A Review on the Importance of Instructional Leadership in Schools and Its Effects on Students' Achievement

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Abstract

This study explores the importance of instructional leadership and its impacts on school students' academic achievement and to find which specific instructional leadership dimensions have the most important role. Different studies have been reviewed in the area of instructional leadership models and dimensions. The findings of this review indicated that overall instructional leadership showed a significant moderating influence on the students' academic achievement. Regarding the dimensions, different influence trends were observed. The dimensions of managing instruction, defining the school mission and goals, and promoting teacher development were found to influence students' scores in both direct and indirect ways; however, no significant impact on students from managing public relations was found.

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1 Introduction

School principals are the highest rank of leadership in schools and are expected to execute both simple and complex tasks. The principal's core responsibilities are to serve as the headteacher responsible for schools' teaching, learning progress, and development. Indeed, instructional leadership is an undeniable duty and has been widely studied (Boyce & Bowers, 2018). According to Drake and Roe (2002), instructional leadership refers to any effort towards encouraging and

supporting people involved in the teaching and learning process to achieve school goals and develop a strong school social system.

As such, it is the major task of efficient instructional leaders, and they are obliged to offer effective learning and teaching environments. Marks and Printy (2003) point out that this increases the quality of education by moving schools towards their ideal location. These changes also enhance the achievements of students. Therefore, instructional leadership has become increasingly important for educationists and researchers as expectations from schools and efforts to establish a more accountable school system (Boyce & Bowers, 2018; Hallinger et al., 2015). Hence, this paper aims to provide a comprehensive review of instructional leadership models and dimensions and highlight their importance in schools. Also, the effect of instructional leadership on students' achievement is presented in this paper based on previous related studies.

2 Concept of Instructional Leadership

Instructional leadership is referred to the influence of leaders on teaching and learning through actions associated with identifying the school's mission and vision, motivating staff to meet goals, and coordinating classroom-based approaches toward school improvement (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). The Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale (PIMRS) is used as a measurement of the frequency of instructional leadership practices. PIMRS is a survey instrument designed by Hallinger and Wang (2013) to provide a profile of a principal's instructional leadership across ten functions of leadership and measure the frequency of instructional leadership practices (Hallinger & Wang, 2013). Later, Hallinger et al. (2015) developed a concise version of the PIMRS model based on Hallinger and Wang's (2013) model.

Educational leadership has been explored for more than 50 years to understand the linkage between school leadership and changes in students' learning (Bell et al., 2003; Hallinger, 2012). This phenomenon led educational scholars to study a range of leadership models, including instructional leadership, transformational leadership, transactional leadership, educative leadership strategic leadership, teacher leadership, collaborative leadership, and distributed leadership (Boyce & Bowers, 2018; Gronn, 2003; Leithwood & Sun, 2012; Spillane, 2006).

However, according to Hallinger et al. (2015), out of these models, instructional leadership has the greatest empirically verified impact on students' outcomes via the studies and research conducted by educational researchers. Meanwhile, indirectly this empirically proven evidence strengthened school accountability as a prominent measure for policymakers and school leaders. This evidence rationalised that instructional leadership is salient for school improvement (Hallinger, 2011).

3 Instructional Leadership Model

Various instructional leadership models have been developed by scholars of education to define dimensions, functions, or roles that can be practiced by school leaders in executing their responsibilities. For this subtopic, the researcher presents three main instructional leadership

models frequently discussed in academic research. These are Murphy's Instructional Leadership Model (1990), Weber's Instructional Leadership Model (1996), and Hallinger's Instructional Leadership Model (2011). Duke (1987), among others, sought to draw an accurate picture of instructional leadership. Leithwood and Jantzi (2005), in their review of research, advocated that Hallinger's (2008) and Hallinger's and Murphy's (1985) models of instructional leadership offer the most empirical evidence. Later, Hallinger et al. (2015) revised the same model that suits current educational changes. Thus, Hallinger et al.'s (2015) instructional leadership model will be applied in this study.

