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Instructional Leadership Model through Asian Principals' Perspectives

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Abstract. This study focuses on instructional leadership of principals of successful schools in four Asian countries India, Malaysia, Thailand and United Arab Emirates. This study followed the qualitative method involving questionnaire and interview. About fifty five principals from these countries participated in this study. The questionnaire was sent trough post or email while interview was conducted either face to face or online using msn or Skype. The responding rate of participants was hundred percent. The discussion was focussed on three themes namely concept of instructional leadership, role of principal as instructional leader and benefits of instructional leadership. The findings accounted for instructional leadership of the participant principals as leadership for overall development of students, supported commitment for overall development of students, shared decision making, involving supervisory models and continuous professional development. It also advocated the benefits of instructional leadership in terms of fulfilment of higher needs of recognition, self esteem and self actualization of students, teachers and the principals. The study concludes with formulation of a new model based on instructional leadership practised by principals from these Asian countries.

KeyWords*:* Instructional Leadership, Instructional Leadership Model

1. Introduction

Instructional Leadership has been debated across the globe for almost four decades. Leithwood (1994), Whittaker (1997) have linked Instructional Leadership to improvement in class room instructions. Though the term instructional leadership is still an elusive concept, but most of the researchers agree on a point that principal of school must be a strong instructional leader. Barth (1990,p.64) stated, "*Show me a good school and I'll show you a good principal"*. In light of this statement it's necessary to link instructional leadership perspective with principal ship context.

> *Of the seven major task areas for which principals have responsibility, curriculum and instruction has generated the most sound and fury. On the one hand, the principal has been exhorted to exert instructional leadership; while on the other hand, he has been told flatly that such a role is beyond his or any other human being's capacity. The problem with these disputations is that the exponents of a given position have neither defined sharply what is signified by the concept of instructional leadership nor made their assumptions explicit. (Bridges, 1967, p.136)*

Bridges assertion about instructional leadership brought too much rethinking on the role of school principal which ultimately lead to researches towards a viable model that could be applied broadly to the principalship (Barth, 1996; Cuban, 1984). Rethinking on school principalship lead to linking instructional leadership with transformational leadership (Leithwood,1994;Leithwood & Jantzi,1999,2000;Silins,1994), distributed leadership (Gron,2002;Spillane,2006), and shared leadership (Barth ,1990;Hallinger and Heck,2010;Marks and Printy,2003;Pounder ,Ogawa & Adams,1995). Empirical results across a large number of studies showed fairly consistent patterns of impact, and today, the term 'leadership for learning' has come to subsume features of instructional leadership, transformational leadership, and shared leadership (Hallinger,

2003; Heck & Hallinger, 2009; MacBeath & Cheng, 2008; Marks & Printy, 2003; Mulford & Silins, 2009). Zepeda Sally

(2003) described instructional leadership as critical to the development and maintenance of an effective school. Instructional leaders must influence others to pair appropriate instructional practices with their best knowledge of the subject matter. The focus must always be on student Active Teaching, and principals must supply teachers with resources and incentives to keep their focus on students. Jantzi and Leithwood (1996, pp. 514-15) defined six dimensions critical in the practice of leadership including: identifying and articulating a vision; fostering the acceptance of group goals; providing individualized support; intellectual stimulation; providing an appropriate model; and high performance expectations. Hallinger and Murphy (1985) in their model on instructional leadership describes principals' role in three dimensions of Defining *the School's Mission*, *Managing the Instructional Program*, *and Promoting a Positive School Learning Climate* .Andrews and Soder (1987, pp. 9-20) described the effective instructional leader as a principal performing at high levels in four areas – resource provider, instructional resource, communicator, and visible presence in the school. Though various models on instructional leadership have been formulated and studied in western world but there are no successful models designed keeping into consideration the leadership of principals in Asian schools .This study therefore formulates a model on instructional leadership by exploring instructional leadership of effective principals from four Asian countries India, Malaysia, Thailand and United Arab Emirates.

1.1. Objectives of the Study

The study aims to develop a model on instructional leadership by discussing the following three themes.

