Instructional Leadership Practices: Exploring Malaysia Primary Principals Strategies

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore the effective instructional strategies practiced by primary principals in performing their roles as instructional leaders. This qualitative study used a multiphasecase study design through interview and observation approaches. This study involved 15 purposely selected teachers who worked at eight selected primary schools. In addition, researchers also conducted a few observation sessions with the school administrators, teachers, and students within the abovementioned schools. Findings indicated the studied primary principals had accomplished three to five major strategies as instructional leaders which listed in the Hallinger and Murphy (1985)'s instructional leadership model. In summary,instructional leadership has been practiced by principals in the Southern Zone of Malaysia in leadingtheir schools towards the achievement of the vision and mission that has been determined by the ministry of education.

Keywords: instructional leadership, public schools, primary schools.

INTRODUCTION

Under the third NKRA or known as the Education NKRA, there are four sub-NKRAs that explain in detail the functions of the NKRA. The four sub-NKRAs are preschools, literacy, and numeracy screening (LINUS), high-performing schools and new deals to school leaders who succeed in improving school excellence. Based on this sub-NKRA, the leadership aspect has been emphasized by the Ministry of Education (MOE) to elevate the performance of public schools in Malaysia. The fourth sub NKRA stressed that school leaders are requested to improve students' academic achievement (Performance Management and Delivery Unit (PEMANDU), 2010). In this sense, it is clearly declared that school leaders and their leadership roles have significant impacts in influencing and improvement of students' academic performance either directly or indirectly (Jackson, Davis, Abeel, &Bordonaro, 2000; Marzano, 2003; Wilson, 2016) and towards the schools' improvement and development (Fullan, 2007; Harris, 2013; Leithwood&Jantzi, 2005; Day, Sammons, Hopkins, Leithwood, & Kington, 2008; Hallinger& Heck, 1996; Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008). In fact, the leadership style of a school leader has strong influence towards the positive school environment including teacher and staff attitudes, teaching,and learning (T&L) process, as well as academic achievement of students.

In the context of public schools, the MOE has outlined three approaches in guaranteeing that all school leaders are performing their effective duties as instructional leaders. First, all school leaders are requested to play their active involvement in teacher's growth and development by planning, coordinating, and evaluating the teaching and learningprocess. Second, the school leaders also assigned as key agents of changeto achieve the MOE's educational vision and mission which

officially translated inall school's goals and missions. Third, school leaders also urged to create a conducive and positive school's environment that support and encourage the teaching and learning process (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013). Based on thepreliminary finding on the improvement of the Malaysia Education Development Plan 2013-2025 which conducted by MOE, it was reported that students' performance has increased by 20 percent through the practice of instructional leadership in schools. In addition, it is also suggesting that the middle lever leaders in schools should play their trusted roles and empowered as instructional leaders in schools (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013). Through the practice of instructional leadership, MOE believes that the good performance of all schoolswasresulted from students' academic achievement and towering personality.

As such, Robinson, Lloyd, and Rowe (2008)had previously affirmed that the practice of instructional leadership is continuously relevant and even becoming more essential in the of 21st century learning context. This is because the major purpose of instructional leadership is to improve students' academic achievement and the school's performance and even has four times impacts than the practice of transformational leadership (Robinson et al., 2008; Shatzer et al., 2014). Thus, in matching the instructional with transformational leadership practice, researchers had introduced the new framework called "leadership for learning" which combined all the three types of leadership has an impact on student academic achievement namely the instructional leadership, transformational leadership and partnership leadership (Hallinger, 2003, 2011b; Hallinger, Lee,& Ko,

2014; MacBeath& Cheng, 2008; Marks &Printy, 2003). Besides focusing on the students' academic achievements, instructional leadership is also inseparable from the indication of the school success (Duke, 1987; Hallinger, 2003; Hassan, Monypenny, &Prideaux, 2012; Findley& Findley, 1992). Hence, it is proven that instructional leadership model is still considered the effective leadership practice to improve the school effectiveness by boosting the quality of teaching and student academic achievement.
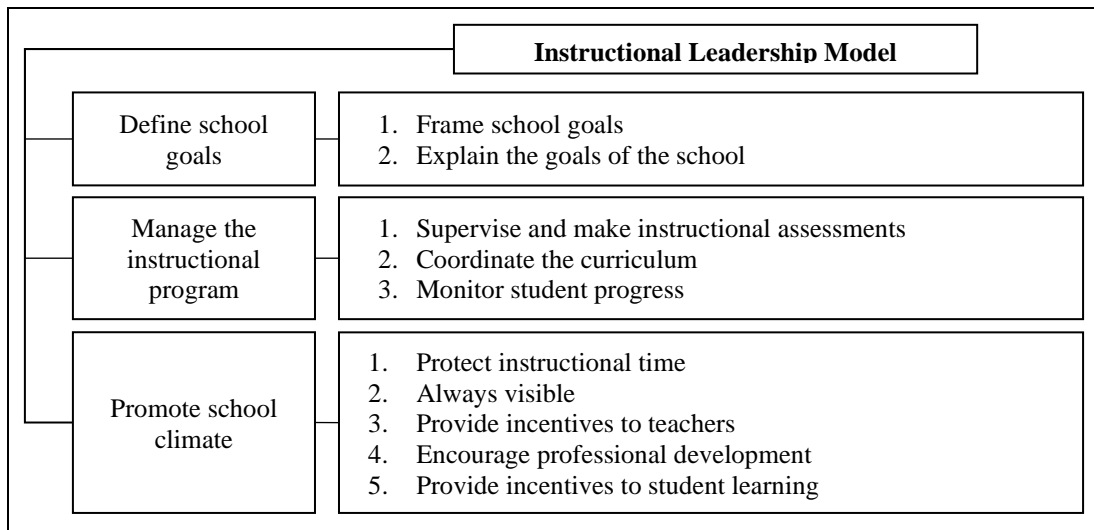
LITERATURE REVIEW
Theoretical Framework
The Instructional Leadership Model by Hallinger (2011a)

