SCHOOL PRINCIPALS' PERCEPTIONS TOWARDS INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP PRACTICES: A CASE STUDY FROM THE SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF BHUTAN

Dorjee Wangchuck k[1*] Nipaporn Chalermnirundorn[2]

Abstract

The mixed methods research was conducted to analyze the level and differences of principals' perceptions towards instructional leadership practices based on individual and institutional factors along with identification of hindrances to leadership practice in one of the southern districts in Bhutan. Three instructional leadership dimensions of, managing instructional programs, defining the school mission and promoting a positive school learning environment were used as measurement of criteria. The data were collected through (PIMRS) questionnaires and semi-structured interviews and analyzed using mean, standard deviation, t-test, and content analysis. The respondents consisted of 31 principals. The result revealed principals' high-level practices of instructional leadership and consistency among the personal and institutional factors. The result showed that all the 10 instructional leadership functions (PIMRS) almost at high level and overall mean generated was also high (3.58). Based on the findings, hypotheses concerning the variables of personal and institutional factors were in favor for rejection. Identified hindrances to instructional leadership were: numerous roles, time constraints, work overload, inadequate instructional resources, teacher shortages, limited support for professional development, mismatch between expectations and priorities. In the light of the above findings, researcher would like to conclude that creating learning culture not only depend on individual academic qualification but also the working environment and attitude of the academic community towards student centered learning under the supervision of effective instructional leadership.

Keywords : Leadership, Instructional, Principals, Practices

[1] *M.Ed Program student, Suryadhep Teachers College, Rangsit University. e-mail: Khalingpa75@gmail.com*

[2] *Lecturer, Suryadhep Teachers College, Rangsit University. e-mail: nipaporn.c@rsu.ac.th*

** Corresponding author, e-mail: Khalingpa75@gmail.com*

Introduction

The growth in population both within school and in community in general, a concern is raised where instructional leadership is felt key factor in development for a future progress. Besides, educational leadership is still considered as an important emphasis that value a great deal amongst educational scholars. Instructional leadership is a feature connected with effective schools by improving quality of teaching and enhancing student learning (Antoniou, 2013). Excellence of instruction is the top importance for the instructional principal. Pietsch (2015) proved that instructional leadership has a direct influence on a teaching practice. Instructional leaders should work hard, and perform well because a principal must be capable, skillful, should be able to connect and link formally and informally to teachers . In addition, instructional leaders must be able to carry out the specific approaches and methods which are the most effective to enhance students' achievement (Purinton, 2013).

Education plays crucial role in policy planning, developing curriculum and administrating schools . Education Ministry is also accountable for choosing international scholarship for, designing and executing policy of higher education, and coordinating with the Royal University of Bhutan (RUB) (Zam, 2008). Districts and (gewogs) sub-districts, as per the decentralization policy, are entrusted with managing basic, higher secondary and continuing education, primarily concentrating on construction and maintenance of the school and executing of national policies . To accomplish these tasks, the school principals in sub-district level play pivotal role in implementing curriculums and national polices . At the District level, the Chief District Education Officer (CDEO) reports District Governor and to the Ministry of Education.

Beginning of academic session 2010, the Ministry of Education of Bhutan mandated instructional leadership to be school principal's main function. The principals are expected to devote themselves to instructional leadership roles that would enable them to carry instructional programs effectively in the schools. However, the researcher presumes that the instructional leadership practices designed by the Ministry of Education, Bhutan are occasionally adapted due to some differences of opinions related to roles and the workloads vested upon the leadership practices of the principal. The researcher also assumes that the training and experience of principals and climate and culture of the schools are some barriers to be considered in carrying out instructional roles successfully.

The principals often show less concern for instructional leadership due to other administrative roles and obligations in the schools. Principals face many challenges within their working circle on daily basis which impede their functions related to instructional responsibility. Therefore, most school principals in Bhutan perform administrative duties and compromise their instructional roles due to administrative and management requirements and pressure of

accountability. As a result, majority of principal's face criticism from different sectors of the population for playing lesser role as instructional leaders.

Tshering and Sawangmek (2016) in their research states that, research and relationship between principal's instruction and school effectiveness remains a challenge, due to its shallow definition on roles, instructions and other leadership theories. Moreover, in last seven years, schools under this district have not been in top ten rank in PMS ranking done by Ministry of Education, Bhutan (EMD, 2017).

