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Strategic Instructional Leadership Characteristics and Senior School Administration Competencies for a Disruptive Social Environment

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Abstract
This research sought to identify the teachers' perceptions of principal instructional leadership at Huahin Vitthayalai School in Thailand throughout 2018, having utilized the *Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale (PIMRS*) authored by Hallinger. While this research undertook a quantitative survey of 85 full-time teachers' demographics using the PIMRS questionnaire, a total of 76 questionnaires were successfully returned, achieving a response rate of 89.4% for the purpose of a comparative study. The findings discovered numerous demographic responses to various questions, while the results identified a number of relationships at the dimensional level, and a small number of cross-relational factors at the functional level. Further analysis concluded that the cultural, economic, historical and social correlations with principal instructional leadership are plays a participatory role in the effects of strategic instructional leadership and these factors have an impact on the senior school administration. To this end, understand the respective effects will promote superior leadership within a fast-changing, disruptive social environment.

Keywords: Principal Instructional Leadership, Learning Community

Introduction

It is essential to know the answer to the question of *who is teaching our children*, since this will assist in creating a holistic approach to securing a strong curriculum for a 21st century professional learning community. If schools are unable to describe who their teachers are, it is unlikely that they will be competent in planning, and implementing the values that are necessary for academic achievement. Dynamic changes in society have intensely encouraged the streamlining of various common visions and expectations of wide-ranging senior stakeholders within a professional learning community as result of these unwavering changes. In order to improve overall social development, frameworks and theories have been studied and various scholarly researchers have undertaken further examinations to explore social and educational implications of ineffective instructional leadership practices, while developing nations continue to remain stagnated by their findings. To this end, professional practices require improvement based on a critical analysis of research results, which could be accomplished by proactively incorporating the various inter-relationship and co-relationship dimensions of the Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale into the school system as an critical element for continued principal instructional leadership development.

Principal Instructional Leadership has been, for many years, measured by utilizing the *Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale (PIMRS)* developed by Hallinger and

Murphy (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). The respective instrument, illustrated in Figure 1, utilizes three dimensions (1.0) Defining the School Mission, (2.0) Management the Instructional Program, and (3.0) Developing the School Learning Climate Program. Within each of these respective dimensions are a number of job-functions, these are as follows: (1.1) Frame the School Goals, (1.2) Communicate the School Goals; (2.1) Supervise and Evaluate Instruction, (2.2) Coordinate the Curriculum, (2.3) Monitor Student Progress; (3.1) Protect Instructional Time, (3.2) Maintain High Visibility, (3.3) Provide Incentives for Teachers, (3.4) Promote Professional Development, (3.5) Provide Incentives for Learning. Hallinger (2011) notes that the various job-functions and dimensions proposed have supported various studies throughout the continent as well as in Western nations. The strength of instructional leadership lies not in the job-functions themselves, rather, the holistic approach to leadership itself as a combination of all functions and dimensions as a way to strengthen the overall school leadership.

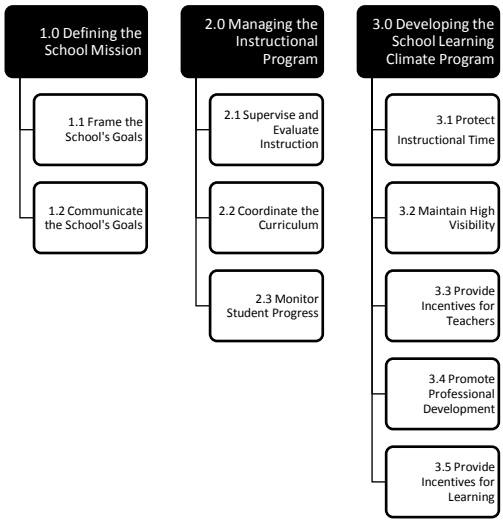

Figure 1. Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale Framework with 3 Dimensions and the 10 Principal Job-Functions. Reprinted from *Mapping Instructional leadership in Thailand: Has Education Reform Impacted Principal Practice?* by Hallinger and Lee, November 18 2013, retrieved from http://ema.sagepub.com/content/42/1/16. Adapted with permission.

Literature Review

A recent study by Carpenter (2018) on professional learning communities and on the implications of a school collaborative culture reiterated previous understandings in the field of instructional leadership that intellectual and physical contributions of a wide-variety of stakeholders are fundamental to prudent principal instructional leadership. While Carpenter focused primarily on workspace interactions, his study echoed the findings of previous studies that administrative tasks are important even though he also found that "shared leadership, decision making, teaching and learning practice, and accountability measures" (Carpenter, 2018, p.121) are increasingly more important for schools. His focus on the collaborative culture reinforces the perspective that principal instructional leadership is not an exclusive function, rather, it is a role that evolves with the support and contribution of all other stakeholders within the school.