In explaining the instructional leadership framework, Hallinger (2011a) has outlined three dimensions and ten functions of instructional leadership in assessing the level of instructional leadership of school leaders. The three dimensions are defining school goals, managing instructional programs, and promoting a school climate. The three dimensions consist of 10 functions that describe in detail the roles or tasks that need to be performed by instructional leaders in schools. This leadership model is as shown in Figure 1.

The first dimension, which is to define school goals, consists of two functions, namely framing and explaining school goals. The second dimension is to manage the instructional program. This dimension consists of three functions, namely supervising and making instructional assessments, coordinating the curriculum, and monitoring student progress. The third dimension is to promote a school climate that covers five functions namely protecting instructional time, always visible, providing incentives to teachers, encouraging professional

development, and providing incentives to student learning. Further descriptions of the dimensions and

functions found in this model will be explained in the next subtopics.

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│                    │      Instructional Leadership Model       │  │
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│    │  ┌──────────────┐   ┌──────────────────────────────────┐  │  │
│    │  │ Define school │   │ 1. Frame school goals            │  │  │
│    │  │    goals      │   │ 2. Explain the goals of the school│ │  │
│    │  └──────────────┘   └──────────────────────────────────┘  │  │
│    │  ┌──────────────┐   ┌──────────────────────────────────┐  │  │
│    │  │ Manage the   │   │ 1. Supervise and make instructional│ │  │
│    │  │ instructional│   │    assessments                   │  │  │
│    │  │   program    │   │ 2. Coordinate the curriculum     │  │  │
│    │  └──────────────┘   │ 3. Monitor student progress      │  │  │
│    │                     └──────────────────────────────────┘  │  │
│    │  ┌──────────────┐   ┌──────────────────────────────────┐  │  │
│    │  │              │   │ 1. Protect instructional time    │  │  │
│    │  │Promote school│   │ 2. Always visible                │  │  │
│    │  │   climate    │   │ 3. Provide incentives to teachers│  │  │
│    │  │              │   │ 4. Encourage professional devel. │  │  │
│    │  │              │   │ 5. Provide incentives to student │  │  │
│    │  └──────────────┘   │    learning                      │  │  │
│    │                     └──────────────────────────────────┘  │  │
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Figure1 Instructional Leadership Model by Hallinger (2011a)

Strategies for Instructional Leadership Practices
Define School Goals

The dimension of defining school goals has two functions namely formulating and explaining school goals (Hallinger, 2011a; 2000; Hallinger& Murphy, 1987). Through this dimension the primary role of school leaders is to determine school goals. They need to know what the school wants to achieve and the direction it wants to take. A school whose direction is not determined certainly does not have the criteria as a successful school (Krug, 1992). This dimension focuses on the role of leaders in carrying out their responsibilities together with their followers to ensure that the school has clear, measurable goals and has a time frame. Leaders are also responsible for clarifying the goals framed so that all parties know and this facilitates support or assistance from the school community to ensure those goals are achieved (Hallinger, 2005).

The role of instructional leaders in defining school goals can be seen more clearly through a study conducted by Hallinger and Murphy (1986) on elementary schools in California. The results of interviews with school leaders and teachers involved, it can be summarized six characteristics that must be present in instructional leaders in terms of defining school goals. First, the vision and mission of the school should be clear and easily understood by all members of the school community. The goal should be written or displayed around the school to ensure that every member of the school can easily see it and this makes them always sensitive and aware of the direction of the school. Second, school goals should focus on academic development according to the suitability and needs of the school. Third, school goals should be the priority of every teacher as they perform tasks. Fourth, the goal needs to be legitimately accepted by all teachers. Fifth, the goal needs to be cleverly articulated by the leader and sixth, the goal needs to be supported by all members of the school and the leader himself needs to set the best example in realizing the goal.

