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Instructional Leadership in Malaysia:
Roles, Practices and Challenges in High Performing School

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Instructional Leadership in Malaysia:

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Introduction

The theory and practice of the role of instructional leadership continues to be an important issue for many school leaders who are at the crossroads of scholarship and practice (Quah, 2011). As far as principals in Malaysia are concerned, the Malaysia Education Blueprint (MEB) 2013 reported that there is a fairly equal division of time and effort between instructional and administrative duties. Generally, school principals have shown they have an understanding of the importance of instructional leadership, herein a critical component for school transformation.

Background

In Malaysia, High Performance Schools (HPS) are highly regarded due to their consistent excellent performance in public examinations. There are one hundred and thirty four high performance schools located in urban and rural areas throughout Malaysia. A HPS is defined as a school with ethos, character and a unique identity in all aspects of education. Usually, these schools have a social heritage of tradition, positive school culture and commitment and identification of students and teachers to the schools. These schools are seen as vibrant as they provide support improvement efforts drawn from the energy and motivation of its citizenry. Students from these schools enter tertiary education and graduate in due course; thus providing the highly educated component of the nation's workforce and human capital. HPSs are categorized as Band 1 schools (the top most strata in school ranking) and defined generally as schools that succeed. Selected and approved based on stringent criteria set by the Malaysian Ministry of Education (MOE), these schools have earned respect for being the hallmark of quality

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for being the hallmark of quality education in Malaysia and they have the potential to improve to match global education standards. Hence HPSs are now the public school of choice.

Problem Statement

The MEB envisions that a high-quality principal who displays instructional leadership supported by a leadership team be emplaced in every school without regard to its location or school achievement level to drive its overall school performance (MEB 5-12, 2013). Leaders of High Performing Schools in Malaysia have always been looked up to by other schools as exemplars by virtue of their track record in ensuring high achievement rates in their schools. The focus in this problem statement is to ascertain if instructional leadership practices is evident among HPS leaders. If HPS leaders are indeed instructional leaders, the need is then to ascertain the Instructional leadership domains that are core to their leadership. Further to this, is to determine the challenges that would be faced by other school leaders who wish to adopt or emulate HPS instructional leadership practices.

Literature Review

Research has shown that instructional leadership has both direct and indirect effect on teacher effectiveness and student learning. Fullan (2005, p.6) stated "principals must be instructional leaders if they are to be effective leaders for innovation". The statement acknowledges instructional leadership as the key role a principal adopts in order to improve student achievement. Hallinger (2011, p.271) noted in his research that "Thirty years later, 'instructional leadership' is widely accepted by policy makers as essential elements of management practice in schools". This denotes that instructional leadership was the critical school leadership criteria in the intervening years. Hallinger and Heck (2011) also theorized that instructional leadership of a principal has reciprocal effect on other organizational variables.

As they are entrusted to lead and improve schools, their brand of leadership has become a critical component of school improvement (Bryk, Sebring & Allensworth, 2010). Hallinger and Murphy (2013) reported that school principals face conflict when leading learning and in the daily engagement of professional practice. This conflict is also addressed by Leonard (2010) who pointed out that 21st century school principals are to emphasize more on their professional core in lieu of schooling management. They are to maximize their time spent in organizing learning activities in schools. They are expected to spend more time in ensuring and monitoring teachers' professional duties and students' learning activities (Louis & Wahlstrom, 2010). School principals that are safe guarding instruction oriented activities are able to ensure all students reach ambitious targets of performance, including outlining the demands for greater accountability of those with disabilities (Billingsley, McLeskey & Crockett, 2014). Clearly, instructional leadership advocates that the alignment of organizational needs, implementation plans, and professional actions should focus on one thing alone that is in improving learning and teaching.

Owens (2015) research on principals' and teachers' perceptions of instructional leadership in United States showed that principals rated their own instructional leadership highest for the Hallinger's (2014) PIMRS subscale of framing school goals, while rating themselves lowest on the subscale of supervising and evaluating instruction. The teachers rated their principal's instructional leadership highest for the PIMRS subscale of framing school goals, while rating their principal lowest on the subscale of maintaining high visibility. The emphasis on the core domains of instructional leadership as evidenced in Hallinger's model differed in principal and leader perception.

Clearly, there are conflicting views on the level of instructional leadership of school principals. This research on the instructional leadership role of the principals in Malaysian HPS is warranted to understand their prominent roles, practices and challenges as leaders.

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Research Objectives

The aim of this study is to examine the instructional leadership practices and challenges of school leaders in Malaysian High Performing Schools (HPS). The focus is to ascertain if instructional leadership practices are evident among HPS leaders. Thus, the research questions are as below:

i. What are the Instructional Leadership domains that are prominently practiced by High Performing Schools' principals?

ii. To what extent is the practice of these Instructional Leadership domains in High Performing Schools?

iii. What are the main challenges faced by High Performing Schools' principals when practicing Instructional Leadership?