To this end, a collaborative culture in the context of a professional learning community requires the principal, as the leader of the school, to frame and communicate

the school goals. Studies have found that the principal is a key person for the identification, and development of, school goals; and these have overwhelming implications on the surrounding learning environment through the contribution of some stakeholders that have an indirect impact on student learning, such as the parents. For this purpose, since research has shown that performance quality is helped by a collaborative culture, it is prudent to recognize that the culmination of this culture is illustrated in a set of shared values with goal-setting recognized by all stakeholders as a means to implement and direct the utilization of school resources.

Despite this, Thessin and Louis (2019) made a distinction between short term goals and long-term goals. The respective researchers noted that "first and foremost, changes to support principals prioritize professional learning, thereby weighing development goals with potential long-terms gains equal to or higher than an immediate goal of improving outcomes" (p.434). In this context, communicating which goals play a fundamental and long-term impact are imperative to the longevity of the school. For this purpose, community communication and engagement is essential and would require the utilization of various communication channels, such as school events, newsletters, and a strong online presence. These conveniently assist in the building of cordial relations with all stakeholders, thus the cultivation of these communication channels is pivotal to ongoing success, particularly in a changing society.

While research by Meyers and Vangronigen (2019) stated that bureaucratic procedures and an inability to be flexible hinders goal development and implementation; their analysis of 134 school principals identified various planning factors to be a cause of insufficiently implemented goal-setting. Such tasks as focusing goals squarely on achievement scores, not appreciating the significance of the intended timeline for milestone achievement, and an under-appreciation by administrators for the role of the individual in charge of the school planning, were some of the factors identified and should be contemplated by current school leaders. Thus, an escalation of awareness is necessary for the effective provision of goal-setting.

One method in which the respective factors could be circumvented was revealed in a recent study by Lynch, Smith, Yeigh and Provost (2019), which established the importance of principals promoting teacher contribution for goal development and implementation. Their study of 22 state schools in Australia found that school readiness, through goal-setting and planning, was directly correlated with successful teaching, which in turn, positively induced academic achievement scores. They also interpreted their study differently from previous research by observing that internal conditions are a prominent factor to impacting achievement scores, and that these impacts induced greater weight than conditions outside the school. Therefore, discerning internal elements from external causes acquaints the principal with detecting both a relevant course of action, and to what extent, in light of either budgetary restraints or other limited resources.

Nevertheless, defining and communicating the school goals are crucial since they would naturally be made in light of a suitable instructional program. A study by Aas and Paulsen (2019) in Norway and Sweden found that there were wide-ranging variations in the way school principals managed the instructional program, for instance, they found that there were significant increases to the contribution of principal instructional leadership when they developed teachers' core competencies with regard to implementing activities utilizing digital learning. In that study, managing the instructional program through digital learning and formative assessments of teachers was a critical role

of the principal, either through supervising and evaluating instruction, coordinating the curriculum or monitoring student progress. In this role, Aas and Paulsen reiterated that staff were able to communicate sense-making processes within the context of their subject in accordance with the principal as a result of the observation of class instruction.

Lochmiller and Mancinelli (2019) stated in their study that the delegation of tasks was an important step for North American principals as a means to increase their focus on classroom observation. Furthermore, the delegation of these tasks improved their time-management for more essential tasks such that they sought external assistance for coaching, in this way, the principals were able to implement better evaluation practices. A similar study by Tulowitzki (2019) identified similar results for German principals, and went further by noting that professional development steps needed to be developed for principals to observe changing culture shifts.

While instructional support is enhanced by regulating the teaching quality within the classroom using evaluation methods; to maintain these standards, the alignment of pedagogical demands with the course objectives in light of national standards and a method of teaching which is reflective of the social context is required (Aas & Paulsen, 2019). As such, it is through mutual problem solving, conferencing, observation, and open communication that the principal assists in evaluation and coordination.

To this end, the subject being taught, the dynamics in the local community and the changes in the social environment, as well as new pedagogical techniques and other changing practices in the field of education as it relates to student learning would be discussed between the principal and the teacher, thus alleviating potential problematic issues that would cause disruptive changes.