Manage the Instructional Program

The second dimension is to manage instructional program. This dimension focuses on controlling and coordinating matters related to curriculum and teaching. According to James and Balasandran (2013), this dimension is one of the biggest tasks and challenges that school leaders must face because curriculum and teaching are the core functions of a school. Failure to complete this task efficiently and effectively results in the desired result of the student's academic achievement not being achieved. There are three functions in this dimension namely supervising and making instructional assessments, coordinating the curriculum, and monitoring student progress (Hallinger, 2011; 2000; Hallinger& Murphy, 1987).

According to Hallinger (2011, 2000), the first function of this dimension is to supervise and evaluate teaching. It refers to the efforts of school leaders to ensure that school goals are fully translated and put into practice in the PdP process. While for the second function, which is to coordinate the curriculum, school leaders need to ensure that teaching objectives are in line with learning in the classroom, the existence of the assessment process and coordinate instructional -related programs. School leaders also need to appoint individuals who are responsible for coordinating the curriculum, analysing student examination results, and conducting the selection of curriculum materials as teaching aids for teachers. For the third function, which is to monitor student development, school leaders need to have ongoing discussions with teachers related to student academic development, provide specific views, and make improvement efforts in the teaching and learning process to improve student achievement.

Promote School Climate

The third dimension is promoting a school climate. There are five functions in this dimension namely protecting instructional time, always being visible, providing incentives to teachers, encouraging professional development, and providing incentives to student learning (Hallinger, 2011a; 2000). Hallinger (2011a, 2000) has made modifications to the model and concept of instructional leadership that he built with his colleagues namely the Instructional Leadership Model of Hallinger and Murphy (1987, 1985). After conducting several validity and reliability tests, he has dropped one of the six functions in this third dimension which is to enforce academic standards. Therefore, for this new leadership model the function for the dimension of encouraging school climate has only five functions as stated above, and it remains to this day.

This dimension is also the widest dimension of scope and purpose compared to the previous two dimensions. This is consistent with the notion that effective schools typically create an academic stress through the development of high standards and expectations for students and teachers to excel academically and teaching (Bossert et al., 1982; Purkey& Smith, 1983). From the aspect of teaching, schools effectively develop a culture of "continuous development" that is, every success in adopting a good practice that can contribute to school development will be rewarded (Barth, 1990; Glasman, 1984; Hallinger& Murphy, 1986; Heck, Larsen, &Marcoulides , 1990; Leithwood& Montgomery, 1982; Mortimore, 1993; Purkey& Smith, 1983). Head teachers must also set a good example in terms of values and practices that can create a climate of sustainable development in aspects of PdP (Dwyer, 1985).

Past Studies on Instructional Leadership

There are many past studies either from within or outside the country that discuss instructional leadership. This study, which involves various levels of schooling, has examined various issues such as the level of instructional leadership practice around the world and the factors that influence the success of its implementation.

The level of understanding and implementation of instructional leadership practices is a subject that is often the choice of researchers. Among them is a study on the instructional leadership practices of headmasters in Malaysia. Harris, Jones, Cheah, Devadason, and Adam (2017) have conducted research aimed at exploring instructional leadership practices among headmasters in primary schools in Malaysia. The findings of the study show that head teachers understand and can explain the responsibilities they have performed related to instructional practice. Specifically, they perform instructional supervision on all teachers and outline how they monitor the quality of the PdP process in the classroom. The findings of the study have also successfully revealed that some of the duties and responsibilities of headmasters in Malaysia are in line with the instructional leadership practices outlined by western scholars. In addition, the findings of the study also show that the supervision of the PdP process moves in line with professional learning among teachers in the 30 schools.

A study to examine the role of instructional leadership in developing a vision and managing all matters related to teaching in Singapore was conducted by Nguyen, Ng, and Yap (2017). The purpose of this study was to explore the practice of instructional leadership in primary schools in Singapore. The findings of this study show that the role of instructional

leadership of head teachers can be categorized into four main themes namely vision development and implementation, organizational and physical structure, professional development, and leading and managing aspects of teaching. While the most important finding in this study is that a hybrid instructional leadership structure that combines elements of hierarchy (a single supreme authority) and heterarchy (organization does not depend only on a single supreme leader) can be developed and become the basis for schools in Singapore to strengthen leadership practices instructional.

Mission setting, managing curriculum and teaching, and developing a school climate that supports learning have proven to be key dimensions that need to be practiced by instructional leaders whether in the context of education in the west or in the east. Hallinger, Walker, Nguyen, Truong, and Nguyen (2017) have conducted a study that has three objectives namely first to obtain the views of primary school principals on their role as instructional leaders; second, describe instructional leadership practices that they see as important; and third, developing an instructional leadership model according to the context of education in Vietnam. This study successfully produced a model of instructional leadership according to the context of education in Vietnam by showing similarities with the model of instructional leadership in western countries in terms of dimensions focusing on setting school direction, managing curriculum, and teaching, and developing learning climate in schools.

