

The Influence of Instructional Leadership on Learning Organisation At High Performing Primary Schools in Malaysia

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Abstract: Transforming a school into a learning organization requires a significant cultural shift, change of mind-sets and a school-wide commitment to self-reflection and evaluation. The headmaster's presence and drive in the school are urgently needed to bring the school to its intended purpose. Various styles of leadership will characterize the behaviour of a leader in performing their duties. It is essentially crucial for headmasters to increase competencies and skills in their practice of instructional leadership at the school. This study was conducted to identify the influence of instructional leadership on learning organization. It involved 286 teachers from 14 high-performing primary schools in the northern zone of Peninsular Malaysia. The modified Principal Instructional Management Rating Skills (PIMRS), and Middle School Teacher Survey (MSTS) were applied as research instruments. Data was analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) aided program AMOS 24. Findings indicated that instructional leadership was significantly related to learning organization. Results showed that loadings were significantly fit based on all index values tested with SEM and achieved the required level of the Goodness-of-Fit. Hence, findings could potentially benefit educational practitioners in planning, designing, implementing and evaluating future training such as professional development programs to sustain and enhance the leadership excellence of school leaders in Malaysia. Considerable time, efforts, and resources, however, will need to be allocated strategically, to turn any school into a successful and sustainable learning organization. What is important in bringing change and improvement is the collective agreement of the vision and objectives of the school.

Keywords: High Performing School, Instructional Leadership, Learning Organisation,

1. Introduction

As a developing nation, Malaysia faces a keen competition in this 21st century. The competitive world today warrants a trajectory towards a robust development in order to achieve the developed nation status. A world class education system is an important factor towards this end. In addition, learning in the 21st century has used the integration of information and communication technology (ICT) into the education environment and it has become the new ordinary in the past few years (Aziz, Seman, Hashim, Roslin, & Ishar, 2019). The Ministry of Education (MOE) has introduced and implemented the Malaysian Education Blueprint (MEB) (2013-2025), which is a major reform of the education system

spanning 12 years, from 2013 to 2025, with an aspiration of becoming more competitive and driving the education system towards a world class one (MOE, 2013).

The focus of high performing schools (HPS) in the MEB is to maintain a high standard quality for all these schools. Therefore, the instructional leadership style demonstrated by school heads plays an important role towards becoming effective schools (Lim & Jamal, 2016; Ibrahim, et al., 2015; Syarwan & Maznah, 2015; Hallinger, 2011). Instructional leadership is emphasized in the MEB (2013-2025) with the assertion that instructional leadership practicing school leaders can affect the raise of student outcomes by as much as 20 per cent compared to administrative leadership (MOE, 2013). The instructional leadership style is regarded as a contemporary style in the world of educational leadership (Harris et al., 2018).

The need to ensure high-performing school heads who are able to provide the instructional leadership in the MEB stems from the concern of Malaysia's low ranking in international reviews of learner performance, such as Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) (Ministry of Education, 2013: E-4). The assertion by Leithwood et al. (2006) that high performing principals could improve student outcomes was echoed in the MEB, that 'the quality of school leaders is the second biggest school-based factor in determining student outcomes, after teacher quality' (Ministry of Education, 2013: E-27). The fifth shift in the MEB asserts that high-performing school leaders are to be placed in every school across the nation. This study therefore investigates the school headteachers' instructional leadership practices and learning organisation aspects in high-performing primary schools, from the perceptions of the teachers in those schools.

1.2 Problem Statement

Many studies have emphasized on the importance of the role of headteachers as instructional leaders in school with the assertion that this contributes to students' academic achievement towards being an effective school (Lim & Jamal, 2016; Zakaria, 2016; Rahimi & Yusri, 2015; Hallinger, 2011). However, a review of the literature tends to show that instructional leadership is scarce (Rahimi & Yusri, 2014; Yusri & Aziz, 2014; Azlin et al., 2013; JNJK, 2009). Apart from that, studies based on the instructional leadership model developed by Hallinger and Murphy (1985) report that the instructional leadership practice among the school leaders is at the low levels (Hussein Ahmad, 2012; Yusri, 2012; Quah, 2011).

The main barrier seems to be the lack of understanding amongst school heads on their role as instructional leaders (Michael, 2014). This impedes the accountability of an educational leader. In the global competitive environment, organisations face the reality that learning is ever more critical than before. A learning organisation is expected to have the capacity to move changes and progress to remain competitive through learning. Senge (2006) therefore asserts the need for learning organisation concepts in organisations.