Methodology

To increase the credibility and validity of the results, this study employed the methodical triangulation of the quantitative and qualitative approach. The survey method was employed quantitatively to explore teachers' views on the role of school administrators as instructional leaders. The instrument in this study is based on Quah's (2011) instrument which had already been translated, adapted and tested from three sources: "Principals Instructional Management Rating Scale" (PIMRS) by Philip Hallinger (1987), Krug's model (1992) and Hussein Mahmood (1997). Semi-structured questions via focus interviews and in-depth interviews were used in the qualitative approach, to explore teachers' and administrators' views on the pertinent role of the school administrators as instructional leaders. Clustered-stratified-random sampling was used to determine the sample of 60 schools representing the population of High Performance Schools.

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Findings

i. What are the Instructional Leadership domains that are prominently practiced?

Figure 1 shows the mean score on the principal role as an instructional leader. The finding indicates that principals have successfully implemented all seven dimensions of instructional leadership. All seven dimensions of instructional leadership have a high mean score ranging from 4.17 to 4.36. Of the seven dimensions, framing school goals has the highest mean score of 4.36, followed by monitoring student progress. In contrast, supervising teaching and learning has the lowest mean score of 4.17. Hence, the finding showed that three salient dimensions of instructional leadership are framing school goals, followed by monitoring student progress and developing staff.
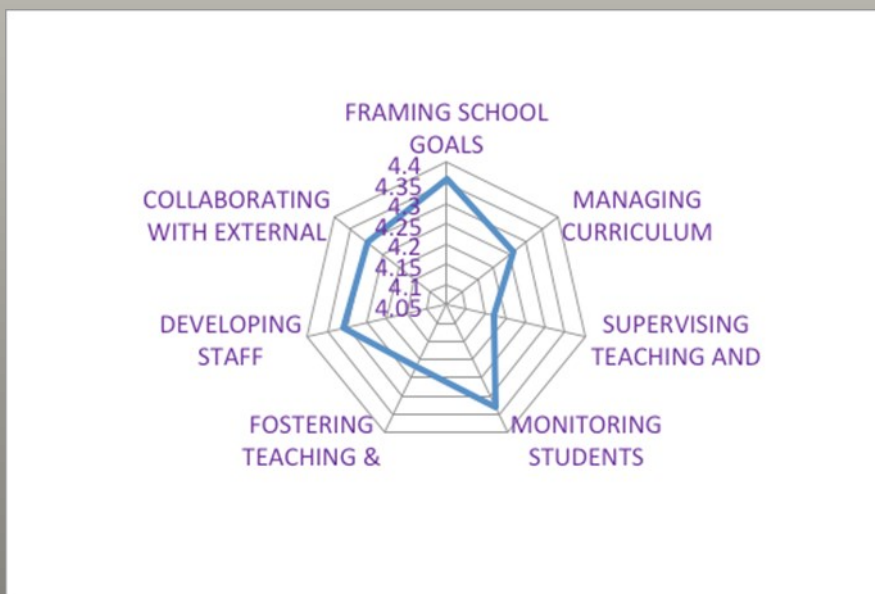

Figure 1 Mean score on principals' role as instructional leaders

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ii. To what extent is the practice of these Instructional Leadership domains in High Performing Schools?

a. Framing School Goals

Figure 2 shows the mean for framing school goals. Each item shows relatively high scores of mean within the range of 4.18 - 4.48. It can be seen from Figure 2 that principals using student data performance to develop school's academic goals have the highest mean score of 4.48. In fact, about 55.2 percent of teachers strongly agree that their principals are more inclined to use student data performance to develop schools' academic goals. The second highest means for framing school goal is varieties of programs to achieve school goals with a mean of 4.45. A total of 52.8 percent of teachers strongly agree that their principals implement a variety of programs to achieve school goals.
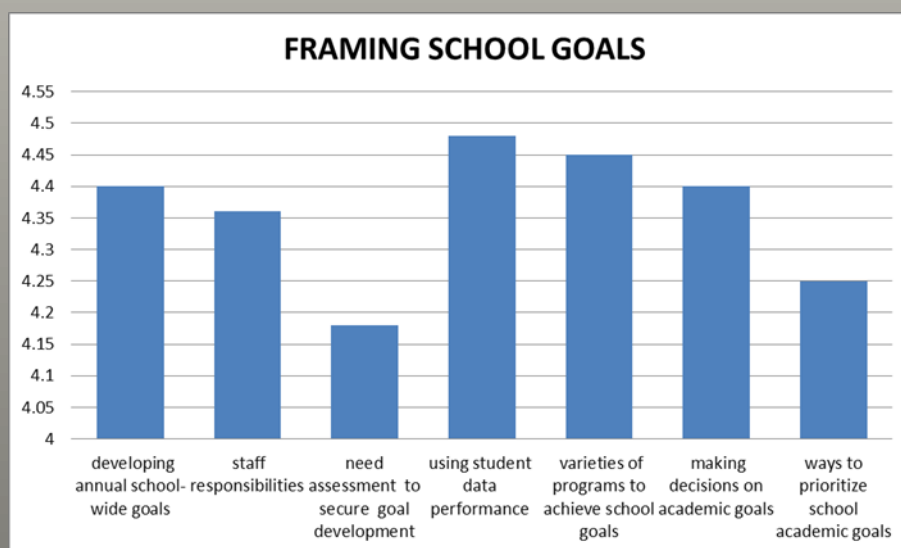