While principals should oversee a solid instructional program, evidence suggests that positive feelings, achievement motivation and student-teacher relations are critical factors that support academic achievement. In a study by Sims, Waniganayake and Hadley (2019), building strong relations with stakeholders was a more significant role than ensuring compliance to policies. The respective study also noted that caring for stakeholders could also provide valuable contributions to performance excellence. Furthermore, Karami-Akkaray, Mahfouz, and Mansour (2019) go further in that "emotions of school leaders influence school culture" (p.50) by stating that personalized interventions could offer significant insight during times of disruption.

As strong cordial relations informs the development of the school learning climate program, caring for teachers could links back to the competency of a school principal to handle transforming environments. Thus, a direct contributor is professional development which plays a critical role for the emotional and intellectual development of the teachers' skill-set in the classroom.

The strenuous task of defining *school learning climate* is perhaps most notably demonstrated by a recent study which indicated that the school learning climate program should be adapted to the specific values of the local community; which reiterates the both the circumstantial background of the school as well as the much-needed awareness of the specific values held by the local community. Wilkinson, Edwards-Groves, Grootenboer and Kemmis (2019) agreed by stating that "understanding how particular practices come to be in specific sites, and what kinds of conditions make their emergence possible" (p.501) were key factors to a successful learning climate program. In that respective study, Wilkinson et al (2019) were mindful of how different schools respond to, and

develop solutions for, diverse milieus. Despite this, the term *school learning climate* remains undefined within the educational industry (Payne, 2018).

While the school climate is widely recognized as made up of order and discipline, relationship building with teachers and parents, and involvement in the affairs and life of the school; a recent study by the U.S. National Institute of Justice (as cited in Payne, 2018) expressed concern over the gap between the aspirations of many school climate programs and their actual policies as implemented within the surveyed schools. These shortcomings in the U.S might also be reminiscent across various Western nations, and still perceived in Asian nations too. Largely, however, there is a consensus on one term – cordial relations among all stakeholders. Even though, undefined terms can precipitate a lack of knowledge required to investigate, produce, validate and uphold a positive school learning climate. This has an added affect. While the definition appears enigmatic even for the digital age, there is subsequently little available metrics for its assessment as a result. Comprehensive measurements on the status of a schools' climate program varies and from the literature it is understood that validity and reliability results are unlikely to be sufficiently trustworthy (Ramelow, Currie & Felder-Puig, 2015).

Additionally, school authorities and school principals need to remain vigilant in their roles, by appreciating the changing social dynamics in order for their vision and mission statements to remain relevant in their local and state environments. In this way, a competent school principal might be able to break loose from irrelevant aspirations of the old education system and adapt himself for the betterment of his community. Principal competency has been acknowledged throughout the literature that, even in the digital age, administrative tasks as well as instructional assessment and school learning climates are essentially overseen by the principal.

Nevertheless, in light of the literature review, an agreement should be made on the definition of the respective term – at least at the state level - as it relates to the values of the community/culture, and suitable assessments could then be developed using the specific components of the agreed definition. Without comprehensive agreement on a definition, identifying the characteristics of a positive school climate and the desired results might not allow for effective investigation. Meyers and Vangronigen (2019) reiterated the importance of this respective supposition through the implementation of a quality school improvement plan and the appreciation necessary to sustain quality instructional leadership competencies as having been spearheaded by suitable leadership characteristics. For alignment, continued participation, evaluation, assessment and valued implementation might only be undertaken where school leadership is mindful of the disruptive social environment, which in turn, recognizes the evolving characteristics of instructional leadership, its key components, and its application in the context of the community.

Research Objectives

1. To identify teacher's demographics according to age, gender, education level, years of teaching experience with the current principal and total years of teaching experience.
2. To determine teacher's perception towards principal instructional leadership.
3. To compare teacher's perception with their demographic factors.

Research Methodology

A quantitative and comparative research was undertaken during the academic year of 2018 at Huahin Vitthayalai School, a private school with a Roman Catholic affiliation, using a quantitative and comparative approach to measuring their teachers' perception of principal instructional leadership according to age, gender, educational level, years of teaching experience with the current principal and total years of teaching experience.

The population included a survey of 85 full-time grade 7 to 12 teachers' at the aforementioned school, with at least one-year of experience in the selected school.

The study adopted the well-known Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale (PIMRS) research instrument authored by Hallinger and Murphy (1985) to determine the teachers' perception. The instrument measured *Defining the School Mission, Managing the Instructional Program,* and *Developing the School Learning Climate Program*. Each dimension has up-to 10 job-functions as previously mentioned. Teachers' perceptions of principal instructional leadership allowed this research to create a profile of the principal's apparent competency in each of the respective job-functions. Official Thai and English versions were distributed with the approval of the authors. The validity and reliability of both the Thai and English *PIMRS* versions were found to be satisfactory in quality with each job-function achieving at least 80% as an average agreement score. The reliability coefficients were also acceptable (achieving at least .78 for each job-function); with a recommended reliability coefficient of .70 for research purposes.