The transformation of education much talked about today also points toward lifelong learning (MOE, 2012). The school is at the forefront of developing individuals by imparting knowledge and skills. The school head is therefore entrusted with the main role of moving the human resources to achieve the school's goals and vision. The question that needs to be answered is the extent of influence by instructional leadership on learning organisation.

1.3 Research Objectives and Research Questions

This study intends to address the following objectives:

1. To determine whether instructional leadership has a positive and significant effect on learning organisation;
2. To determine whether the structural model of instructional leadership and learning organisation has a good fit with the data attained.

The research questions of the study are as follows:

1. Does instructional leadership have a positive and significant influence on learning organisation?

2. Is the proposed theoretical model of instructional leadership and learning organisation has a good fit with the data attained?

1.4 Hypothetical Model

To address the research questions, a hypothetical model which comprises of the two variables, i.e. head teachers' instructional leadership and learning organisation, derived from theories and past studies literature (Lim & Jamal, 2016; Ibrahim et al., 2015; Rahimi & Yusri, 2015; Rosnah et al., 2014; Senge, 2006; dan Hallinger & Murphy, 1985) is presented in Figure 1.

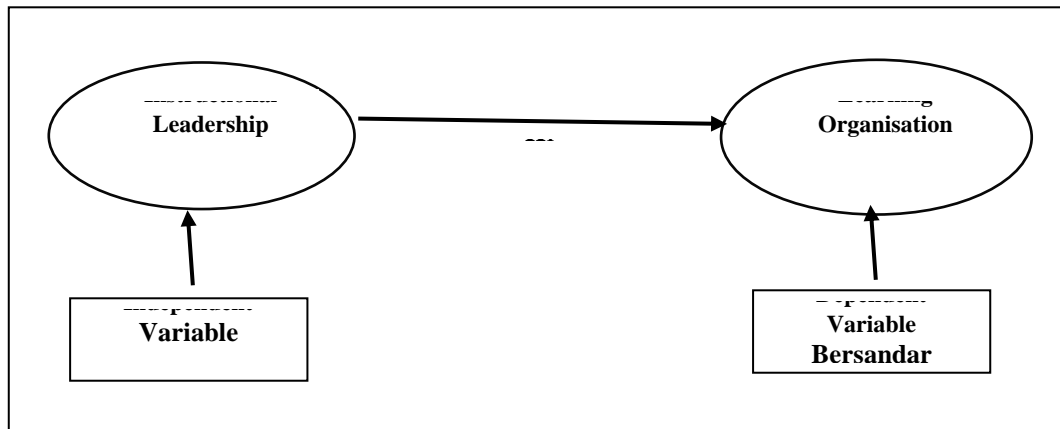


Fig. 1 Hypothetical Model of the Study

Based on the hypothetical model, instructional leadership practices are assigned as the independent variable whilst learning organisation is categorized as the dependent variable, following past studies (Rosnah et al., 2014; Senge, 2006; Amin Senin, 2005). The research hypotheses are as follows:

- H1: Instructional leadership (IL) has a positive and significant influence on learning organisation (LO).
H2: The structural model of IL and LO is a good fit with the data attained.

2. Literature Review

The importance of effective school leaders in producing high performing schools is undeniable. The evidence from literature ((Lim & Jamal, 2016; Ibrahim et al., 2015; Rahimi & Yusri, 2015; Mohd Yusri & Aziz, 2014; Azlin et al., 2013; Hallinger, 2011) shows that the instructional leadership role played by the school heads is vital in ensuring academic excellence and in driving the schools to become effective schools. In addition, Ancho & Rosario (2020) described in their previous study that the challenges of leaders are usually related to staff improvement, assurance of learners' safety, change implementation, curriculum planning, recruitment and strategizing. Instructional leadership can be defined as every act of planning by the school head which is clearly disseminated in order to influence, guide, and motivate teachers and students towards the improvement of teaching and learning in achieving the school goal. These include to ascertain that any educational change initiative is well implemented to reach the school goals (Lim & Jamal, 2016; Hallinger, 2011; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985) Literature shows that instructional leadership exerts a bigger influence on student performance compared to transformational leadership (Robinson et al., 2008). Past studies also point towards instructional leadership as an important element in creating a learning organisation that moves the organisation forward ((Rosnah et al.,