In Figure 1, the instructional leadership model has domains divided into three categories of behaviours, with each encompassing 10 additional specific practices. Hallinger et al. (2015) leadership domains are (a) defining the school's mission, which includes framing and then communicating the school's goals; (b) managing the instructional programme, which includes supervising and evaluating instruction, coordinating the curriculum, and monitoring student progress; and (c) promoting a positive school learning climate, which encompasses protecting instructional time, promoting professional development, maintaining high visibility, providing incentives for teachers, and providing incentives for learning.
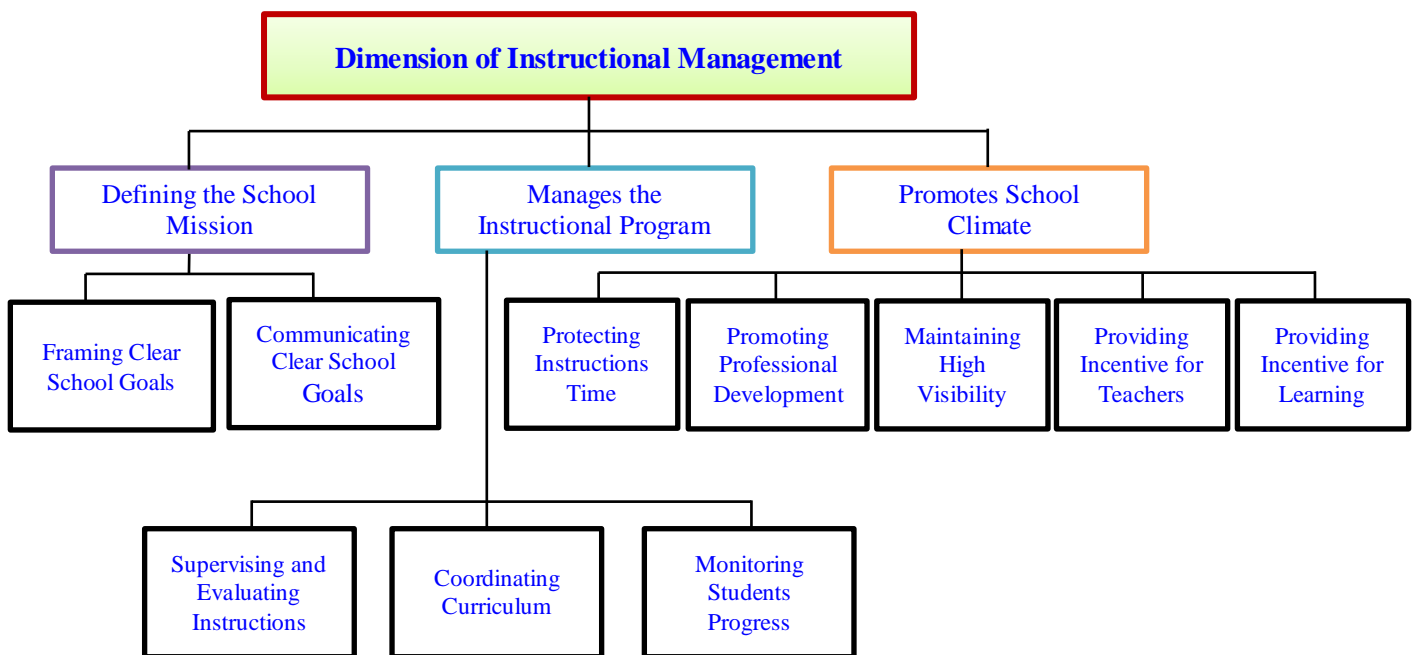

Figure 1: Instructional Leadership Framework Model (Hallinger et al., 2015).

3.1 First Dimension: Defining the School Mission

Defining the school mission is the main thrust of Halinger's model and prescribes that instructional leaders must be goal-oriented (Hallinger, 2012). This aspect reflects two functions, which are constructing school goals and spreading the goals by communicating, defining, and sharing them via communication. Instructional leaders can motivate others to adhere as a team to achieve it. According to Hallinger (2012), defining the school mission is crucial to determine the direction and central purposes. As such, the vision, goals, and mission of the school must be underlined by the principal.

The principal has a prominent role to play in framing and structuring the mission by working with academic staff to ensure the school has clear, measurable, time-based goals focused on the academic progress of students. Therefore, communication within the school community is necessary to be widely practised and supported. In this regard, school principals may create an effective public relations system to announce school objectives to the stakeholders and local community (Boyce & Bowers, 2018; Rathana, 2020).

Regarding school goals, it is stated that instructional leaders should perceive six criteria. Firstly, the vision and mission of the school ought to be comprehensible for everyone in the school community (Hallinger, 2012). The goals should be displayed visibly in school areas that are accessible and written clearly so they are understandable by all school community members. Secondly, the school's goal should focus based on academic development to cater to the school's needs. Thirdly, the school's goals should be a priority for teachers while carrying out their tasks. Fourth, teachers in the school must accept and verify the school goals. Fifth, the goals should be expressed profoundly by the leader and finally, the goals should be supported by everyone in the school community.