Utilizing a licensed version of *IBM® SPSS® Statistics* purchased by the researchers, an analysis was completed using Frequency and Percentage (to determine demographics), Mean and Standard Deviation (to identify perception), The Independent Samples t-Test and One-Way ANOVA (to make comparisons) according to the respective demographic factors.

A 5-point Likert Scale was utilized with ranks according to *very low, low, moderate, high* and *very high.*

Results

The results for research objective one are as follows:

Table 1. Demographic - Gender

Gender	Number	Percentage
Male	26	34.2
Female	50	65.8
Total	76	100

Out of the 76 respondents, the majority of Grade 7 to 12 were female (65.8%) while males were the minority (34.2%), in Table 1.

Table 2. Demographic - Age

Age	Number	Percentage
20 - 25	6	7.9
26 – 31	19	25.0
32 – 37	17	22.4
38 – 43	15	19.7
44 – 49	10	13.2
50 ≥	9	11.8
Total	76	100

There were 19 teachers between the ages of 26 to 31 years of age (25%), while six were between 20 and 25 years of age (7.9%). There were 17 between the ages of 32 and 37 who constituted a large faction of this demographic (22.4%), in Table 2.

Table 3. Demographic - Educational Level

Educational Level	Number	Percentage
Bachelor	66	86.8
Master	10	13.2
Total	76	100

The educational level of 66 (86.8%) full-time teachers had a bachelor degree, while 10 (13.2%) full-time teachers stated they had a master degree for their highest level of education in Table 3.

Table 4. Demographic - Years of Experience with Current Principal

Years of Experience with Current Principal	Number	Percentage
1	6	7.9
2-4	19	25.0
5-9	48	63.2
10 - 15	3	3.9
15 ≥	0	0
Total	76	100

Table 4 shows that there were 48 (63.2%) full-time teachers who stated that they had 5 to 9 years of teaching experience with the current principal, while no teacher had 15 years or more of experience with the current principal. Six (7.9%) teachers stated they had at least 1 year of teaching experience with the current principal.

Table 5. Demographic - Total Years of Teaching Experience

Total Years of Teaching Experience	Number	Percentage
1	3	3.9
2-4	12	15.8
5-9	24	31.6
10 - 15	14	18.4
15 ≥	23	30.3
Total	76	100

Table 5 states there were 24 (31.6%) full-time teachers who had five to nine years' experience, while 23 teachers (30.3%) stated that they had 15 years or more of teaching experience in their lifetime.

The results for research objective two are as follows:

Table 6. Summary of the Overall Teachers' Perception of Principal Instructional Leadership According to the 10 Job Functions of the PIMRS framework

Dimension	Principal Job Function	*N*	μ	σ	Interpretation

Defining the School Mission	Communicates the School Goals	76	4.17	.56	High
	Frame the School Goals	76	4.12	.65	High
Managing the Instructional Program	Coordinate the Curriculum	76	4.15	.63	High
	Monitor Student Progress	76	3.97	.66	High
	Supervise and Evaluate Instruction	76	3.85	.62	High
Developing the School Learning Climate Program	Provide Incentives for Learning	76	4.14	.69	High
	Protect Instructional Time	76	4.08	.67	High
	Promote Professional Development	76	4.05	.73	High
	Provide Incentives for Teachers	76	3.86	.84	High
	Maintain High Visibility	76	3.59	.76	High

Note. Each mean describes the teachers' perception of the principal's behavior with regards to each job function.

Table 6 gives an overview of the 50-questions to show the total means of each of the 10-principal job-functions. The highest observed mean was 4.17 which refers to *Communicates the School Goals*; this was interpreted as having a ***high*** level of teachers' perception for this principal job-function. On the other hand, the lowest mean observed mean referred to the dimension *Maintain High Visibility*, which achieved an overall mean of 3.59, however, it was still interpreted as high on the Criteria of Interpretation's scale between 3.51-4.50.

Table 7. Summary of the Overall Teachers' Perception of the 3-Dimensions of the PIMRS framework

Dimension	*N*	μ	σ	Interpretation
Managing the Instructional Program	76	3.99	.59	High
Developing the School Learning Climate Program	76	3.99	.64	High
Defining the School Mission	76	3.95	.57	High
Total	76	3.98	.58	High

Note: Each mean describes the teachers' perception of each dimension.

