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Research paper



Principals' Instructional Leadership towards Teachers' Self-Efficacy

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Abstract

Principals' instructional leadership practices have proved to be an imperative predictor to teachers' self-efficacy. Yet, educators are concerned about the ability to adapt to new instructional leaderships due to unspoken principal-teacher expectations. This paper discusses the extent of instructional leadership practices by two newly transferred principals at two different schools. The purpose of this quantitative study was to examine how their instructional leadership practices affected the self-efficacy of the teachers. Through the use of a cross-sectional survey, responses made by 64 teachers employed in one public school and one privately-run school, were compared. The Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale (PIMRS) Teacher Short Form and the Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale (TSES) were used for data collection. The findings showed a high level of instructional leadership practices and self-efficacy in both schools. The test results indicated a strong and positive relationship between the principals' perceived instructional leadership practices and the teachers' self-efficacy. Some of the details even suggested that newly transferred principals enforce specific school goals as their main agenda. Nevertheless, the areas of significance identified by this study may help district school superintendents develop the right knowledge to support newly transferred principals in their instructional leadership, thus enhancing teachers' self-efficacy at the school level.

Keywords: *instructional leadership; public schools; principal; private schools; self-efficacy.*

1. Introduction

There has been a substantial development in instructional leadership since the 1980s. Over three decades, instructional leadership has been the subject of research that needs constant enrichment to its findings in order to gain a better understanding. There has been little agreement to define an ideal principal that is agreed by most researchers (1), especially to look into the impact of instructional leadership in an increasingly important area such as in Southeast Asia (2).

Nonetheless, research has suggested that the impact of instructional leadership on student outcomes is notably greater than that of transformational or other types of leadership (3). Additionally, this has called for more evaluations and trainings to accommodate the role of principals' instructional leadership in a different context (4) (5) Allio, 2012), as well as research studies related to teachers. How instructional leadership is experienced and instructionally enacted by teachers is much less clear (7). Therefore, the urge to have more findings would bring in useful information on the subject of principal-teacher relationship. The principals' instructional leadership proved to be an imperative predictor to teachers' self-efficacy (8,9) which can indirectly contribute to student learning outcomes (10). In retrospect, Bandura (1977) pioneered the use of Social Cognitive Theory which yielded the concept of self-efficacy. The concept, which gained vast attention among researchers in educational settings rests on four major sources: emotional and physical state, mastery experience, vicarious experience (provided by social models) and social persuasion.

Another primary concern related to this issue is how fast teachers adapt to their new principal's instructional leadership practices. A reason for the link between the principals' instructional leadership and the teachers' self-efficacy has to do with expectations from both parties. Enacted in the context of active instructional leadership, the teachers' self-efficacy is nurtured when the principals are providing necessary resources and allowing the teachers to participate in classroom affairs (12,13). As newly-transferred principals gain more experience and feedback from the schools. their self-evaluations change. The principals can either become more optimistic, or more realistic depending on their level of self-evaluation. In other word, less confident principals would gain an inability to lead, while confident principals would have achieved a realistic self-evaluation as a consequence of their time as first-time principals in a particular school (14).

2. Instructional Leadership and Self-Efficacy

Many researchers have shown interest in the fields of principals' instructional leadership and teachers' self-efficacy by incorporating both variables in their research. The reason for this is because they have found a link between the principals' instructional leadership and the self-efficacy of teachers, but yet both variables strayed into a territory that is less well established by measuring individual efficacy or collective efficacy (12,15). The teachers' self-efficacy can strongly predict instructional behaviors such as focused instruction, but is less predictive of behaviors such as standard contemporary practice and flexible grouping practice (7).