- Instructional Leadership as concept and importance
- Role of principal as an instructional leader
- Benefits of instructional leadership

2. Methodology

The study used a qualitative technique to data collection. Its qualitative nature arouses from the use of open ended questions and interview. The research was carried out in four Asian countries Malaysia, UAE, Thailand and India at different times in five years.

2.1. Open Ended Questionnaire

A seven item questionnaire was developed to explore the instructional leadership of the principals. The questionnaire was tested in five different schools to determine the appropriateness and level of difficulty to the respondents. The findings of the open ended questionnaire are to provide an overview of the principals as well as to serve to formulate guidance /prompts for qualitative interviews.

2.2. Interview

The interview questions were framed from the questionnaire used for studying instructional leadership practices by the principal. Keeping in mind the responses obtained from pilot testing of questionnaire, the interview questions were developed and tested on the same five principals to ensure clarity of responses on they explain about their instructional leadership. Both of the data collection techniques provokes thoughts and allows respondents the opportunity to express their opinion in greater detail, thereby revealing more information that the researcher may not be aware of.

2.3. Participants

The participants of the study comprised 55 principals from fifty five different secondary schools in three Asian countries, Thailand, Malaysia and United Arab Emirates. All these principals are well recognised principals based on their attributes and success of school in their respective societies. All these participants were provided with questionnaire through email or hard copy with self addressed envelope to send back the responses. All the subjects were kind enough to return the responses on time, keeping hundred percent rate of response. The interviews were either conducted face to face or using msn or Skype.

3. Data Analysis

The analysis focused on the selection of items from the open-ended questionnaire and the interview schedule that related to issues on instructional leadership of principals The discussion was focused on three themes : (1)Instructional Leadership as concept and importance and (2) What principals need to do for Instructional leadership? (3) What are the benefits of instructional leadership?

4. Findings

Responses from interview and open ended questions are reported together because the same questions applied to both. The response rate and participation rate for questionnaire and interview was hundred percent. The following are the findings of the study.

4.1 Concept of Instructional Leadership & Importance

It's noteworthy that all of the principals have same ideas on instructional leadership. All of them stated instructional leadership as a leadership that promotes effective learning in classroom, out of class room, learning of values and ethics, responsibilities , learning to sustain culture and develop national character. The reflective comments were

" Principal as an instructional leader not only should lead curricular basis of instructions and learning but also beyond it".

"Instructional leadership of principals should never reflect mere academic achievements. It should also reflect values inculcated in students and sense of responsibilities."

"Sustainable leadership, developing firm national character, emotional intelligence and entrepreneurship that can't be transferred through curriculum transaction and pedagogy ,should have prior place in instructional leadership, of course we don't neglect academic success too".

It clearly indicates that principals from these Asian countries have different understanding on instructional leadership than the western scholars Leithwood (1994), Whittaker (1997) and Zepeda Sally (2003).Their comments are reflective of importance of instructional leadership beyond class room, beyond prescribed curriculum. From practionner, trainer and researcher's perspective I could say that a principal has to do more leadership acts beyond classroom. As prescribed curriculum only *develops* subjective competencies in students, leadership beyond classroom accounts for over all and holistic development of students and instructional leadership here is leadership for holistic development of students.

4.2 Role of Principal as an Instructional Leader

Various researchers have interpreted role of principals on instructional leadership. While Zepeda Sally (2003) describes it as making commitment to learning, providing connectivity and cohesion, developing team of teacher leaders and understanding change, Hallinger and Murphy (1988) advocates on class room observations. In contrary to this all the principals from these Asian countries have put emphasis on (1) Committing leadership for student's overall development (2) Incorporating teachers and students in leadership process (3) Including clinical, developmental and collegial models of supervision for developments (4) Continuous professional development of all. The reflective comments are

" In our every weekly meeting we all (teachers and principal) discuss more on the ways to link , learning to classroom teaching, ca-curricular activities, entrepreneurship and student's leadership. We volunteer ourselves towards the responsibilities and commit till success is achieved".