In this era of competitiveness, a learning organisation has the capabilities to initiate change and remain competitive through learning and should be able to learn fast enough from its success and failures whether from within the organisation or without (Marquardt, 2002). This assertion is supported by Hasbullah (2017) and Koh (2014) who explained that the characteristics of a learning organisation

which provides the opportunities for continuous learning are able to improve quality, competitiveness, effectiveness, and excellence of the organisation in line with a borderless world. Therefore, Senge (2006) proposed the creation of a learning organisation where the personnel always develop themselves to achieve the optimum outcome, with encouragement to develop a new way of thinking and when the aspiration is achieved, they continuously learn together. The literature attributes certain factors to the development of the learning organisation, namely leader, culture and professional development (Amin, 2005). Leaders who practice instructional leadership characteristics such as a focus in vision building, a clear dissemination of the same to their charge, practice sharing of knowledge and experiences towards the vision as well as provide intellectual stimulation through staff professional development are able to encourage the creation of a learning organisation and improve the organisational performance (Nor Foniza, 2012; Amin, 2005). It is evident from past studies that instructional leadership practices by school heads bear a significant impact on the creation of learning organisations. This study, therefore, investigates the influence of instructional leadership on learning organisation.

3. Methodology

This study uses the survey design with quantitative methodology by studying the population through measurement of data from a determined sample size (Chua, 2014; Noraini, 2013). The population of this study are teachers from the high performing public primary schools in the northern region of Malaysia, comprising the states of Perak, Pulau Pinang, Kedah and Perlis. The sample is 286 teachers from 14 high performing public primary schools (HPPPS) determined through stratified sampling using the formula from Krejcie and Morgan (1970).

The contextually modified Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale (PIMRS) (Hallinger dan Murphy, 1985) survey questionnaire is used as the instrument in this study. Meanwhile, another survey questionnaire, Middle School Teacher Survey (MSTS) which was adapted and modified from Jamal (2009), in accordance to the model by Senge (2006), was used to measure the extent of teacher participation in learning organisation activities in the schools.

In this study, the structural equation modeling (SEM), using IBM-SPSS-AMOS (Statistical Package for Social Science – Analysis of Moments Structures) version 24 was used to test the relationship of the variables and fitness of the research model with the sample. According to Hair et al. (2010), and Zainudin, Lim, and Nur Faizura (2018), SEM is a multivariate technique that combines multiple regression aspects with factor analysis to estimate a dependency relationship which is simultaneously connected. In this study, SEM analysis is an extension of the multivariate analysis to determine domains of HPPPS through components of instructional leadership and learning organisation. The advantage of using SEM is in the determination of variance error in each of the variables tested. In other words, SEM analysis has a high validity for the test instrument (Schumacker & Lomax, 2004; Zainudin, Lim & Nur Fairuza, 2018). The significant testing of significance in the relationship of instructional leadership and learning organisation is determined using the regression multiplier with a critical ratio exceeding 1.96 and a significant value (p) of less than 0.001. The fitness of the research model to the data attained is determined with several fitness indexes. Hair et al. (2010) and Holmes-Smith (2006) recommend the use of at least one fitness index from each category of model fit as presented in Table 1.

Table 1. The three categories of model fit and their level of acceptance

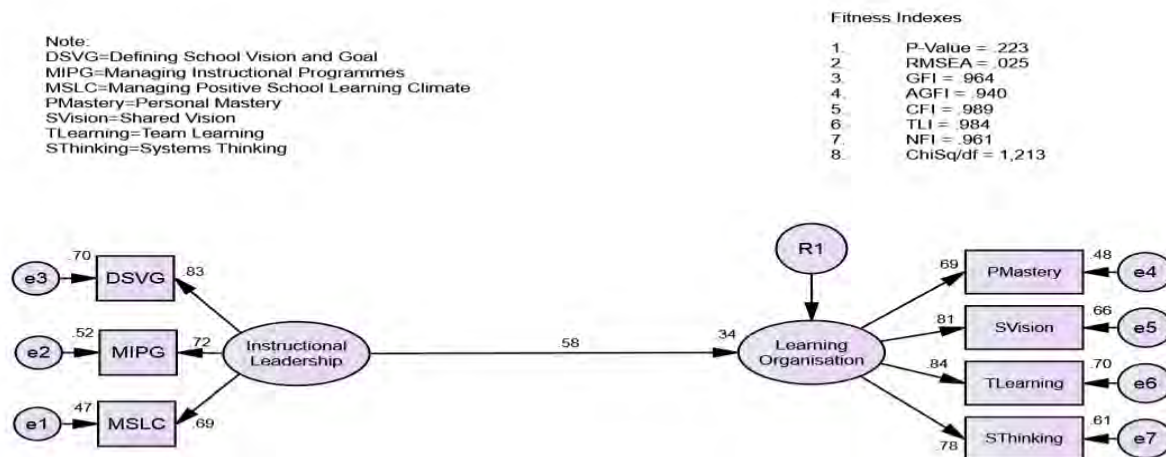
category	index	name	
	Square	Chi Square	applicable for large sample size, more than 200) (1977)
		Square of Error	and best if RMSEA < 0.08 (1993)