Figure 2 Framing School Goals

From the focus group interview of 441 teachers, the findings showed that 94.6 percent of the respondents confirmed that their principals requested teachers to give their input when framing school goals. In addition, a total number of 654 responses from Table 1 showed that HPS principals initiated various programs in order to achieve school goals. The main goal of instructional leadership is to improve students' academic achievement. With this in mind, these programs were categorized into six broad domains, namely student motivation programs, student academic improvement programs, technology integration programs, thinking skills programs, teacher quality programs, and parent involvement programs. Almost 30.0 percent of the teachers' responses showed that the HPS principals initiated morning speeches, student spiritual activities and student camps were targeted at enhancing student motivation to learn. Another 20.6 percent of the responses showed that programs such as extra-classes, remedial classes, special classes, peer mentorship, foster-parent program, academic excellence program, and acceleration program were initiated by the principals to tackle student achievement issues. 18.7 percent of the total responses showed that the principals also initiated programs to ensure technology integration in teaching and learning. 17.0 percent of the responses showed that the principals initiated programs for improving students' higher order thinking skills through the use of i-Think maps. Teacher responses (10.5%) also showed that the HPS principals made effort to improve teacher quality by involving teachers in programs such as workshops, PLC activities, headcount, benchmark visits, performance dialogues, postmortems, and 21st century teaching and learning. A small proportion of the teacher responses (3.2%) showed that there were programs such as collaboration activities and inter and intra school parent dialogues to engage parents to improve student academic results.

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No	Various programs initiated by principals	Number of responses	Themes
1	Morning speech; motivation	8	Motivating students
2	Motivation Program; Spiritual Program, Perkampungan ilmu	188	196 (30.0%)
3	VLE	110	Technology integration
4	Kahoot	2	122 (18.7%)
5	resources: smartboard, internet kiosk, ICT, Apmodo technology	10	
6	i-Think/HOTS	111	Thinking skills 111(17.0%)
7	Academic Excellent Program	43	Student Academic improvement
8	Extra Class/Remedial /Special	68	135 (20.6)
9	Mentor-Mentee/ 'Anak Angkat'	15	
10	Speed/'Pecutan'	8	
11	Face to face	1	
12	Collaboration Parents, dialog , Townhall, international, other school	21	Parental involvement 21(3.2%)
13	21st T&L, Effective T&L	26	Teacher quality
14	PLC Learning Walks	6	69 (10.5)
15	School KPI, Performance dialog, headcount, halatuju	17	
16	Workshop: Teaching and learning	12	
17	Postmortem	2	
18	Benchmarking	3	
19	Rewards, Awards	3	
	TOTAL	654	

Table 1: Various programs initiated by HPS principals to achieve school goals

b. Monitoring Student Progress

Figure 3 depicts findings of principals conducting post-mortem on students' achievement with the highest mean score of 4.53 followed by principals using tests and examinations results to assess student progress (4.51). A total of 59.4 percent respondents strongly agree that their principal conducted post-mortem on students' achievement followed by using tests and examinations results to assess student progress (57.5%) when monitoring student progress.
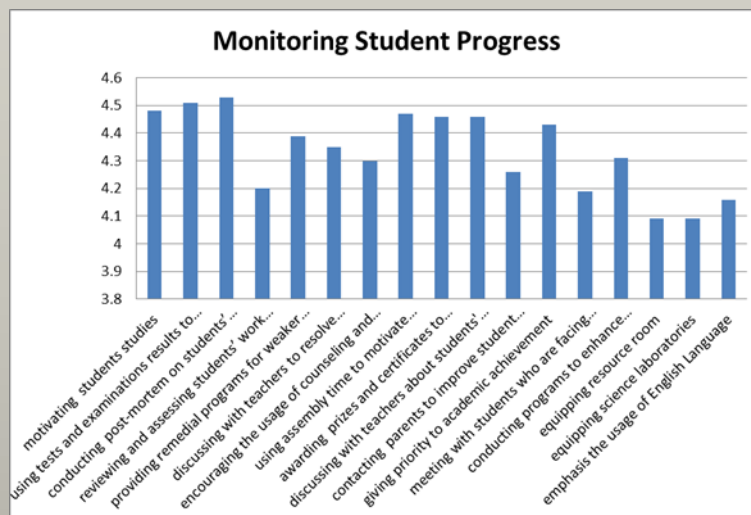
Figure 3 Monitoring students' progress

During the focus interview, principals were questioned on how students' academic improvements were ensured.　The HPS principals showed their concern for students' progress by organizing several activities which directly or indirectly targeting at enhancing students' academic improvement. These activities consisted primarily of two categories; programs for students and programs for teachers. Out of 498 teacher responses, 41.4 percent showed that HPS principals ensured student academic improvement by organizing special programs for students such as special classes, special learning programs, answering techniques workshops, and motivation programs. Another 58.6% responses showed programs were also organized for teachers in order to help increase teacher competencies to consequently improve student academic achievement.　These programs included headcounts, benchmarking visits, ICT integration, 21st century teaching strategies, and supervision.