Previous studies have reported that principals' instructional leadership have a significantly positive effect on teachers' self-efficacy (9,10,16–18). (8) concluded that a principal who emphasizes more on instructional practice rather than administrative work, will make a difference in a teacher's ability

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to complete planned instructional goals. Conversely, researchers have also reported no significant difference in teachers' self-efficacy from principals' instructional leadership. Studies by (19) as well as (20) using the PIMRS and TSES, further indicated that principals' instructional leadership does not influence or has little effect on teachers' efficacy. Moreover, (21) reported that teachers' perceived general efficacy is unrelated to their principals' leadership style.

Unlike the principals in privately-run schools, the principals in public schools are required to attend a preparatory program by the Ministry of Education. The program, known as the National Professional Qualification for Educational Leaders (NPQEL), has been nurturing future school leaders since its inception in 2014. Whilst extensive research has been carried out on principals' instructional leadership, there has been little data on how newly transferred principals adapt to new school environments. When it comes to the advantage of having a preparatory program mandated by the ministry, it is assumed that the principals' instructional leadership level in public schools would be higher than the instructional leadership level of principals in privately-run schools. Thus, this paper will provide an insight into the relationship between the principals' instructional leadership practices and the self-efficacy of teachers. Moreover, it aims to compare the instructional leadership practices by two newly transferred principals at a public school and a privately-run school.

The study under discussion aims to answer the following research questions:

Q1: What are the levels of principals' instructional leadership practices and teachers' self-efficacy in both schools?

Q2: Is there a relationship between the principals' instructional leadership practices and the teachers' self-efficacy?

Q3: Are there any significant differences between the principals' instructional leadership practices and the teachers' self-efficacy?

3. Conceptual Framework

This framework identified the principals' instructional leadership as an independent variable while the teachers' self-efficacy as a depending variable as stated in Figure 1.

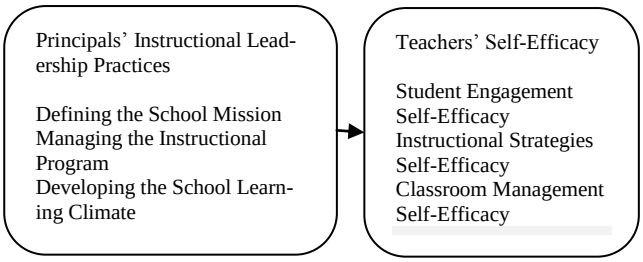


Fig.1: Principals' Instructional Leadership Practices and Teachers' Self-Efficacy Conceptual Framework

In Figure 1, the principals' instructional leadership practices act as an independent variable. It is referred as a variable by incorporating three dimensions based upon the conceptual framework shown. The first dimension which is 'defining the school mission' refers to the principals' role in determining the areas and resources in which the school will focus on. The second dimension, 'managing the instructional program' focuses on the coordination and control of instruction and curriculum. The last dimension, 'developing the school learning climate', conforms the notion that successful schools need the development of high standards and expectations that rewards continuous learning and improvement (22).

Meanwhile, the teachers' self-efficacy become the dependent variable and are defined by three constructs which are referring to the teachers' assessment of their ability to perform the job of teaching (15). All the three constructs are 'student engagement self-efficacy', 'instructional strategies self-efficacy' and 'classroom management self-efficacy'. These constructs will determine the teachers' efficacy by individual's judgement of his or her ability for the teaching task at hand. In other word, they need to assess what will be required in the anticipated teaching situations (23).

4. Methodology

A quantitative cross-sectional survey was used in this study involving a public school and a privately-run school in Kuala Lumpur. The two secondary schools are located in an urban area, with female principals leading both schools in their first year, respectively. A comparison was done between the schools, with 32 teachers from each school participating as respondents. The teachers were randomly selected and assigned to fill up a set of pencil and paper questionnaire each.

