefs. It is important to the principals to become examples to her or his staff so that the power that they have can motivate the teacher to do their work. As a leader they must do the right things and doing it right from the first time without defect. This can encourage the teachers and the staff to follow suit whenever they do their work. Participants perceived to be 'role model' is essentials as instructional leader.

Principal A: "I cannot tell people what to do. I must be able to do it then they can follow, be example to them (teacher)."
Principal B: "……I teach all the Head of Department and my Senior Assistant how to construct item for setup question. I must be a supervision leader."
Principal C: "be a good example to the teachers. We cannot just tell and sit inside the office."

A school principal is the primary leader in a school building. A good leader always leads by example. An effective leader is available to teachers, staff members, parents, students, and community members

Visionary Leader
Most of the participants mentioned about their practices as identifying and articulating a vision to be important as instructional leader. It is important that leaders in formal positions of authority retain responsibility for building a shared vision for their organizations. The practices is aimed at helping among the whole member in the organization develop shared understandings about the organization and its activities and goals that can under gird a sense of purpose or vision.
Principal A: "… my vision is to bring this school to the stage people want send their children to this school, not just have a vision but pass down the vision to the school."
Principal C: "in order to get the good result first the student must be discipline only they can study. I must set directions for the school, for the students and for the teachers"

A successful principal must have a clear vision that shows how all components of a school will operate at some point in the future. Having a clear image of their schools helps principals avoid becoming consumed by the administrative requirements of their jobs. In fact, principals may need

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two types of vision: one vision of their schools and the roles they play in those schools, and another vision of how the change process will proceed (Manasse, 1985). Successful principals understand that it is important to establish clear learning goals and garner school wide and even communitywide commitment to these goals. The development of a clear vision and goals for learning is emphasized by principals of high-achieving schools (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003).

Supporting and listening
Participants talked frequently about supporting and encouraging teachers to learn and used new technology to enhance their knowledge. All the principals are supplying teachers with necessary resources and material including training for them. They hold high expectations that teachers and students will meet these goals and hold themselves accountable for the success of the school. The fundamental concept of staff development emphasized the importance of professional growth for teachers and principals. These principals provide emotional support for teachers and are viewed as possessing the ability to foster positive interpersonal relationships.

Principal A: "More and more teachers are force to learn how to used ICT application and worked with that, teachers went for PBS (School Base Assessment) training, and also team building activities."

Staff development and reflection were not only important to supervision, but also integral to instructional leadership. Staff development assists in the expansion of one's knowledge on best practices, creates an awareness of present educational research, and promotes the development of one's skills and abilities (Blasé & Blasé, 2004).

Supervision
Some of the participants use informal visits to classrooms to learn what teachers are doing. They believe that visibility in the school by walking around and informally visiting classrooms was related to increased use of reflectively informed behaviors and good teacher behavior.
Principal A: "we have committee for observation because it is important to ensure teachers finish the syllabus and preparation for the examination."
Principal B: "…during my observation just pass by the class room I can determine that so many teachers not using teaching aid during the teaching and learning, so I setup committee for super vision including administrator and expert teachers."
Principal C: "….have to observe them (teacher) from time to time not only talk and sit in the office, so walking around is important. When we walk around the school the teacher knows to do their business."

The instructional leader monitors classroom practice alignment with the school's mission. Visiting classrooms is a supervision strategy that positively affects teachers (Blasé & Blasé, 1998; Blasé & Roberts, 1994). All schools need principals to exercise their roles as instructional leaders who ensure the quality of instruction (Portin et al., 2003). As part of their ongoing instructional leadership responsibilities, effective school principals are highly visible through contact and interaction with teachers, students, and parents, thus promoting the concept of a learning community (Marzano et al., 2005).

Changes practices on Instructional leadership due to new technology and globalization.