c. Developing Staff/ Professional Development

Figure 4 shows the percentage and mean of the principals in developing staff. Each item shows relatively high scores of mean at the range of 4.20 - 4.37. Principals encouraging teachers to attend courses have the highest mean score of 4.37. In fact, about 47.5 percent of teachers strongly agreed that their principals were more inclined to encouraging teachers to attend courses.   The second highest mean for developing staff is giving empowerment to improve quality of teaching with a mean of 4.33. A total of 43.6 percent teachers strongly agreed that giving them empowerment improved their quality of teaching.
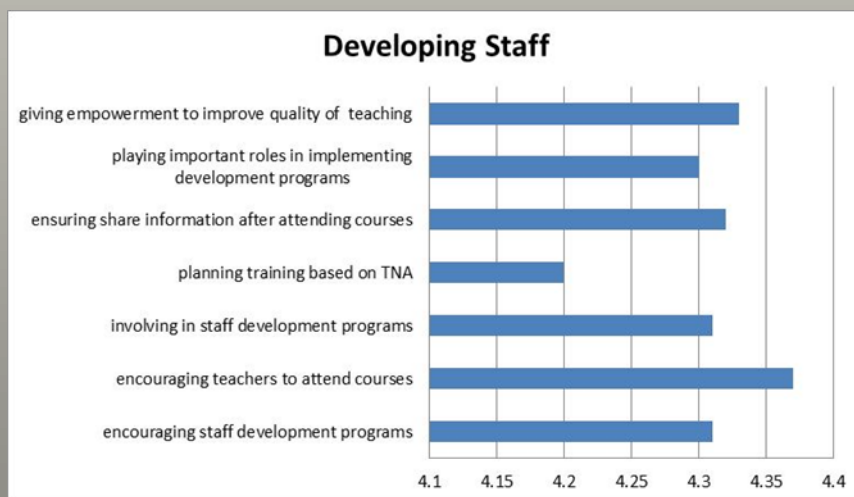

Figure 4 Developing Staff

Based on the focus group interview data, 95.4 percent of the respondents revealed that their school heads encouraged them to attend courses on teaching and learning matters which are conducted outside school. Only 20 respondents or 4.56 percent of the total interviewed divulged that they were not encouraged to do so.

Moreover, from the focus group interview data (Table 2), it is seen that most of the principals created various professional development and learning opportunities for teachers. The activities were categorized into three themes namely managing self, others and system; improving teaching and student learning; and appreciating educational policies and procedures. Out of 484 responses on teacher development programs that teachers had attended, 62.2 percent were meant for helping teachers to improve their knowledge and skills in teaching and consequently student learning.

Another 30.6 percent of the responses showed that teachers were involved in professional development programs in order to help them manage themselves, others and the system. The other 6.5 percent of the teacher responses showed that teachers participated in professional learning activities that allowed them to grasp an understanding and knowledge about the latest national educational policies and procedures.

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No.	Various professional development and learning opportunities	Number of Responses	Themes
1	KSSR	6	Appreciating government policies 35 (7.2%)
2	PBPPP, HRMIS. SPSK, PPPM, PBS, SKPM	29	
3	Team building, KIK	49	Managing self, others and system 148(30.6%)
4	Parenting, Child psychology	2	
5	Personal dev (Root cause analysis, strategic planning, Soft skills. Moral imperative, Motivation, spiritual dev)	58	
6	School management, Leadership (BOS, OPPM)	39	
7	21st Century i-Think, HOTS, Apple iPad Training	102	Improving Teaching and Learning 301 (62.2%)
8	Assessment, marking scheme, answering techniques, headcount	26	
9	Pedagogy (Smartboard, teaching strategy, teaching aids)	52	
10	LDP	3	
11	PLC (lesson study)	43	
12	Benchmarking	4	
13	Action Research	3	
14	Coaching & Mentoring	1	
15	Frog VLE	58	
16	MYP Workshop, Trust School Workshop. LeapEd	9	
	TOTAL	484	

Table 2: Various professional development and learning opportunities

The principals ensured that teachers who attended courses or any other professional development programs had to conduct in-house training for other teachers in the school. 97.9 percent of the 428 teachers confirmed this fact.

d. Managing Curriculum and Instruction

Findings from Figure 5 shows that principals ensuring punctuality and instructional time had the highest mean (4.49) followed by informing teachers about new developments with a mean of 4.46. A total of 54.8 percent strongly agreed that their principals ensured punctuality and instructional time while managing curriculum and instruction. Conversely,

principal giving attention to teachers who are facing teaching and learning problems had the lowest mean score of 4.04. In this regard, only 26.7 percent of teachers strongly agreed that their principal gave attention to teachers who were facing teaching and learning problems.