"Certainly for development of students their involvement is must. We invite and encourage them with their ideas and seek feedback on our actions".

"Teachers do their best when their views are valued. We involve them in every process right from planning to outcome through process. In fact we also take their feedback, as being a person, we too need some feedback".

"It's important to provide feedback to everyone and at every stage. Therefore supervision is very important. We plan the process of supervision, observe it, provide proper feedback, and use appropriate behaviours to work together, encourage each other to help each other, develop professionally and continuously".

4.3 Benefits of Instructional leadership

As stated earlier the term instructional leadership is linked to transformational leadership(Leithwood,1994; Leithwood&Jantzi,1999,2000; Silins,1994), distributed leadership Gron,2002; Spillane,2006), and shared leadership (Barth,1990; Hallinger and Heck,2010; Marks and Printy,2003; Pounder, Ogawa & Adams,1995), the role of principal as explored above in addition to linking with previous researchers links instructional leadership to moral leadership(Robert J.Owens,1998) that exemplifies the fulfilment of higher needs of teachers , students and principal as well. All of the principals advocated for benefits out of their instructional leadership that includes students satisfaction with outcome, students high recognition, self esteem and self actualization; teachers high morale, recognition, self esteem and actualization and such fulfilment of needs for principal too.

5. Conclusion

The findings of the study on instructional leadership of principals in Asian school conclude towards development of instructional leadership model beyond classroom teaching too.

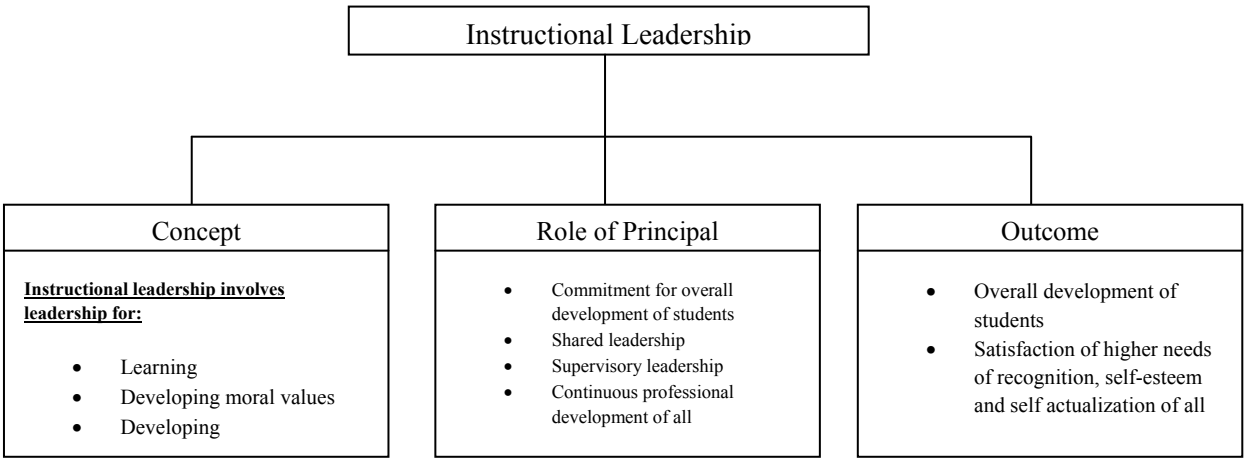

Fig 1: Model for Instructional Leadership

The figure 1 shows model derived from responses of principals through open ended questionnaire and subsequent interview which describes, the concept, role of principal and outcome of process as major dimensions of instructional leadership. The concept of instructional leadership involves improving learning in and out of class room, leadership for developing moral values, entrepreneurship and national character amongst students. In terms of role of principal it describes the commitment of principal towards overall development, involving teachers and students in process (shared leadership), supervisory leadership using models and continuous professional development of all. While outcome of instructional leadership accounts for satisfaction of higher needs of students, teachers and principal himself along with academic achievement of students. These needs are Recognition, self esteem and self actualization.

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