A study on the implementation of instructional leadership by school leaders in Swaziland was conducted by Merwe and Schenck (2016) involving eight primary schools in Hhohhoi.e. the southern province of

Swaziland. The findings of the study show that two characteristics of instructional leadership practices are practiced, namely first, the collaborative efforts of school people based on shared leadership and healthy interpersonal relationships provide an optimal effect on student learning; and second, the school leader is the chief executive who remains responsible for ensuring that the collaborative PdP process works well. In addition, this study also successfully explored the key factors in the success of instructional leadership programs in schools namely collaborative support from the subject panel, recognition for each achievement, healthy interpersonal relationships and always protecting instructional time.

Factors influencing the successful implementation of instructional leadership by school leaders are also issues that have been studied scientifically. Simin, Sani, Komathi, Kumar, and Amuta (2015) have conducted a study to identify the factors that influence the instructional leadership practices of Technical and Vocational College principals in Malaysia from the perspective of teachers. The findings show that there are four domains or areas that are the most important factors in the practice of instructional leadership, namely professional leadership, sharing a clear mission and goals, continuous monitoring of teacher progress and the development of teacher professionalism. Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that the factors that lead to the successful implementation of instructional leadership practices have similarities with the dimensions of instructional leadership that have been stated by scholars of instructional leadership such as the need to have a mission, vision or goals, importance of leader role, quality monitoring teacher

teaching and promote professional development among teachers.

Shatzer et al. (2014) conducted a study aimed at investigating the impact of school leaders on student academic achievement and to determine leadership practices specifically that can be associated with improved student academic achievement. This study successfully revealed leader behaviors that can have a significant impact on student academic achievement. Such behaviors are monitoring student progress, protecting instructional time, providing incentives to students who show success in learning, providing incentives to teachers who are successful in the teaching process and creating contingent rewards i.e. the level of leaders creating productive transactions with their followers (one of the dimensions in transaction leadership).

RESEARCH DESIGN

This study uses a qualitative method by using a multiple case study design to explore the strategies used by primary principals in implementing instructional leadership. The use of case study research design is particularly appropriate when a study conducted involves the observation of an individual or unit, a group of people, a class, a school, a community, a culture, or an event. Accordingly, a case study design is considering appropriate if the study involves a thorough study of a group, individual, situation or location, community, or program(Patton, 2015; Merriam, 1998, Yin, 2003; Dayang& Hafiz, 2009).

Participants

For this study, homogeneous purposive sampling was used with a total of 15 selected teachers, namely four teachers from two schools in Negeri Sembilan, four teachers from two schools in Melaka and seven

teachers from four schools in Johor. There are two reasons in choosing the selected teachers. First, selected teacher musthave at least three years' experience as a teacher, and second, selected teachers must be emotionally as well as physically healthy. The purposive sampling is used because it is a purposive sampling technique that targets samples that have uniformity or similarity in terms of characteristics or properties (Creswell, 2015; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Ilker, Sulaiman, &Rukayya, 2016).

Howthe protocol's items and observation checklist developed?

Since this study was derived from an explanatory sequential design, then the interview questions and observation checklists were constructed only after the questionnaire instrument was ready to be analyzed. This study uses semi-structured interviews as a method in collecting qualitative data. According to Edwards and Holland (2013), semi-structured interviews are located halfway between structured interviews and unstructured interviews. Formal questions were constructed early, yet the researcher had the freedom to question and explore more deeply the answers given by the study participants. These interview questions were constructed based on the isolated and extreme findings found during the quantitative study conducted. To implement the observation process, this study also constructed a checklist consisting of some information such as 10 functions of instructional leadership and important locations in schools where it is believed that principals practice instructional leadership. This checklist was used by the researcher to record any principal behaviours related to instructional leadership.

Trustworthiness and validity

Qualitative data collected through interviews and observations are also necessary to validity and reliability and they are closely related to internal and external consistency (Ely, Vinz, Downing, &Anzul, 1997; Miles, Huberman, &Salfida, 2014; Taylor, Bogdan, &DeVault, 2016). The reliability of the interview can be improved through a careful interview structuring process. According to Silverman (2014), in order to ensure that the interview data has a high level of reliability, the interviews need to be carefully structured. The interviews should have the same format and word sequence as well as questions for each study participant. He also suggested that each study participant understand the interview questions given with the same understanding. Thus, reliability can be enhanced through several means such as being careful while plotting the interview schedule, undergoing interview training, coding accurate interview data and the use of closed-ended questions (Silverman, 2014).

Researcher has ensured that the governance of interviews and observations are conducted in an orderly and well -organized manner. The date of the interview was set in advance and conducted according to the comfort and time availability of the participants. For questions that are poorly understood, researcher does not mind to explain them with examples to improve their understanding. Interview time is also always maintained and does not exceed 60 minutes. For external validity, the researcher found the interview participants and gave them a full transcript of the interview to read, review and verify if they agreed. If not, then the correction is done according to their wishes. Yet in the study, all study participants agreed with what was written in the transcript.

To assess the level of validity and reliability of qualitative data findings, this study uses triangulation method.