3.2 Second Dimension: Managing the Instructional Programme

The second dimension is managing the instructional programme. This dimension includes three functions, which are supervising and evaluating instruction, coordinating the curriculum, and monitoring student progress (Boyce & Bowers, 2018). As such, Hallinger (2011) has suggested that the school leaders' initiative is central to ensure the school's goals can be achieved in the process of teaching and learning. This dimension is also consistent with upholding a visible presence to supervise and assess instruction.

Under this dimension, the second principal function is the responsibility of leaders to coordinate the curriculum (Hallinger, 2011). As the curriculum implementer, the principal needs to maintain a good environment in the classroom. School leaders should align teaching objectives with learning activities in the classroom. They should promote effective instructional activities in the class which include content functions, arrangement, and management. Further, school leaders should assign individuals with responsibility in coordinating the curriculum, analysing students' examination results, and making decisions to choose the correct curriculum materials as teaching aids.

Further, the third function is monitoring students' progress and here, School leaders should promote intervention, monitoring in the classroom and an effective process of learning (Khaki, 2009). Khaki (2009) strongly suggests that three elements reflect the instructional principal, which are strong educational learning activities, the scope of the syllabus in time and sharp supervision. School leaders should hold continuous discussions with teachers regarding students' academic development and achievement.

Monitoring students' learning and progress are one of the activities of the principals as instructional leaders. The main purpose is to make good instructional decisions and provide feedback on learning and progress (Southworth, 2002). Providing teachers and parents with assessment results on a progressing premise is a good and effective school principal characteristic. Principals who show solid instructional leadership focus on regular classroom inspections, clear assessment criteria, feedback on teaching-learning, helping staff and students increase their performance and regularly monitoring student progress (Hallinger, 2011).

3.3 Third Dimension: Promoting a Positive School Learning Climate

The third dimension is creating a positive school climate. This dimension encompasses five functions, which are (1) protecting instructional periods, (2) always seen or visible, (3) providing incentives for teachers, (4) promoting professional development and (5) providing incentives for student learning. This dimension refers to norms and the attitudes of teachers and students that affect the learning process (Hallinger et al., 2015). Promoting effective professional development is the most influential instructional leadership practice among elementary and secondary schools (Blase & Blase, 1999).

3.3.1 Protecting the Instructional Period

Protecting instructional time denotes protecting time planned for reasons of instruction, assessments and other students' activities where direct student-teacher correspondence and supervision are well-maintained. It tends to be resolved as the time spent by principals working straightforwardly with teachers and students to achieve teaching and learning (Grissom & Loeb, 2011). For ensuring allocation time for instruction, it is recommended to set up a prize system for good participation, foster proper commitment within the staff to prompt guardians about sporadic class attendance, hold a staff meeting to discuss regular and current important issues. Classroom instructional time must be protected from aggravation; there must be a supervision plan, time allocated when teachers will start and end classes on schedule must be planned.

3.3.2 Always Seen or Visible

Effective school leaders maintain high visibility by visiting classrooms as part of their daily routine and interacting with teachers and students, as well as other stakeholders when opportunities arise (Marzano et al., 2005). High visibility provides school leaders with frequent opportunities to model desired values and beliefs. Maintaining high visibility also provides frequent communication with stakeholders. Visibility and communication in the community outside the school allow principals to advocate for their schools to parents, the central office and the community (Marzano et al., 2005).

3.3.3 Promoting Professional Development

Indeed, principals play a significant role in improving teachers' instructional skills in schools. This argument is supported by Blasé and Blasé (2000), who stress that the principal offers

and advances professional development opportunities to upgrade teachers' instructional aptitudes. An effective principal is indeed a compelling instructional leader who holds staff advancement gatherings, seminars, observations and supervises the procedures of staff (Hallinger, 2012).

3.3.4 Providing Incentives for Teachers

To propagate the desired school-learning climate, the principal, as noted by Hallinger et al. (2015), should provide incentives for teachers and learning. Glickman et al. (2001) underlined that providing feedback on teaching and learning is one of the notable practices of principals as instructional leaders. It includes the act of providing incentives for teachers, for instance, by presenting praise and feedback concerning their classrooms and professional progress programmes.