The principals' instructional leadership practices were measured using the PIMRS Teacher Short Form which served as an effective instrument for the data collection with high standard reliability and internal validity (22,24). The teachers' self-efficacy was measured using the TSES by (15). It consisted of 24 items aimed at getting the teachers' own perceptions about their efficacy in student engagement, instructional strategies and classroom management. For this study, an additional 14 items were created in the instrument set based on suggestions by (20) on how the principals' instructional leadership can enhance the teachers' self-efficacy. All of the data were gathered through the use of a five-point Likert scale in the questionnaires. A Cronbach's α value of 0.96 was used for each scale. Teachers were asked to what extent they agree or disagree with the 60 items presented in the instruments. The items that represented individual factors were then subjected to a reliability analysis while the rest of the data were analyzed using an SPSS software.

5. Findings

As shown in Table 1 below, of the 64 random teachers who participated in this survey, 31.3 percent (20) of them were male, and 68.8 percent (44) were female. The 21.8 percent (7) and 40.6 percent (13) male teachers were from the public school and the private school, respectively. Whereas 78.1 percent (25) of the female respondents were teachers from the public school, and 59.3 percent (19) were the private school's female teachers.

Table. 1: Respondent's Demographic

Teachers' gender (n=64)	Type of school			
	Public		Private	
	n	%	n	%
Male	7	21.8	13	40.6
Female	25	78.1	19	59.3
Total	32		32	

5.1 Instructional Leadership Practices

Table 2 shows the level of the principals' instructional leadership practices in both schools. The mean scores for both principals showed that their level of instructional leadership practices was high. The public school principal's score (M=4.29, SD=0.46) was higher compared to the score of the principal from the private school M=4.16, SD=0.49). The findings also reported the same high dimension of instructional leadership for both principals, which was 'defining the school mission'. The public school principal's dimension score was higher (M=4.45, SD=0.43) compared to the private school principal's score (M=4.32, SD=0.58).

Table. 2: Comparison on Means and Standard Deviations in Dimension of Instructional Leadership

Principal Instructional Leadership Practices	Public school			Private school		
	Mean	SD	Level	Mean	SD	Level
Defining the school mission	4.45	0.43	High	4.32	0.58	High
Managing the instructional program	4.28	0.45	High	4.18	0.52	High
Promoting the school learning climate	4.21	0.58	High	4.07	0.61	High
Overall	4.29	0.46	High	4.16	0.49	High

Even though both principals' instructional leadership levels were high, an independent-sample t-test was conducted to compare the scores of instructional leadership practices for both principals. Table 3 below shows that there was no significant difference in the scores between the public school principal (M=4.29, SD=0.46), and the private school principal (M=4.16, SD=0.49); (t=1.04, p=<.05). The magnitude of the differences in the means was very small (eta squared=0.27) based on (25).

Table. 3: Means and Standard Deviations of Principal Instructional Leadership Practices

Scale	Type of School	n	Mean	SD	t-Value	Sig.
Principal Instructional Leadership Practices	Public	32	4.29	0.46	1.04	0.301
	Private	32	4.16	0.49		

5.2. Teachers' Self-Efficacy

As shown in Table 3, the mean scores from both schools showed that the teachers' self-efficacy level was high. However, the teachers' self-efficacy score in the private school (M=4.24, SD=0.38) was lower compared to the public school teachers' self-efficacy score (M=4.31, SD=0.40). It was found that the highest construct's score for the teachers' self-efficacy in instructional strategies for both groups was the same. The highest construct for public school teachers' self-efficacy was higher (M=4.31, SD=0.40) than their counterparts from the private school (M=4.24, SD=0.38).

Table. 3: Comparison of Means and Standard Deviations in Self-Efficacy's Constructs

Teachers' Self-efficacy	Public school			Private school		
	Mean	SD	Level	Mean	SD	Level
Student engagement	4.19	0.47	High	4.19	0.39	High
Instructional strategies	4.38	0.42	High	4.32	0.42	High
Classroom management	4.35	0.42	High	4.19	0.44	High
Overall	4.31	0.40	High	4.24	0.38	High

An independent-sample t-test was also conducted to compare the teachers' self-efficacy scores for both schools. Based on Table 4, the mean scores for both groups showed that the self-efficacy level was higher in public school teachers (M=4.31, SD=0.40) as compared to what the teachers in private school scored (M=4.24, SD=0.38). However, there was no significant difference in scores for teachers' self-efficacy in both schools (t=.733, p=0.466). The magnitude of the differences in the means was very small (eta squared=0.28).