According to Gay et al. (2012), triangulation refers to the use of various methods, data collection strategies and data sources to get a more complete picture of what is being studied and cross -check the information received. According to him, triangulation is the main way to ensure that the findings of qualitative studies are reliable. Triangulation is a process to improve the validity and reliability of qualitative data using interview and observation methods on study subjects (Yin, 2011).

For the observational data collection method, the researcher used observation without direct involvement in collecting qualitative data. Validity in this observational activity was made through construct validity techniques. Through this construct validity technique, events or occurrences that have been observed are categorized into several groups based on the desired variables (Bailey, 2008). While the reliability of the method of data collection observation based on the way and process of observation is done. De Laine (2000) states that if the researcher makes observations directly then it can add value to the reliability of the observation information obtained.

Pilot study

This study used interview's protocol and an observation checklist as the instruments for the study.A pilot study wasconducted to ensure the high trustworthiness and validity of interviews' protocol and an observation checklist. The pilot study only involved a teacher from a selected school and took place on March 13, 2018. The benefits of conducting this pilot study is that the researcher able to obtain views of the participants on their understanding of the instructional leadership practices. Upon completion, it was found that there are some questions that need further explanation to help the participants understand the questions.

In fact, at the end of the session, participant has mentioned that there were some questions that were poorly understood that insisted further explanation. As for the time, the pilot study lasted for 63 minutes which considered as reasonable. In general, it was found that the pilot study for qualitative data collection was successful especially for interviews because all the information received was very important and made the researcher more prepared to face the real interview (Yin, 2011). In addition, the researcher can also ensure that all the questions posed to the actual participants will be clearer and easier to understand (Kalof, Dan, & Dietz, 2008).

Data Collection and Analysis

In this study, qualitative data collection was conducted through interviews and observations. According to Patton (2015), qualitative data analysis requires several key processes such as organizing data, constructing themes, coding data according to themes, making data evaluations and ending with conclusions. The main process of qualitative data analysis is also like what was stated by Wellington (2015) who suggested several steps in analysing qualitative data that is to code each data unit, verify code, assign categories to each code, build themes and sub-themes, check each category as well as the theme so as not to overlap, and finally get the correlations, comparisons, similarities, differences between themes, and sub-themes.

To facilitate the administration of qualitative data, researchers use NVivo12 software in storing, compiling, and analysing qualitative data resulting from interviews. As for the observation data, the researcher analysed it manually, that is, collecting and storing all the pictures taken during the observation process and then compiling based on the
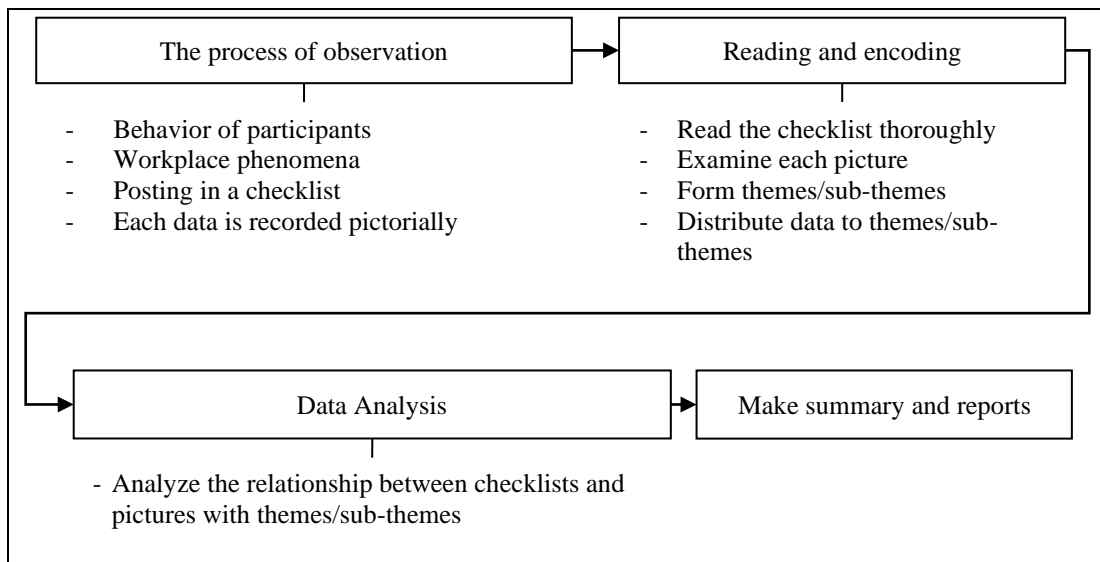
theme that has been built. This qualitative data management process is done carefully and well planned to ensure that the data obtained has a high level of validity and reliability. The complete data management process for the interviews can be referred to in Figure 2 while for the observation it is in Figure 3.