The fact is, experimental investigations have demonstrated that instructional leadership has established ideas to promote enhanced academic progress, particularly by students and school as a whole (Jawas, 2014). Therefore, it is vital to examine how school principals in Bhutan carry out their instructional leadership role on a daily basis. Thus, this research is designed to study the instructional leadership practices perceived by principals in one of the southern districts in Bhutan. The results provided the level of instructional leadership practices and allow better understanding of instructional leaders and also a possible support to enhance academic outcome of the students and professional development of teachers.

Research Objectives

1. To study the level of school principals' perceptions towards instructional leadership practices in one of the southern districts in Bhutan.

2. To compare the differences of school principals' perceptions towards instructional leadership practices on personal and institutional factors.

3. To identify the difficulties of school principals' perceptions towards instructional leadership practices in one of the southern districts in Bhutan.

Research Methodology

This study used both quantitative and qualitative approaches as the findings based on one approach is not authentic enough to make reliable generalization. With the use of both approaches, lapses of one can be supplemented by the other. Thus, reliability can be strengthened. Depending solely on quantitative can be challenging as under the animosity of the responses, absolute genuineness and earnestness of responses cannot be confirmed.

The subject consisted of 31principals of Bhutanese schools ranging from pre-primary to higher secondary school. The first part of the instrument was intended to gather personal information of principals while the second one was to study the level of principals' instruction leadership behaviors through survey questionnaire on Principals Instructional Management Rating Scale (PIRMS) which included ten dimensions and 50 functions. Further, researcher adopted principal's instructional management rating scale questionnaires (PIMRS)

(Hallinger, 2013; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985) were used after the grant of email permission from author to use.

Qualitative data were collected through the interviews of four principals as additional information on instructional leadership behaviors. The key informants were selected based on currently serving the school. The content validity of the questions was ensured through a detailed scrutiny of content coverage and relevancy, language accuracy and suitability, feedbacks and recommendations by three experts' Item- Object Congruence (IOC). The items with validity score of 0.5 – 1.00 were used for the survey questionnaire. To determine the reliability of items of instructional leadership, pretest was conducted to 31 Principals of other districts of Bhutan. Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient was applied to calculate the reliability test (Cronbach, 1951). The questionnaire items were validated by three experts. All the items under the variables had an IOC of 1.00. The pretest confirmed the variable reliability with Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient value of 0.925. Approval to carry out the research was sought from the MoE and the Chief District Education office.

Quantitative data analysis was done through the statistical package. The general information of principals was analyzed by frequency and percentages. The level of instructional leadership behaviors perceived by the principals was computed by mean and standard deviation. The interviewed data was analyzed by employing content analysis.

Research Results

The data collected from questionnaire and interview were analyzed and presented in the following sequences:

1. Level of principals' perception towards instructional leadership practices

The ten instructional leadership functions 'overall mean score was 3.58 at the high level. This designated that principal's involvement in leadership practices were vigorous. The highest function mean score with 3.98 at the high level was communicating school goals. The least practiced function was maintaining high visibility with the mean score of 3.11 at the moderate level.

2. Analysis of differences in principals' perception towards instructional leadership practices based on personal and institutional factors.

Table 1. Difference of ILP based on age (n=31)

Functions	20-30 yrs.		31 Above yrs.		t	P-value
	$\bar{X}$	SD	$\bar{X}$	SD		
Framing the school goals	3.66	.937	3.78	.871	-.371	.713
Communicating the school goals	3.87	.856	4.05	.664	-.648	.522
Supervising & evaluating instructions	4.00	.603	3.81	.711	.743	.463
Coordinating the curriculum	3.20	.689	3.44	.911	-.777	.443
Monitoring student progress	3.54	.721	3.52	.735	.057	.955
Protecting instructional time	3.41	.792	3.63	.969	-.643	.525
Maintaining high visibility	3.25	.621	3.21	.751	.153	.880
Providing incentives for teachers	3.83	.834	3.73	.962	.256	.777
Promoting professional development	3.54	.450	3.65	.928	-.403	.690
Providing incentive for learning	3.70	.689	3.60	.980	.317	.753
Total	36	7.192	36.42	8.482	-1.316	6.721

Notes : The rating scale was divided into 5 perception levels to the mean score form 4.21-5.00 as Highest, 3.41-4.20 as High, 2.61-3.40 as Moderate, 1.81-2.60 as low and 1.00-1.80 as lowest.