From the focus interview, majority of the principals support their teachers in trying out new teaching and learning strategies in their classes. Views expressed by the teachers showed that the principal's support is mostly in the form of encouraging capacity building for teachers, direct input including verbal encouragement or advice, facilitating ICT in teaching and learning, having structured programs and working with outside bodies. Direct inputs by principals were given during sharing sessions or even through the simple act of recognition of teacher initiatives.
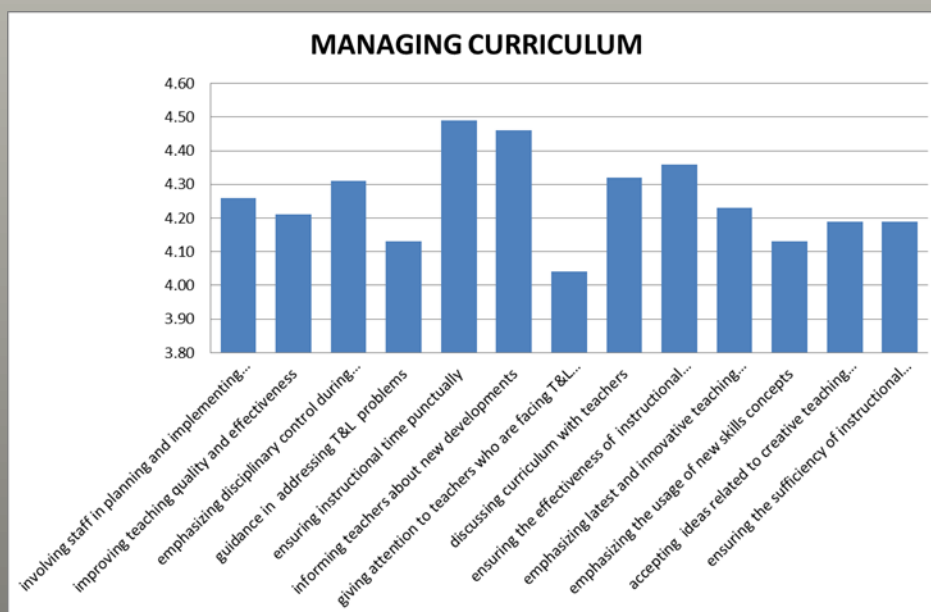

Figure 5 Managing curriculum

e. Supervising Teaching and Learning

Figure 6 shows that principals tend to allow teachers to adjust appropriate teaching and learning techniques and patrol class to monitor teaching and learning. These two items have the highest mean score of 4.28 and 4.26. While item "principal providing self-study rooms to improve students' language skills" has the lowest mean of 3.87 with the lowest percentage (24.9%) of respondents that strongly agree to this matter.
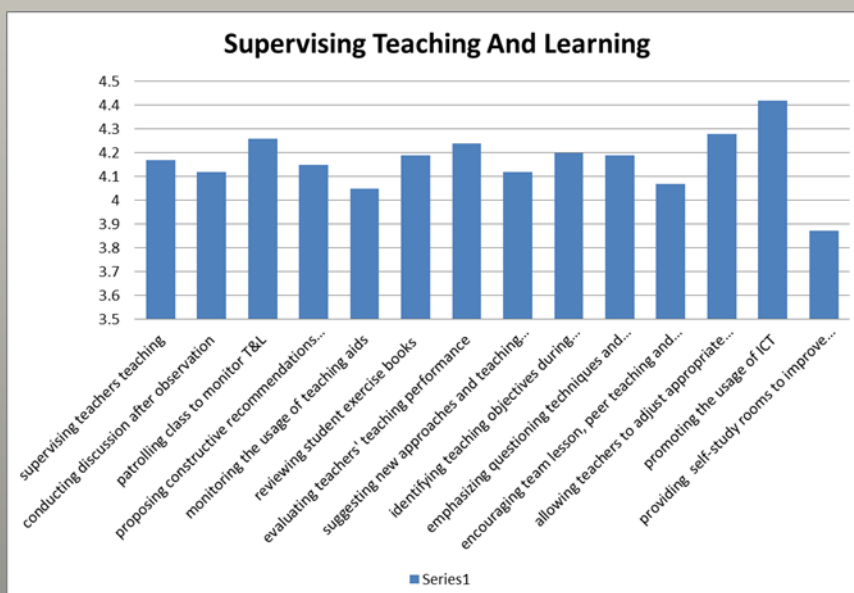

Figure 6 Mean of principals in supervision of teaching and learning

The focus interview data showed that majority of the respondents, 87.50% (378 from a total of 441 teachers), indicated that their principals visited the classroom during the teaching and learning process. Meanwhile 12.50% (54) teachers disclosed that their principal never visited the classroom during teaching.

f. Fostering Teaching & Learning Climate

Finding showed that emphasizing on teamwork has the highest mean (4.38), followed by ensuring good condition in school infrastructure and facilities with a mean of 4.37. A total of 49.7 percent strongly agree that their principal emphasizes on teamwork in terms of fostering teaching and learning climate.