4 Importance of Instructional Leadership in Schools

Based on their review of research papers, Findley and Findley (1992) concluded that school ineffectiveness is due to a lack of instructional leadership on the part of the principal. The core dynamic of teaching and learning is the focus of effective leadership and is depicted through perceptions, behaviours, and interactions towards it. Principals should work closely with teachers on instructional improvement, school achievement goals and student academic progress.

Studies conducted by Krug (1990) argued that what leaders believe about their work is dominant in explaining differences between leaders. These researchers admitted that other leader characteristics helped to determine practices and behaviour but challenged the view that leaders' beliefs shaped their perceptions of events and were the primary influences in their actions and/or response to circumstances. In these studies, the researchers used data gained from 87 principals as their samples. The findings based on the analysis of data indicated that principals' activities elucidated the differences between more and less effective instructional leaders compared to their beliefs. They proposed that instructional leadership may be viewed more accurately as an approach to administration rather than a set of practices.

Hou et al. (2019) conducted a study on the effect of instructional leadership on students' academic achievement in China. They investigated 26 high schools with 26 principals and 4,288 students as their sample in Shenyang, China. The findings show that there are concrete impacts of the roles of principals as instructional leadership on student academic achievement. In their studies, principals rated their instructional leadership according to the Revised Instructional Leadership Questionnaire of China (ILQC-R). The results showed that instructional leadership is significantly proven as the factor for moderating influence on the relationship between high school entrance scores and college entrance scores for students. A central measure for school improvement and effectiveness sustainability is a principal's diagnosis of the school's needs and the principal's educational values, combined with the application of diverse strategies (Day et al., 2016).

As other research has suggested, different leadership emphases are needed for schools at different stages of development (Robinson et al., 2008). For some schools, a focus on managing

public relations may be an essential preliminary stage before principals can give more attention to the curriculum. However, a principal's instructional leadership is likely to have more positive impacts on high school students' academic achievement when the principal can focus on the quality of learning, teaching and teacher development. Given the potential benefits of instructional leadership, it is important to understand how principals who have demonstrated successful instructional leadership learned to do so. It is also critical to identify efficient strategies to train other school leaders so they can adapt leadership practices in different contexts. Moreover, it is necessary to design effective professional development programmes for school leaders and continuously cultivate their instructional leadership in real situations (Qian et al., 2017).

In the context of early childhood education (ECE), Campbell-Barr and Leeson (2016) stated that the quality of leadership and management determines and influences the quality of the educational institution. Thus, the success of any organisation depends mainly on the crucial and significant role of leaders. The importance of leadership as an area of research was also noticed by Davis and Ryder, who stated that "leadership is a hot topic for early childhood and we advocate the use of leadership for all those who work in the field of early childhood education and care" (Davis & Ryder, 2016).

Regarding instructional leadership, Alhazmi (2010) stated that in the Saudi Arabian education system, the Minister of Education underlines the roles and responsibilities of principals (referred to as headteachers), who are accountable for preparing the school environment and have a comprehensive understanding of the objectives of education and awareness of the characteristics of pupils at the stage they serve. They also have responsibility for organising resources and equipment and maintaining good relationships with students. Further, teachers and parents supervise the school's provision through carrying out observations and assessments of teachers' and students' performance.

Senge et al. (2000) advocated that in an educational organisation, efforts to build a philosophy of teamwork, preserve positive relationships by upholding a balance between individualities, work culture and shared goals are important. They strongly suggest that the role of an educational leader is undeniably significant to achieve those visions.

This provides children with the opportunity to convey their experiences and master skills within a balance of child-initiated and adult-initiated activities as they work as partners within a motivating environment with productive interactions. This positive environment enables children to achieve more advanced levels of learning and development (Cobb et al., 2009). Therefore, educational leaders with the role of instructional leadership should take effective steps to guide and facilitate the learning process. Leaders should ensure learning activities support language development and the acquisition of social and communicative skills. They further motivate intellectual, physical, creative, social, and emotional capabilities by allowing them to monitor and replicate their leaders as role models (Drake, 2005).

In Saudi schools, however, this philosophy of teamwork is still in need of further consideration, as teachers tend to use competition to motivate learning, which limits the benefits of cooperative learning inside classrooms. Educational leaders should therefore aim to guide and facilitate the learning process through participating in children's activities, supporting their language development and acquisition of social and communicative skills through verbal interaction and motivating their intellectual, physical, creative, social, and emotional capabilities and allowing them to observe and imitate their leaders as role models in this respect (Drake, 2005).