Waters et al. (2003), through an extensive meta-analysis, defined several characteristics in effective educational leadership for the ultimate goal being student achievement. Three of these characteristics: (a) possesses knowledge of curricular methods, (b) focuses on instruction and assessment, and (c) provides intellectual stimulation for staff. So it's important for the principals to adopt and develop these characteristic as an effective instructional leader. Jenkins (2009) further suggested that instructional leaders go beyond their traditional role of school managers and administrators and place large focus and time developing knowledge and the implementation of curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

One of the question asked about how they perceived Malaysian ranking on TIMSS and PICA result, variety of answer are given but all of the principals agreed that one of the reason is Malaysian assessment system is too exam-oriented but the international level is mire to higher order thinking skill. Malaysian assessment system is already formatted and the teachers are got used to it. Every subject has their own format of questions and the teacher focus more towards the examination questions requirement rather than the curriculum accomplishment. So year by years especially during the examination year, teachers prepared the student how to answer well for the examination as ultimate goal for the school. Participants perceived high quality instruction to be important but all of them not emphasize high expectations for what students should achieve beyond the public examination purpose. They not place a strong focus on numeracy and literacy in the early years based. Participants also lacking on emphasize to match current teaching on higher order thinking skills as a process for learning in the class room.

i.   Exam-oriented
Principal A: "we trained and focus our students for the technique of answering exam question. As English teacher, I teach one of the form five student and always train them if not I'm scared they not be able to answer."

ii.   literacy wise
Principal C: "last year in 2011 my school also took part, still got students cannot read and our student not used to high level of question."

iii.   Lacking of Higher order thinking skill
Principal B: "to me still no changes on teacher's method in the class room and the implementation of higher order thinking skills for the assessment."
Principal C: "I never emphasize on higher order thinking skills for student assessment."

Higher order literacy and numeracy skills are now adopted as a starting point in most international assessment programs. A useful conceptualization of higher order thinking skills distinguishes two contexts in which these skills are employed: contexts where the thought processes are needed to solve problems and make decisions in everyday life; and contexts where mental processes are needed to benefit from instruction, including comparing, evaluating, justifying and making inferences (Wheeler & Haertel, 1993).

iv.   Lacking of Culture on learning and professional behavior
From the interviews, most of the participant principals reveal that positive behavior and professional practice among the teachers create a healthy school environment in which student learning is the central focus. Unfortunately, according to them, there are so many teachers in the comfort zone because of their time-base promotion not concerned for academic learning. So there are no integrated communities of professional practice in the service of student academic.

Principal A: "…students they look forward to changes in our teaching method, they (teachers) need to come out with new idea to encourage student, so we need to find means to keeping them occupied to make them interested, but our teachers in the comfort zone."
There are many panels in the school like panel of Math and Science, English panel and etc. With the guide from the principal and commitment within the members of the panel, teachers can transform the panel become a dynamic group which can produce excellent idea to promote good practice in the class room and also pro social programs that attract students for learning. Even though so many teachers are promoted by the 'time-base' system but with the effective leadership it can set the bearing toward healthy learning and professional behavior. These practices are lacking among the participants.

Summary of finding and suggestions
Participant Principals in Seremban district had understood instructional leadership as synonymous with clear vision and goal, classroom observation and direct teaching of students and teachers.

They have strong believes that to be instructional leadership is to portrays 'role model' toward the teachers, staff and the whole organization. As an instructional leadership, principal has to be good listener and give full support to the teachers. Their practices merely to achieve better result every year for Malaysian public examination (this study is not concern about student affair and extra curriculum for the students). Their scope is not toward globalization but still answerable to the system of exam-oriented which been too long in Malaysian society. The quality of teaching in a school can be affected only marginally by a principal's involvement in the classroom. It's the principal's who can retain teachers and create opportunities for teachers to improve. It's the principal's who managing the curriculum and ensure changes will make toward higher order thinking skill by the teachers. The essential learning skill for 21st century includes creativity and innovation skills, critical thinking and problem solving skills, communication and collaborative skill. So it's important for all principals in Malaysia enhance their knowledge with the new finding of research regarding education and to be a strong organization manager and also effective instructional leadership. Participant principals lacking of 'drive' factor to encourage and boost teachers fully using all sources including ICT to change their methods of teaching. It is important for the principals to expose all teachers with new theory about teaching and learning by collaborates with university and teachers training institute. They can be proactive or align with district department, state department and also with Aminuddin Baki Institute (IAB) training centre to develop short courses for the teachers.

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