Fostering Teaching & Learning Climate

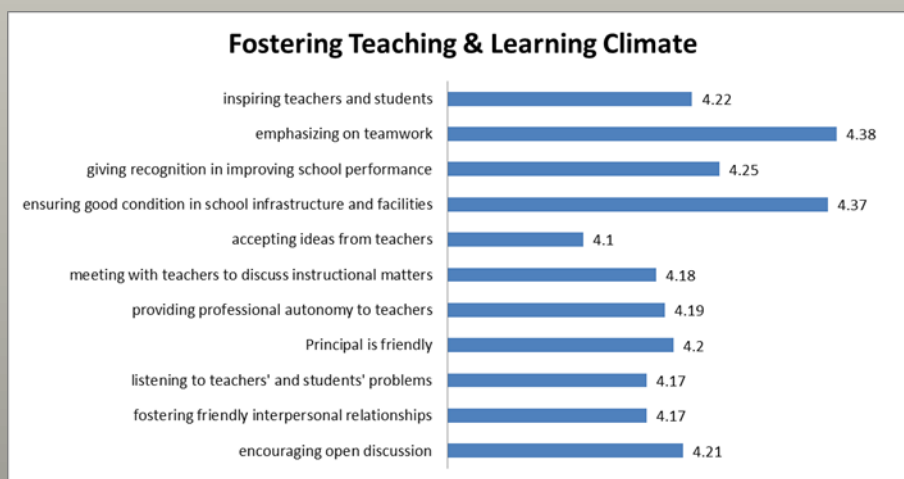|	
inspiring teachers and students	4.22
emphasizing on teamwork	4.38
giving recognition in improving school performance	4.25
ensuring good condition in school infrastructure and facilities	4.37
accepting ideas from teachers	4.1
meeting with teachers to discuss instructional matters	4.18
providing professional autonomy to teachers	4.19
Principal is friendly	4.2
listening to teachers' and students' problems	4.17
fostering friendly interpersonal relationships	4.17
encouraging open discussion	4.21

Figure 7 Mean of principals in fostering Teaching & Learning Climate

The focus interview data showed majority of the respondents indicated that their principals also emphasized quality teaching by ensuring that the teachers have adequate teaching resources and facilities in classrooms, and that there is sharing of teaching and learning strategies and PLCs.

g. Collaborating with External Parties

Figure 7 shows the percentage distribution and frequency of the principals in collaborating with external parties. Each item shows relatively high scores of mean at the range of 4.24 - 4.43. It can be seen from Figure 7 that principals encouraging parents to take part in school activities has the highest mean score of 4.43. In fact, about 50.8 percent of teachers strongly agreed that their principals encourage parents to take part in school activities. The second highest mean for collaborating with external parties is seeking advice from the DEO/SEP to address the problem of curriculum with a mean of 4.30. A total of 40.7 percent of teachers strongly agreed that their principals seek advice from the DEO/SEP to address the problem of curriculum.
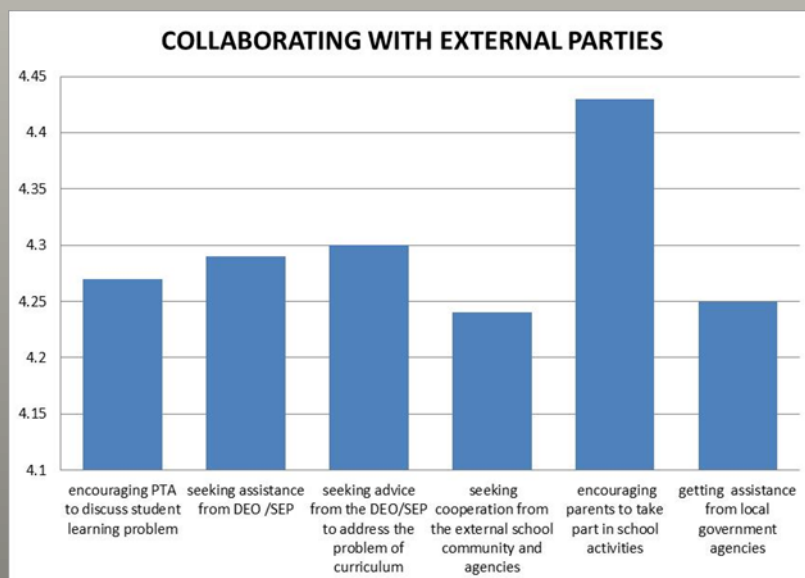

Figure 7 Mean of principals in collaborating with external parties

From the focus interview data, it is evident that majority of the respondents indicated that there are some forms of on-going cooperation between the school head and the PTA. Only a few teachers indicated that they were not sure of any on-going cooperation between their school head and PTA. Eight themes emerged from the data regarding the on-going cooperation between school head and PTA. The eight themes are academic programmes, financial support and expertise, *gotong-royong**, school facility and learning environment, student support, co-curricular program, religious programme, and other school programmes. The most frequently mentioned on going cooperation with PTA is in the form of contribution towards student academic programmes (f=108). Respondents specified the cooperation with PTA in various academic programmes that supported students learning directly such as assisting teachers in teaching, coaching students in reading and stand in for classes when teachers were required to attend other official duties. The next frequently mentioned theme is financial support and expertise. PTA is a pertinent source of funding and expertise for many school programmes.

iii. What are the challenges encountered by HPS leaders when practicing Instructional Leadership?