The t-test output in the above Table 1, for the age groups indicated the statistically insignificant differences among age groups is higher than.05 level (t=-.131). This denoted that there were no variations
in the instructional leadership practices of the principals based on age.

Table 2 Difference of ILP based on experience (n=31)

Functions	1-10 yrs.		Above 11 yrs.		t	P-value
	$\bar{X}$	SD	$\bar{X}$	SD		
Framing the school goals	3.53	1.008	3.93	.727	-1.286	.209
Communicating the school goals	3.80	.840	4.15	.597	-1.367	.182
Supervising & evaluating instructions	3.03	.718	3.65	.831	-2.225	.034
Coordinating the curriculum	3.30	.702	3.75	.683	-1.809	.671
Monitoring student progress	3.83	.672	3.93	.680	-.428	.010
Protecting instructional time	3.13	.915	3.93	.704	-2.752	.081
Maintaining high visibility	3.03	.718	3.40	.638	-1.530	.137
Providing incentives for teachers	3.36	.812	3.84	.676	-1.782	.085
Promoting professional development	3.56	1.083	3.96	.670	-1.252	.221
Providing incentive for learning	3.46	.934	3.81	.793	-1.113	.275
Total	34.03	7.319	38.35	6.999	-15.544	1.905

Notes : The rating scale was divided into 5 perception levels to the mean score form 4.21-5.00 as Highest, 3.41-4.20 as High, 2.61-3.40 as Moderate, 1.81-2.60 as low and 1.00-1.80 as lowest.

As presented in Table 2, there was insignificant difference between the principals' year of experiences and their instructional leadership practices since P-value was higher than .05 level. The number of experiences did not impact instructional leadership practices.

Table 3. Difference of ILP based on academic qualification (n=31)

Functions	B.Ed.		MA/M.Ed		t	P-value
	$\bar{X}$	SD	$\bar{X}$	SD		
Framing the school goals	3.85	.534	3.64	1.100	.652	.519
Communicating the school goals	4.10	.446	3.88	.910	.842	.406
Supervising & evaluating instructions	3.60	.615	3.73	.931	1.57	.126
Coordinating the curriculum	4.07	.625	3.14	.819	.024	.166
Monitoring student progress	3.53	.603	3.52	.687	1.41	.359
Protecting instructional time	3.71	.801	3.41	.972	.932	.981
Maintaining high visibility	3.25	.549	3.20	.811	.173	.864
Providing incentives for teachers	3.71	.671	3.52	.856	.658	.516
Promoting professional development	3.96	.414	3.61	.1.152	.1.06	.259
Providing incentive for learning	3.78	.544	3.52	1.067	.814	.422
Total	37.56	5.802	35.17	8.153	7.075	4.618

Notes : The rating scale was divided into 5 perception levels to the mean score form 4.21-5.00 as Highest, 3.41-4.20 as High, 2.61-3.40 as Moderate, 1.81-2.60 as low and 1.00-1.80 as lowest.

Table 3, indicated insignificant difference between the principals' highest academic qualification and their instructional leadership practices as p-value was .461 which was higher than .05 level.

Table 4. Difference of ILP based on school level (n=31)

Functions	Primary		Secondary		t	P-value
	$\bar{X}$	SD	$\bar{X}$	SD		
Framing the school goals	3.55	.724	4.04	1.054	-1.534	.136
Communicating the school goals	3.89	.678	4.12	.829	1.845	.405
Supervising & evaluating instructions	3.31	.548	3.91	.973	-.325	.747
Coordinating the curriculum	3.86	.749	3.41	.834	-1.939	.062
Monitoring student progress	3.34	.578	3.83	.848	-.193	.848
Protecting instructional time	3.50	.816	3.62	1.047	-.372	.712
Maintaining high visibility	3.13	.495	3.37	.932	-.951	.350
Providing incentives for teachers	3.68	.605	3.50	1.000	.641	.526
Promoting professional development	3.76	.694	3.791	.195	-.084	.933
Providing incentive for learning	3.63	.597	3.661	.213	- .108	.915
Total	35.65	6.484	37.25	9.925	-3.02	5.634

Notes: The rating scale was divided into 5 perception levels to the mean score form 4.21-5.00 as Highest, 3.41-4.20 as High, 2.61-3.40 as Moderate, 1.81-2.60 as low and 1.00-1.80 as lowest.