Fit		Index	Interpretation	Source
fit		Fit Index	still acceptable if the model is complex)	Sorbom (1984)
		Goodness of Fit	is still acceptable if the model is complex)	(1985)
		Fit Index	still acceptable if the model is complex)	
		Lewis Index	still acceptable if the model is complex)	(1980)
		Index	still acceptable if the model is complex)	
fit	df	Degree of Freedom	if the value $\text{ChiSq}/\text{df} < 3.0$)	(1985)

Source: Adapted from Zainudin Awang, Lim Siew Hui & Nur Fairuza Zainudin (2018)

4. Results

Figure 2 shows the output of path analysis for the structural model proposed in this study. The findings show that the fitness indexes are good and the factor loading for all items are satisfactory (above the required 0.6).



The first hypothesis tested that there is an influence of instructional leadership on the learning organisation. The regression path coefficient analysis of the instructional leadership variable on the learning organisation shown in Table 2. Based on Table 2, the regression coefficient of instructional leadership variable on learning organisation is 0.57. This value indicates that for every one unit increase in instructional leadership, its effects would contribute 0.57 unit increase in learning organisation. And more importantly the effects of instructional leadership on learning organisation is significant ($p < 0.001$). Thus, the hypothesis, H₁ that instructional leadership has positive and significant influence on learning organisation is supported. The value of R₂ is 0.34 (as shown in Figure 2). The figure indicates the contribution of instructional leadership to learning organisations is 34%.

Table 2. The regression path coefficient and its significance based on p-value <0.001

Path	Coefficient	Standard Error	t-value	Significance
Instructional Leadership (IL) → Learning Organisation (LO)	.573	.080	7.196	*** Significant

The second hypothesis tested that there is a good fit with the data obtained of the proposed structural model of IL and LO. The fitness indexes in Table 3 meet the required level as recommended by the literature. Thus, the hypothesis, H₂ is supported, it can be concluded that the proposed structural model of instructional leadership and learning organization has a good fit with the data attained in this study.

Table 3. The fitness indexes assessment for the structural model in Figure 2

Index	Value	Requirement
RMSEA	0.025	achieved
GFI	0.964	<0.08; The required level is achieved
		>0.90; The required level is achieved

CFI	0.989	achieved
TLI	0.984	>0.90; The required level is achieved
NFI	0.961	>0.90; The required level is achieved
		>0.90; The required level is achieved

5. Discussion

The findings of this study has established the model on the influence of instructional leadership on learning organisation. The findings confirmed the theory of instructional leadership by Hallinger and Murphy (1985) that put forth the three main dimensions – defining school vision and goal, managing instructional programmes, and promoting a positive school learning climate. It can be concluded that the theory is appropriate and fits with the teacher behaviour in this study. Apart from that, the study confirms the four dimensions proposed in a learning organisation – systems thinking, personal mastery, team learning and shared vision. This study also found that the instructional leadership practices of the primary school heads have a positive and significant influence on learning organisation in the sample schools. The instructional leadership practices demonstrated by the heads in this study is deemed integral in driving schools as learning organisations and towards becoming effective schools in line with the past literature (Ibrahim et al., 2015; Yusri & Aziz, 2014; Gulcan, 2012; Hallinger, 2011; Quah, 2011).

From the theoretical perspective, this study could potentially contribute to the literature on the relationship between instructional leadership and learning organisation in the education setting. The research model is developed using the local context and not merely following the models by Hallingre and Murphy (1985) as well as Senge (2006). The validity and reliability of the model built by combining the instructional leadership model by Hallinger and Murphy (1985) and learning organisation model by Senge (2006) which is confirmed with the use of SEM in this study could potentially provide some guidance and useful source to other researchers.

A study is even more meaningful when it could provide some input in line with the nation's current policy and leadership aspiration. The model developed in this study could also contribute to the development of leadership and organisation in the education system. It has been found in this study that instructional leadership gives a positive effect on learning organisation in the participating schools. In the MEB (2013-2025), the government has clearly outlined the aspiration in the fifth shift to ensure that high-performance leadership be placed at every school to enhance the effectiveness of the school. The dimensions of instructional leadership and learning organisation in this study could provide a reference for educators and the ministry alike in enhancing school effectiveness.

6. Conclusion

This study concludes that instructional leadership practices are related to learning organisation at school. This in turn could potentially contribute to transforming schools to become excellent high performing schools. The potential contribution of this study is towards a better understanding of this relationship and as a guide to practitioners and stakeholders in the school context in Malaysia. It is with fervent hope that the schools will be able to sustain the quality and be competitive in the global arena.

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