To analyse the interview data, the researcher made an assessment by creating a specific code that was appropriate to the theme obtained. For example, the 15 teachers involved with the interviews were coded as G01 through G15. For the interview questions constructed based on the three dimensions of instructional leadership, the codes IVK1, IVK2 and IVK3 were created. IV refers to interviews and K1 refers to the first dimension of instructional leadership. Next, the codes F1 to F10 were added to represent the 10 functions found in the three dimensions. All these codes are also included with the date the interview was conducted. An example of a complete code for interview data is G1IVK1F2 - 15/03/18 which means the findings from the first participants of the interview regarding the first dimension of instructional leadership and the second function which is to explain the school goals obtained on 15/03/2018. Construction of this code to facilitate the researcher to refer or do revision while writing chapters 4 and 5.
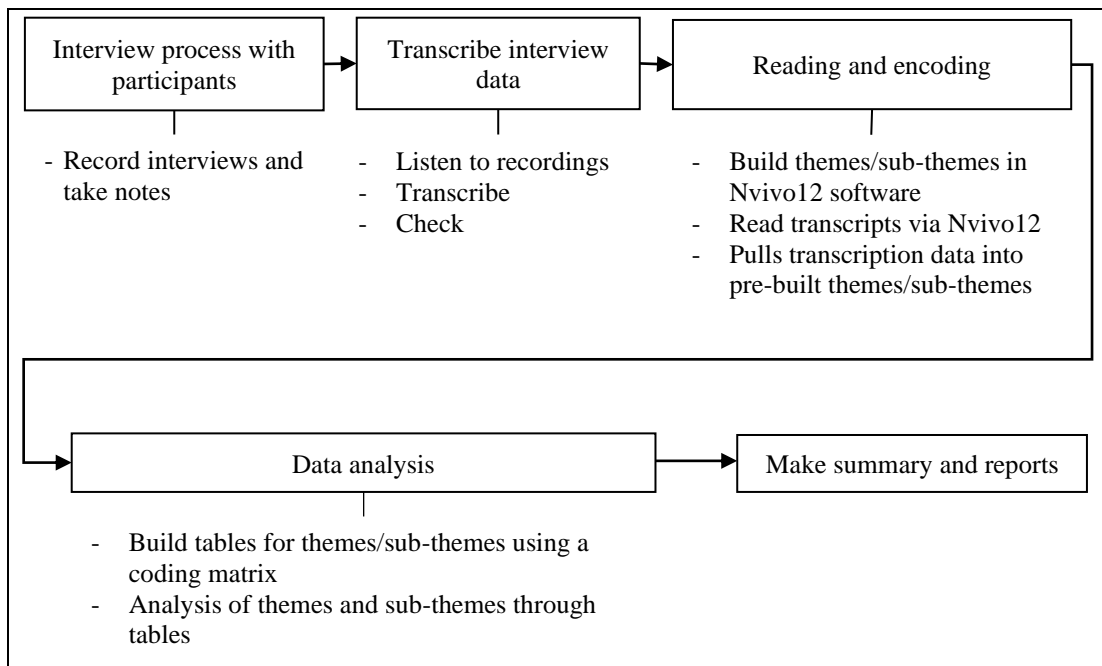
Figure2 Qualitative Data Management Process (Interview)

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│   The process of observation │───────▶│     Reading and encoding    │
└─────────────────────────────┘        └─────────────────────────────┘

  -  Behavior of participants             -  Read the checklist thoroughly
  -  Workplace phenomena                   -  Examine each picture
  -  Posting in a checklist                -  Form themes/sub-themes
  -  Each data is recorded pictorially     -  Distribute data to themes/sub-
                                              themes

        ┌─────────────────────────────┐        ┌─────────────────────────────┐
        │        Data Analysis        │───────▶│   Make summary and reports  │
        └─────────────────────────────┘        └─────────────────────────────┘

          - Analyze the relationship between checklists and
            pictures with themes/sub-themes
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Figure0 Qualitative Data Management Process (Observation)

As for the observation process, the researcher investigated the involvement of principals and teachers in the implementation of instructional leadership practices in schools. All information related to these observations is recorded in the observation checklist as well as photographs. Findings from these observations were analysed to strengthen the interview data. The code used starts with the school code, namely SK1 to SK8 to represent the eight schools that were observed. Followed by the word "OB" which is an abbreviation for observation. Then K1 to K3 for the three dimensions of instructional leadership and F1 to F10 for the 10 functions in those three dimensions. This code is also accompanied by the date the observation process was implemented. For example, the complete code for observational data is SK1OBP3 - 19/04/18. All these qualitative analyses were used to answer the fifth research questions. The fifth research question is related to the implementation of principals' strategies in performing 10 instructional leadership functions.

FINDINGS
Strategies for the Implementation of Instructional Leadership of Principals in the Southern Zone of Malaysia
Strategies for Defining School Goals
Based on interviews and observations, it was found that principals in the southern zone of Malaysia have practiced two functions in the dimension of defining school goals, namely formulating, and explaining school goals. The following are some of the answers of the study participants after being asked the question of how the headmaster defines the goals of the school.