Table 4, exhibited statistically insignificant difference between the primary and secondary school principals for the reason that P-value was more than .05 level in term of their instructional leadership practices. This means that both the secondary and primary principals had no difference in the level of instructional leadership practices.

Table 5. Difference of ILP based on school location (n=31)

Functions	Rural Urban		Rural Urban		t	P-value
	$\bar{X}$	SD	$\bar{X}$	SD		
Framing the school goals	3.75	.851	3.70	1.151	.114	.910
Communicating the school goals	4.03	.747	3.70	.670	.940	.355
Supervising & evaluating instructions	3.42	.648	3.80	.8361	.3141	.756
Coordinating the curriculum	3.90	.744	3.00	.224	.047	.304
Monitoring student progress	3.57	.688	3.30	.908	.785	.439
Protecting instructional time	3.57	.783	3.40	1.474	.398	.694
Maintaining high visibility	3.26	.620	3.00	1.387	.790	.436
Providing incentives for teachers	3.71	.586	3.10	1.387	1.671	.105
Promoting professional development	3.90	.721	3.10	1.474	1.903	.067
Providing incentive for learning	3.69	.762	3.40	1.387	.684	.500
Total	36.8	7.15	33.5	11.898	8.646	4.566

Notes: The rating scale was divided into 5 perception levels to the mean score form 4.21-5.00 as Highest, 3.41-4.20 as High, 2.61-3.40 as Moderate, 1.81-2.60 as low and 1.00-1.80 as lowest.

The statistically insignificant difference was observed between the rural and urban school principals regarding their instructional leadership practices with P-value higher than .05 level. The findings demonstrated both rural and urban area had no difference level of instructional leadership practices.

3 Hindrances to principals' instructional leadership practices.

The respondents pointed out number of obstacles such as, limited professional development opportunities, multiple role and responsibilities, limited instructional resources, under staffed and challenging geographical location, large student number, heavy workload, inadequate support for professional development, mismatch of expectations and priorities.

Discussion and Conclusion

Discussion

This study examined the ten instructional leadership dimensions using the PIMRS. The overall mean of 3.58 was stated as the high level of instructional leadership practices. The principals carried out sub-leadership functions of communicating school goals, protecting instructional time and promoting professional development. They also performed the sub leadership function to manage instruction, monitor student progress, organize curriculum, sustain high visibility, provide incentives for teachers and provide encouragements for learning as well.

The results revealed that principals practiced all the ten instructional leadership functions signifying their acquaintance with the instructional leadership functions and awareness of the teaching learning processes in the schools as authenticated by the qualitative phase. The findings contradicted with other studies that validated the principal's failure on the part as an instructional leader (Hallinger & Murphy, 1987; Miskel, 1991; Taraseina & Hallinger ,1994).

The level of principals' instructional leadership practices based on the personal and institutional factors such as age, and year of experience, academic qualification, school level, school location and for significance test, t-test was used. The test results showed that while instructional leadership practices were common among the principals regardless of their age, and the year of experience, academic qualification, school level and school location, the frequency to which they practiced diverged. Bakar and Mustaffa (2013) stated that not much of a difference among age representative residency, and organizational responsibility in Malaysia had no significant relationship. Similar discoveries were shown by Mathieu et al. (2016) also shows that there was no association with hierarchical duty, work fulfilment and pioneers' conduct in Canadian association as per the age, gender and education level.

The major differences were not discovered in the age variables and leadership practices. The result showed that the both young and old principals were more drawn in the instructional leadership practices and the difference of means between the ages variables were not statistically significant at 0.05 level. The test between the groups was insignificant with significant value not at .05 levels. The findings adhered to Thrash (2015) confirmed the absence of differences among leadership styles based on age and experience of Deans of Universities. It was obvious from the above discussion that personal factors such as age, and year of experience have not distinguished the principals' instructional leadership.

The level of principals' instructional leadership practices based on institutional factors: The test revealed the fact that school level and location did not affect the instructional leadership practices of principals. The difference in the level of principals' instructional leadership between the primary and secondary schools was not at .05 levels as shown by the *t*-test analysis. The secondary principals performed the instructional leadership functions than their primary counterpart with average mean of 3.94 and 3.54 respectively.

The findings revealed that principals working in the bigger schools were involved more frequently in the instructional leadership practices than principals in the smaller schools. Cotton (2003), Principals in secondary schools practiced more of the instructional leadership than those of the smaller schools. Wahlstrom and Louis (2008) believed that school level did not influence effectiveness of the principals' instructional leadership but the researcher contended this statement because in Bhutanese context, the school level matter when it came to facilities, school personnel.