The main challenges in framing school goals encountered by school heads are related to developing annual school-wide goals followed by staff responsibilities. Two respondents (R3 and R52) emphasized that the main issue faced is setting up the school goals. Moreover, four principals (R3, R35, R33 and R53) also stated that they have issues to make the teachers understand the school goals and make sure that everybody is willing to achieve the goals set up. For example; one of the principals (R35) mentioned that *"the school goal is to be emphasized to all but not everybody is*

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willing to walk abreast". In addition, issues related to staff responsibilities are also a main concern among school heads when framing school goals. Another problem faced by school heads is the need assessment to secure goal development. One respondent stated that the issue is to determine the need area of training for teachers (R34).

In terms of managing curriculum and instruction, the most challenging issue was informing teachers about new developments. Five principals (R1,R23,R26,R48,R52) stated that the issues are the attitude and the difficulties for the teachers to adapt to the globalization and the rapid technological changes. This is supported by the fact that it is problematic for teachers to adapt to the characteristics of the 21st Century Learning. For example; one principal (R23) admitted, "senior teachers still use chalk and talk". This statement is underpinned by another respondent (R48) mentioning that "teachers' resistance to change. Teachers often find change difficult especially in the implementation of 21st Century teaching." Additionally, some school heads admitted that they do have issues when involving staff in planning and implementing curriculum in terms of managing curriculum and instruction. Two principals (R9 and R26) stated that the issues arise in making sure the competencies of teachers are adequate to the need of the HPS and the implementation of new subjects. Moreover, another respondent (R43) indicated that insufficient number of teachers in school hampers planning and implementing curriculum and instruction as the existing teachers are burdened with heavy time-table.

Four respondents (R4, R33, R39, R57) encountered problems in supervising teachers teaching. They discovered that they face time constraint to supervise the teachers teaching. Furthermore, three respondents (R52, R55, R56) revealed that they face difficulties in suggesting new approaches and teaching methods, particularly to the senior teachers who are in the comfort zone with the conventional teaching style of

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chalk and talk, are afraid of changes and of using new technologies in their teaching.

Most of the HPS leaders encountered problems when they monitored student progress. In terms of motivating students' studies, the school has problems with students' motivation towards learning even though efforts had been put in place to provide incentives for teachers and students who face low motivation. They even face problems when they tried to use tests and examinations results to assess student progress. They talked about the teachers being exam orientated and tests and examinations results were heavily relied on to assess students' progress. According to respondent R4, *"Exam orientated – as headcount, post-mortem, TOV and GPS concerned teachers very much especially in these five subjects, namely Bahasa Malaysia, English Language, Mathematics, Science and Chinese Language."* In providing remedial programmes for weaker students, three respondents (R3, R13, R49) concurred that though their schools are high performing schools, it is common to find students with poor academic performances who require remedial programmes. According to respondent R13, *"Academic performance at worrying stage for full boarding school and high performance school."* Furthermore, in terms of giving priority to academic achievement, six respondents R17, R22, R31, R32, R33 and R39 have expressed concern on the need to give priority to academic achievements. Four out of the six respondents R31, R32, R33 and R39 shared similar concern on the challenges to sustain academic excellent.

In terms of meeting with teachers to discuss instructional matters, nineteen respondents expressed encouraging open discussions of the issue at hand. This is because of circumstances beyond their control to manage instructional time. Moreover, two respondents even claimed that the teachers were not well prepared for teaching and learning. This is supported by the statements below:

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劉鑾雄慈善基金 亞太領導與變革研究中心

淡江大學
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"Teachers not doing teaching and learning effectively; no variations in teaching method and techniques; no proper preparation." (R50)

"Less preparedness and focus among the students before the class starts." (R39)

"Some of the instruction are not been followed by few teachers because they have been in a comfort zone." (R42)

This is in line with another respondent (R48) who tried to relate on congruency between educational philosophy and pedagogy.

In terms of ensuring good condition in school infrastructure and facilities, respondents feel that high performing schools should have adequate facilities. Moreover, two respondents agreed that the lack of facilities might hamper 21st Century Learning.

In terms of encouraging staff development programmes, four respondents (R1, R35, R46, R37) claimed that they are facing challenges in implementing staff development programmes such as senior teachers lacking motivation and understanding of the need for personal development as well as difficulties in juggling with heavy workload. Besides, they also faced time constraint to run staff development programmes.

When collaborating with external parties, school heads tend to seek assistance from DEO/SEP. However, they encountered problems such as imbalance of supply and demand for teachers when dealing with DEO/SEP. Eight of the school heads complained about insufficient supply of quality teachers. Besides that, three respondents complained that teachers' instructional time is wasted due to attending activities organized by SED and DEO and other programmes out of the school period (R3, R26, R51). Another issue highlighted by two respondents (R46, R61) is about their schools are not fully supported by the Department of Education in terms of budget

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for the purpose of running personal development programmes.