> "… headmaster does use exam data as a goal framework. His reference is based on data…"(G06TBK1F1 - 2/4/2018)

> "… Of course, the headmaster sees the teacher's ability to set goals…" (G06TBK1F1 - 2/4/2018)

> "… usually,the goals are very focused…. I agree

with the goals that are set…" (G01TBK1F1 - 3/4/2018)

"… for the teacher, the headmaster will explain the school goals during the meeting…" (G02TBK1F2 - 3/4/2018)

"… vision, mission, goals, motto and slogan are displayed throughout the school ... the history of the school is also there…. this school is a transformation school ..." (G12TBK1F2 - 4/4/2018)

".... the headmaster then announced the school's goals in an official assembly..." (G05TBK1F2-2/4/2018)

Strategies for Managing the Instructional Program

Principals in the southern zone of Malaysia were also found to practice three functions in the dimension of managing the instructional program, namely supervise and make instructional assessments, coordinate the curriculum, and monitor student progress. The following are some of the responses of study participants when asked whether their principals have implemented this second dimension.

".... when he passed by the class, he saw the teacher teaching. Sometimes he comes in, sits back, sees how students learn…"(G08TBK2F3-12/4/2018)

"… usually, the results of monitoring he will share during meetings or reflections in general…" (G03TBK2F3 - 17/4/2018)

"… Supervision calendar is there… .and the teacher already knows… So far he is following…" (G01TBK2F3 - 3/4/2018)

"… The headmaster assesses with full integrity. He helped us. He helps a weak student. He is not bossy…"(G07TBK2F3 - 12/4/2018)

"... the headmaster cares about the student's achievement and always gives ideas on how to improve the student's academic performance…" (G13TBK2F5 - 29/3/2018)

Strategies for Promoting School Climate

For the third dimension, namely promoting school climate, it was found that principals in the southern zone of Malaysia have implemented five functions in this dimension, namely protect instructional time, always visible, provide incentives to teachers, encourage professional development, and provide incentives

to student learning. The following are some of the study participants' answers regarding the strategies used by principals in implementing this third dimension.

"… The principal is very concerned about MMI. For example, if you go to a course. Recently there were 3 teachers asking to attend the course. Only one person is allowed…"(G03TBK3F 6 - 17/4/2018)

"… This headmaster is easy to see and approach. If he is standing there, the teacher will come and talk about whatever he can. He is friendly …"(G04TBK3F7 - 17/4/2018)

"… Whatever the opportunity for professional development of the teacher, the principal will support. He is very supportive…"(G08TBK 3F8 - 12/4/2018)

"All teachers must attend the LDP. If there is a problem of not being able to attend, the teacher needs to write a show cause letter…"(G05TBK3F9 - 2/4/2018)

"Principals usually use official assembly to give appreciation to students…"

(G04TBK3F10   -   17/4/2018)

DISCUSSION

The discussion on the implementation of head teacher strategies in implementing instructional leadership is divided into three dimensions namely defining goals, managing instructional programs, and promoting the school climate. Regarding the first dimension, which is to define school goals, principals in the southern zone of Malaysia have set clear and focused goals in leading their schools and subsequently disseminate those goals to all school staff and stakeholders. This behaviour is in line with what is stated by Krug (1992), that is, a school that does not determine the direction (goal) certainly cannot measure whether the school is successful in the process or not. Hallinger and Murphy (1986) in their study of elementary schools in California also stated that school goals need to be focused and it is important for the academic development of students.

The study conducted by Simin et al. (2015) regarding the instructional leadership practices of Technical and Vocational College principals in Malaysia also found that the need to have a clear vision, mission or goal is one of the four domains that are the most important factors in this leadership. The findings of this study also meet the recommendation of Murphy (1990) that school goals that have been formulated should be shared or communicated regularly whether formally or not to students, parents, and teachers to ensure that all activities carried out in school should be towards the goal. Weber (1996) stated that disseminating school goals is one way to promote a positive learning climate apart from setting

high achievement targets, creating an orderly learning environment, and increasing the level of teacher commitment in carrying out tasks.

For the second dimension, which is to manage instructional programs, principals in the southern zone of Malaysia have practiced three roles, namely supervising, and making instructional evaluations, coordinating the curriculum, and monitoring student development. The findings of this study are in line with the findings of the study of Harris et al. (2017) on the instructional leadership practices of head teachers in Malaysia. The study showed that headmasters in Malaysia performed instructional supervision on all teachers and outlined methods to monitor the quality of the PdP process. The findings of the study also show that the supervision of the PdP process moves in line with professional learning among teachers in the 30 schools studied.

A study conducted by Sisman (2016) on the behavior of instructional leaders in Turkey found that one of the five behaviors of instructional leaders is administering the curriculum and managing the instructional process. According to him, the success of a school depends on the ability of school leaders in planning, implementing, and coordinating curriculum -related programs. James and Balasandran (2013) in their study on the role of instructional leaders found similar findings to this study regarding curriculum coordination. According to their study, the dimension of managing instructional programs has given focus to controlling and coordinating matters related to curriculum and teaching. This dimension is also one of the biggest tasks and challenges that school leaders must face because curriculum and teaching are the core functions of

a school. Murphy (1990) also stated that instructional leaders need to constantly monitor student progress by using assessment data so that the goals set by the school are achieved.