Table. 4: Means and Standard Deviations of Teachers' Self-Efficacy

Scale	Type of School	n	Mean	SD	t-Value	Sig.
Teachers' self-efficacy	Public	32	4.31	0.40	0.73	0.466
	Private	32	4.24	0.38		

5.3. Instructional Leadership and Teachers' Self-Efficacy

Table 5 below shows the correlation between the principals' instructional leadership practices and the teachers' self-efficacy. Both variables were investigated using the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient. As suggested by (25), there was a very strong and positive correlation between the two variables (r=0.584, n=64, p<0.05).

Table. 5: Correlation between Principal Instructional Leadership Practices and Teachers' Self-Efficacy

	Teachers' Self-Efficacy	
Principal Instructional Leadership Practices	Pearson Correlation	0.584 (**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000
	n	64

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

6. Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to investigate to what extent the principal's instructional leadership practices might affect the level of teachers' self-efficacy and their relationship. The results showed that both principals played an important role as instructional leaders who focused on achieving the school goals, mainly in the teaching and learning areas. Recognizing the school mission will provide a strong foundation for principals to meet the high expectations of teachers at the start of school year.

Setting goals and directions serves as a core practice for the newly transferred principal who wishes to become a successful instructional leader at their respective school (26). The fact that both principals in this study could set the school goals as their immediate focus regardless of school type and school background, further confirmed Fisher (2014) skills-based justification on why the principals were appointed to their current positions. This finding also supported the views on qualified principals who focus on instructional leadership practices under challenging contextual conditions (28).

The relationship between the principals' instructional leadership practices and the teachers' self-efficacy in both schools was found to be positive and strong, thus confirming previous studies done by (9,10,13,16,18). Although this was the case, there was no significant difference in scores found for the principals' instructional leadership among the two schools.

The results of this study also showed that the teachers in both schools emphasized more on instructional strategies. Even though the process of influencing self-efficacy beliefs is not a straightforward one (29), both newly transferred principals have proved to be efficient in giving adequate support in teaching and learning, thus encouraging their teachers to be more effective in their instructional strategies. The high level of self-efficacy in instructional strategies also showed that the teachers were not being left alone in handling their daily tasks. Instead, they were receiving continuous support and assistance from their newly transferred principals. This situation is in line with the practice of instructional leaders who understand how their leadership influences teachers' self-efficacy. Efficacy is not based on the teachers' own skills alone, but also on the support of the context in which they are exercising their teaching skills (30).

The preparatory program such as the National Professional Qualification for Educational Leaders (NPQEL), should serve as an opportunity for future school leader to gain advantage as instructional leader. Thus, it is assumed that the principals' instructional leadership level in public schools would be higher than the instructional leadership level of principals in privately-run schools. However, finding from this study shows that there was no significant difference in the scores between the public-school principal and the private school principal. It is expected that these

findings will also be reflected on the work of preparatory program makers (31).

Such programs have been made compulsory for public school teachers as a way of stressing on leadership competencies and redefining job descriptions for future school leaders. The ministry and district school superintendents should be proactive and provide assistance to instructional leaders through various principal empowerment trainings, regardless of school types. On top of that, principals and teachers would need more facilitation in core areas that constitute teaching and learning.

Finally, more research is needed in order to understand about principalship in a school context. A range of different probes and interview techniques may spark more insights into instructional leadership practices and teachers' self-efficacy. In addition, further research may advance newer approaches to identify factors that are affecting principals' instructional leadership dimensions, and the reason for teachers' lack of inclination towards efficacy in classroom management and student engagement, in preference for instructional strategies.

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