It should be noted that rejection of all the hypotheses did not imply adverse effects. Instead, it was an indication of existence of a very good instructional leadership practices despite differences of the personal and institutional factors. Owing to the geographical size of our country spatial interaction within its boundary had not been so difficult.

The findings of principal instructional leadership practices based on school location did not yield significant differences between the rural and urban schools and it indicated that both were frequently involved in instructional leadership practices. This finding contradicts the viewpoint of Chadwick and Howley (2002), who stated that the existence of different issues that a principal's face at remote school that are being posed by geographic isolation. Today every nook and corner of the country is well connected by roads and network accessibility has improved the ease of access to resources to a great height. Network connectivity has enabled leadership practices in lined with the requirement of 21st century education encompassing latest information and infusion of technologies in teaching.

Four principals were selected for the interview to find out about the instructional hindrances faced by them and how it is being addressed. Principalship is a demanding job amidst limitations and expectations as they need to demonstrate a high level of proficiency in teaching

pedagogies and the curriculum provide effective whole school leadership and requires the ability to handle a range of taxing priorities with limited staff or resources. The respondents expressed their inability to meet the instructional leadership requirement due to versatile roles, shortage of teaching staff, scarcity of relevant instructional resources, lack of time for instructional leadership, heavy workload, limited support for professional development, divergence between expectations and priorities, limited electronic communication.

The respondents identified common ideas in overcoming problems such as providing enough instructional resources and teachers, sustaining and promoting the professional development and focusing on principals' priority areas, organizing instructional leadership training on mastery of experiences in implementing strategies that support teaching-learning processes, partnering with schools to promote instructional programs, involving principals in the discussion , visiting schools more frequently by the authorities, which would facilitate them to undertake the instructional leadership role effectively to their satisfaction and alter existing barriers to instructional leadership .

The findings revealed that principals frequently practiced instructional leadership and were aware of leadership roles but it was not surprising to note that they discharged their leadership roles in the face of hindrance. The discussion also emphasized the need to strengthen and maintain instructional leadership in achieving the goal of teaching and learning rather than ignoring it on the pretext of time shortage.

Conclusion

The mean of 3.58 indicated that instructional leadership practices of principals' as high level.The sub functions of framing and commuincating school goals are on the high end of frequently be practiced(M=3.98) while sub maintaining high visibility (M=3.11) was at the low end of occasionally being practiced. The outcome portrayed that principals in southern districts in Bhutan mostly engaged in formal and indirect instructional leadership functions. It was discovered that differences in principals' leadership practices concerning the age, academic qualification and year of experience was not at .05 level. The test of significance noticed no significant differences based on all the three institutional factors as it was not at 0.5 levels. The principals of both rural and urban schools rated almost the same in all the ten sub instructional leadership functions.

The hindrances to the instructional leadership practices faced by the principals were numerous roles, time constraints, work overload, limited instructional resources, lack of time, teacher shortages, inadequate support for professional development, mismatch of expectations and priorities. The need for providing resources as one of the vital leadership functions of instructional leader which was not included in the PIMRS. It has been found that both personal and institutional factors did not significantly discriminate principals' instructional leadership practices. The personal and institutional factors of the principals are not the

attributes of efficient principal instructional leadership practices but it is essential that all stakeholders should give more resources and provide timely professional development which consequently will aid the principals in performing their duties to the optimal level.

Recommendations

Recommendation for Chief District Education Officers and Policy makers.

1. Offer training for principals on regular basis to acquaint them with new skills and techniques.

2. Study and explore the feasibility of resources mobilization to enhance the Professional Development opportunities both in and out of the districts and country.

3. Pool the best practices of school principals, prioritized the needs and then invite experts to provide necessary training in the district.

Recommendation for the principals

1. It is necessary for the principals to give a full attention to teaching-learning process and prioritize other requirements though they are expected to handle many school tasks.

2. Principals need to work closely and regularly provide feedback to district education officers for better organization.

Recommendation for future research studies

1. Principals should work in consultation with chief district education officers for smooth and better organization.

2. The future research should be conducted at the national level to examine principals' instructional leadership practices involving both teachers and principals as this study could not include the inputs from the teachers as it was limited only to the principals.

3. The aspiring researchers could replicate the study and conduct a nation-wide study to examine principal's instructional leadership practices.

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