The various strategies carried out by the principals are enough to prove that they seriously perform the function of monitoring the development of students with the aim of ensuring that the academic performance of students is on the right track. This action is seen to be in line with the findings of a study conducted by Shatzer et al. (2014) regarding instructional leadership behaviours that can be associated with improved student academic achievement. The study has successfully identified five behaviours that have a major impact on student achievement and one of them is monitoring student development.

The third and final dimension which is to promote the school climate, the principal of the southern zone of Malaysia has practiced all the roles related to this dimension. Those roles are to protect instructional time, be always visible, provide incentives to teachers, encourage professional development, and provide incentives to student learning. All these roles were implemented based on the feedback expressed by the teachers during the interviews and during the observation process conducted by the researchers. The findings of this study are in line with a study conducted by Merwe and Schenck (2016) on eight primary schools in the southern province of Swaziland. The study has successfully explored the key factors in the success of instructional leadership programs in schools and one of those factors is always protecting instructional time. Similarly, the study made by Shatzer et al. (2014) who studied instructional leadership practices in 37 elementary schools in West Intermountain, USA.

The findings of the study have successfully revealed several leader behaviours that can have a major impact on student academic achievement and one of those behaviours is protecting instructional time.

James and Balasandran (2013) have outlined four functions in the dimension of promoting an academic learning climate and one of those functions is maintaining high visibility. Similarly, Murphy (1990), who stated that school leaders need to maintain high visibility to foster the development of a school learning climate that is conducive to the PdP process. Hallinger (2011a; 2000) also stated that the role of principals to always be visible is very important and needs to be implemented so that they can more easily communicate, discuss, and provide time space to approach teachers and students.

Regarding the professional development of a teacher, the findings of this study are in line with the study on the role of instructional leadership in Singapore conducted by Nguyen et al. (2017). The study found four key themes in instructional leadership that need to be highlighted by school leaders and one of them is professional development. Professional development is important to provide teachers with the latest knowledge and skills that can be practiced in the PdP process. Simin et al. (2015) have also conducted a study to identify the factors that influence the instructional leadership practices of Technical and Vocational College principals in Malaysia from the perspective of teachers. The study states that one of the factors that lead to the success of the implementation of instructional leadership practices is to promote professional development among teachers. A study conducted by Alam

and Ahmad (2017) on the impact of instructional leadership on student academic achievement, found that instructional leaders need to implement several strategies to ensure student academic improvement occurs and one of the strategies is school leaders need to create a network among teachers. facilitate the sharing of knowledge and experience among them. This partnership is also one of the forms of professional development that teachers can do.

Principals 'strategies in appreciating student success, in line with the findings of a study conducted by Shatzer et al. (2014) regarding instructional leadership practices that can be linked to improved student academic achievement. This study has successfully identified five instructional leadership behaviors that can influence student learning and among those behaviors is that principals provide incentives to students who show success in learning. James and Balasandran (2013) have outlined four functions that need to be performed by principals in promoting an academic learning climate. One of the four functions is to provide incentives to students.

In conclusion, there are dozens of strategies implemented by school leaders to practice all three dimensions of instructional leadership. All these strategies are implemented according to the situation, environment, and culture in a school. Apart from that, the strategy used by the principals in the three states of the Southern Zone of Malaysia is also mostly implemented by other school leaders from various backgrounds in the education system.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study has detailed the findings on the implementation strategies of principals' instructional leadership practices in three states in the Southern Zone of Malaysia. Having analyzed and discussed all the findings, then this study certainly has implications for the knowledge and understanding of instructional leadership. The results of this study provide a significant contribution to many parties, especially education policy makers, principals, and middleleaders in Malaysia. The findings of this study should be an important source of reference for the Ministry of Education Malaysia (MOE), AminuddinBaki Institute (IAB), State Education Departments (JPN) and all District Education offices (PPD) to strengthen instructional leadership practices in schools. The main purpose of this strengthening is to increase the excellence of schools in Malaysia to be on par with schools in developed countries and further achieve world - class quality education.

Apart from that, the results of this study are also expected to help the MOE in appointing new principals who are more qualified and have credibility by looking at the characteristics of the principal candidate and not just rely on seniority alone. The researcher also hopes that the findings of this study can be disseminated to all educators in Malaysia, especially school leaders, to increase their understanding and knowledge of instructional leadership practices. Principals are encouraged to apply the strategies found in this study and make them a reference to improve instructional leadership practices for the sake of school progress as well as the excellence of student academic performance.

CONCLUSION

Overall, this study found dozens of strategies used by principals in implementing instructional leadership through 10 functions that need to be practiced. Each of these functions consists of three to six strategies that have been put into practice to ensure that this instructional leadership is nurtured. In conclusion, all these strategies are implemented according to the situation, environment, and culture in a school, but the goal is the same for the excellence of students, teachers, and the school.

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