The focus of kindergartens and early stages of education in Saudi Arabia is language and social development. Therefore, instructional leaders in Saudi schools, following the MOE and Kingdom's vision, emphasise and give priority to academic achievement. Thus, instructional leaders should provide a positive learning environment to enhance the academic achievement and learning process, embedded with the enjoyment of learning (Algarni & Male, 2014). According to Jones and Pound (2008), the effective performance of educational leaders includes managing time and space, based on the need of learners to experience a variety of learning activities and enjoyment.

Based on the literature review, it is evident that principals have the most influential impact on school improvement and the achievements of students academically. However, committed teachers as instructors are a determining factor to the achievement of the students. Hence, it is the responsibility and function of instructional leaders to drive the teachers, especially in terms of efficacy, to ensure student achievement. This is coherent with the purpose of this study to investigate the influence of instructional leadership on the teachers' efficacy. This argument is supported by research findings by teacher efficacy advocates such as (Calik et al., 2012; Duyar et al., 2013; Louis et al., 2010).

5 Instructional Leadership's Effects on Student Achievement

Based on his extensive research, Leithwood et al. (2004) underscored leadership as having significant direct and indirect effects on student learning; in mathematical terms, a quarter of total school effects. Their conclusions place the leadership of a school as the second rank to classroom instruction as factors that influence students learning.

Further, regarding the issue of instructional leadership's effects on student achievement, Hallinger and Heck (1998) developed three classifications of principal effects on student and school outcomes. The first classification is direct effects, which means that the principal's actions influence the outcomes of the school. The second classification is mediated effects, which denotes that a principal's actions affect outcomes indirectly via other variables. The final classification is reciprocal effects, which refers to efforts of the principal that affect teachers and *vice versa* and, through these processes, outcomes are affected.

Further, Quinn (2002) concluded that student achievement is an outcome of the indirect effects of instructional leadership. Fundamentally, instructional leadership dimensions are strongly correlated with actual teaching practices. They comprise resource provider, instructional resource,

communicator, and visible presence. In line with this finding, Day et al. (2008) argued that direct effects among elementary schools versus secondary schools have some differences, for instance, between middle and high schools. Day et al. (2008) suggested, based on his findings that direct effects of leadership on student outcomes are more common in elementary school settings than secondary schools. This is due to most elementary schools have more closed settings compared to secondary schools. In addition, Smylie et al. (1996) found that two factors, namely teacher empowerment and staff collaboration (which entail teachers' involvement in curriculum and instruction development) increased student achievement.

Despite the effects of principals portrayed as indirect, nevertheless, their roles and leadership are fundamental to student achievement and school improvement (Hallinger, 2011; Robinson et al., 2008). Thus, there is a significant relationship between the quality of teaching and the level of instructional leadership in principals. Hence, instructional leadership is a key factor for the making of effective schools. This fact is upheld by policymakers and practitioners in education. The concept of instructional leadership is crucial and evident via effective school research, implementation of changes and school improvements carried out by researchers worldwide, such as (Hallinger, 2003). The main thing for instructional leaders in schools is to ensure teaching and learning quality is improved and effective in producing prescribed outcomes and goals and enhancing students' achievements. Based on the discussion above, it is evident academically and empirically that the instructional leadership of principals has a significant impact on the outcomes of schools and student achievement. Therefore, instructional leadership is the key factor for school improvement and effectiveness.

6 Conclusion

Reviewed studies have indicated that a key step for schools to improve and sustain effectiveness is the principal's diagnosis of the school's needs and the principal's educational values combined with the application of diverse strategies. Hence, it is concluded that principals' instructional leadership has an important positive influence on school students' academics. The findings concerning the relative effect of the dimensions of instructional leadership provide more detailed guidance schools about the behaviours of instructional leadership that make a difference for students' academic achievement. As other researchers have recommended, different leadership emphases are needed for schools at different stages of development. For some schools, a focus on managing public relations may be an essential prior stage before principals can give more attention to the curriculum. However, a principal's instructional leadership is likely to have more positive impacts on high school students' academic achievement when the principal can focus on the quality of learning, teaching, and teacher development.

As a result of the prospective benefits of instructional leadership, it is crucial to understand how those principals who have demonstrated successful instructional leadership learned to do so. It is also important to identify efficient strategies to train other school leaders so they can adapt leadership practices in different contexts. Moreover, it is essential to design effective professional

development programmes for school leaders and to continuously cultivate their instructional leadership in real situations.

7 Availability of Data and Material

Data can be made available by contacting the corresponding author.

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