Discussion

The present study ascertained that instructional leadership practices are evident among HPS leaders. This finding supports the arguments of Murphy and colleagues (2007) pertinent to school leaders in productive schools being knowledgeable about and deeply involved in the schools' curricular programmes. Moreover, the finding revealed that the three prominent dimensions of instructional leadership practiced among HPS school leaders are framing school goals followed by monitoring student progress and developing staff. Their instructional practices, in line with the school goals and mission for student learning, influence the norms and attitudes of teachers, students and parents in a school (Darling-Hammond, 1998; Murphy, 1990; Fullan, 2005; Hicks et al., 2012; Brezicha et al., 2015). Likewise, this finding underpinned the notion of researchers such as Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Heck & Hallinger, 2010; Leithwood et al., 2010 which indicated that shaping the purpose of the school and articulating the school's goals are one of the key core components in school effectiveness. Moreover, this finding is also in line with Louis et al., 2010 that emphasized that principals are expected to spend more time in ensuring and monitoring teachers' professional duties and students' learning activities.

In terms of activities that were implemented to enhance instructional leadership practices, finding revealed that principals are more inclined to use student data performance to develop schools' academic goals and implement varieties of programmes to achieve school goals. Moreover, principals also request teachers to give their input when framing school goals. This finding concurs with the study done by Knapp, Copland, & Talbert, (2003) and Murphy et al., (2007) mentioning that there is considerable evidence that a key function of effective school leadership

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concerns shaping the purpose of the school and articulating the school's mission.

In terms of monitoring student progress, the finding found that HPS principals tend to conduct post-mortem on students' achievement followed by using tests and examinations results to assess and monitor student progress. This finding underpinned the notion of researchers such as Weber, (1996); Marzano, (2001); Donaldson, (2007) and DuFour (2005) who stated that armed with student achievement data, they plan, design, administer and analyse instructional programmes. These assessments of evaluation are effective in monitoring student progress. Moreover, HPS principals showed their concern for students' progress by organizing several activities which were directly or indirectly targeted at improving students' academic improvement. These activities primarily consisted of two categories: programmes for students and programmes for teachers. These leaders work with colleagues to ensure that schools are defined by rigorous curriculum programmes and that each student's program, in particular, is of high quality (Newmann, 1997; Ogden & Germinario, 1995). Learning-centered leaders ensure that all students have adequate opportunities to learn rigorous content in all academic subjects (Boyer, 1983).

The results of this study reflect that HPS principals are more inclined to encourage teachers to attend courses and give empowerment to improve quality of teaching. Moreover, from the focus group interview data, finding revealed that most of the principals create various professional developments and learning opportunities for teachers, paving the way for teachers to improve their knowledge and skills in teaching and consequently student learning. This finding is in congruent with Darling-Hammond, 1998; Fullan, 2004; Donaldson, 2008 perspectives that underscore the importance of instructional leaders in enhancing teaching and learning experience in the differentiation of instructions, delivery strategies and learning challenges. On the contrary, the finding is in contrast with

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Grissom & Loed, (2013) that argued principals' time spent on instructional activities does not predict student learning. For example, the informal classroom walkthrough did not predict student learning.

In terms of managing curriculum and instruction, principals ensure instructional time is adhered to and inform teachers regarding new developments. Moreover, principals do support teachers trying out new teaching and learning strategies in their classes. The finding is in line with those of Leithwood et.al (2010) who reported that curriculum that is rigorous and viable, is not enough to safe guard student learning without proper delivery mechanism. Hence, effective pedagogy is needed to ensure the quality of instruction.

In terms of supervising teaching and learning, principals tend to allow teachers to adjust appropriate teaching and learning techniques and patrolling class to monitor teaching and learning. The finding is in line with the finding in Banach's (2015) study reflecting that principals actively worked to create intentional environments within their schools in which the principals expected and supported teachers to continuously refine their instructional practices to meet students' needs and create an environment of deliberate practice for students.

Finding also shows that emphasizing on teamwork followed by ensuring good condition in school infrastructure and facilities can foster teaching and learning climate. Experts (Weber, 1996; DuFour, 2004; Fullan, 2005; Stone-Johnson, 2014) over the years have reported that school leaders create an orderly learning environment with clear expectations and they work toward fostering higher teacher commitment to school.

Results of the study demonstrated that principals encourage parents to take part in school activities and collaborate with external parties (DEO/SEP) to address the problem of curriculum. The most frequently mentioned on going cooperation from PTA is in the form of contribution towards student academic programmes. This supports the notion that external communities that support school goals such as positive parental involvement in recent research have reported positive relation for student learning (Marzano et al., 2005; Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Additionally, Blankstein (2010) has shared his view about the importance of focusing on results and student achievement.

Conclusion

This study has provided insight for educational leaders that instructional leadership practices are evident among HPS leaders. However, this study affirmed that school leaders of HPS schools encountered challenges in every domain when practicing instructional leadership in their respective schools. One of the important issues that must be focused on in the process of developing and improving a school is school principals need to establish a cadre of talented teachers performing their professional responsibilities to produce more high-performing schools. They establish a focus on learning by helping the teachers clarify their instructional goals, nurture a culture of learning by shifting the focus to student learning and lastly, foster working collaboration among teachers. They create a vision of academic success for all students where learning is the most important goal (Blase, Blase, & Phillips, 2010; Smylie, 2010). The bottom line pertinent to the practice of instructional leadership is that schools should focus on teaching and learning that vitally pave way to student academic achievement. Thus, the practices and challenges of instructional leadership can also be extrapolated to other school leaders and not only high performing schools' leaders.

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