The highest perceived dimensions were *Managing the Instructional Program* and *Developing the School Learning Climate Program* with an overall mean of 3.99 for both. These were interpreted as ***high*** on the scale of 3.51-4.50 in the Criteria of Interpretation. The lowest perceived dimension was *Defining the School Mission*, with an overall mean of 3.95. In each dimension, the principal was perceived as having a ***high*** level of teachers' perception towards principal instructional leadership at Huahin Vitthayalai School, Thailand.

The results for research objective three are as follows:

Table 8. Summary Results Compared for Each Demographic to Principal Instructional Leadership

Demographic	Sig. (2-tailed)
Age	.18
Gender	.39
Educational Level	.73
Years of Teaching Experience with the Current Principal	.52
Total Years of Teaching Experience	.24

According to each of the demographics and their subsequent comparison to the various 10 job-functions, the results identified that for each that "There was no significant difference of teachers' perception of principal instructional leadership utilizing the PIMRS framework according to teachers' total years of teaching experience; at Huahin Vitthayalai School, Thailand", since the *Sig*. of each was more than .05. Thus, the research hypothesis was rejected.

Discussion

While this study has revealed a number of interesting findings. Potentially the most important finding is that there was no significant difference in the teachers' perception of principal instructional leadership according to their demographic factors. This finding is consistent with previous studies both in Thailand and overseas.

Although the school goals and the climate program are important partners for successful principal instructional leadership; managing the instructional program is first and foremost the exclusive responsibility of a competency principal. For this purpose, greater dedication is needed to focusing resources on this over-arching dimension.

For Huahin Vitthayalai School, two out of the ten critical job-functions were illustrated as the lowest performing job-functions, they were *Supervise and Evaluate Instruction (3.85)*, and *Monitor Student Progress (3.97).* These two respective job-functions were both located in the over-arching dimension *Managing the Instructional Program*, the most critical dimension for a school principal. For this purpose, the development and enhancement of principal instructional leadership competencies should be focused in these two respective areas so as to inform better instructional program leaders.

It is recommended that, since *Supervise and Evaluate Instruction* (3.85) has been documented as a critical influencer of other job-functions, without a strong visible record of the principal, difficulties begin with other tasks such as curriculum assessment and evaluation of in-class pedagogy. Thus, the principal should delegate administrative tasks and use this available time to observe classroom instruction.

Monitor Student Progress (3.97) also requires improvement. This job-function assists in the fine-tuning of the instructional program, and delegating the task to a team of people who are able to utilize technology to capture student achievement data is critical, this should then be followed by the utilization of data for decision-making purposes that relate directly to the enhancement of the instructional program.

In light of the literature review, the necessary leadership characteristics require classroom observations, as these played an important role that enhances the core competencies of the teachers as well (Aas & Paulsen, 2019). Furthermore, having an awareness of the gaps in teaching standards required the appreciation of principal-teacher evaluation and an assessment of the curriculum as it unfolds in the classroom to improve student progress. Through strong communication and physical contributions using principal-teacher engagement and conferencing, the development of a positive

collaborative culture assists in both the professional and emotional growth of the teacher, and the monitoring of student achievement (Carpenter, 2018).

An additional finding was the growth that had been shown when comparing the administrative roles and instructional results of the principal in this study with previous studies. Former studies of Thai and other South-East Asian principals excelled in administrative tasks, but lacked competency in instructional program assessment and evaluation as well as tasks that required the improvement to the school learning climate program. This study showed that, comparatively, there is growth in all three dimensions, but two of the lowest performing job-functions still remained part of the instructional program.

The principal is highly recommended to gather the leadership team together with relevant stakeholders and create a solid course of action that represents the values of the school's own history, and its place in the local community (Wilkinson et al, 2019). For this purpose, a firm instructional leadership action-plan is needed to focus principals' efforts on managing the instructional program so that greater preparedness might be induced in case of sudden disruption to the local community.

Conclusion

Effective instructional leaders are intricately occupied with the labyrinthine issues that make teaching and learning rewarding in their school. This implicates the quality of the instructional program immensely because teacher-evaluation is fundamentally supported by principal review and consequent feedback. Fragile schedules need to be improved so that the learning community itself develops as a strong member of the local community.

This study sought to study Huahin Vitthayalai School Teachers' perception of principal instructional leadership according to teachers' demographic actors. The results showed that there were no significant differences between teachers' perception of principal instructional leader and their demographic factors. This study observed that teachers' perceptions of principal instructional leadership could be better identified in other manners. Nevertheless, this study identified variations in the principal job-functions that should be managed accordingly to the recommendations aforementioned.

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