

Conference Paper

Instructional Leadership Practices of Principals at Public Elementary Schools in Indonesia

Rosa Dania and Dwi Esti Andriani

Educational Management Study Program, Graduate Program, Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta

ORCID:

Rosa Dania: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2414-2981>

Abstract

For more than thirty years, instructional leadership has been considered an effective school leadership model for improving student achievement. This study aimed to investigate the instructional leadership practices of Indonesian school principals and the obstacles that they face. In this study, the data were collected through semi-structured interviews with three principals of public elementary schools located in Bandung. An audit trail and member checks were applied to ensure the quality of the collected data. The results showed that the three principals shared the instructional leadership role, particularly in performing supervision responsibilities. Despite this practice, the principals found it difficult to perform instructional leadership due to time constraints. Also, they lacked support from student parents, which made it difficult to improve student achievement. Therefore, the results of this study suggest that the instructional leadership of principals should involve parents more in student learning.

Corresponding Author:

Dwi Esti Andriani

rosadania.2018@student

.uny.ac.id

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1. Introduction

Principals' instructional leadership is considered as an essential component to school success. Instructional leadership model that focuses on improving student achievement was introduced in 1980s and early 1990s [1]. Several studies conducted in Western countries [2, 3] and Asia [4, 5] show that instructional leadership in which the focus is on learning will improve student learning achievement [3, 6, 8].

In Indonesia, instructional leadership is considered as one of the effective leadership models to gain school success. Therefore, since 2011 this leadership model has become one of the materials taught in prospective school principal trainings. It is believed that instructional leadership is the main factor of school success in implementing the 2013 National Curriculum as the leadership model focuses on learning and curriculum [10].

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However, various studies reveal that school principals face problems in performing instructional leadership. They find it difficult to manage their time due to the large amount of administrative work [10, 11]. Moreover, a hierarchical education system makes school principals depends on government policy in making decision[12]. At last, the school principals have limited knowledge of their role as an instructional leader [12-16].

This article examines how public elementary school principals exercise instructional leadership in Indonesia and obstacles that they face. It is hoped that this article can enrich the literature and improve educational practitioners' and academicians' knowledge of instructional leadership. Further, the results are expected to be useful for policy makers for developing competency of school principals.

2. Related Works/Literature Review

Instructional leadership has attracted the interest of academicians since it first introduced in the 1980s [17]. The abundance of empirical research on instructional leadership in various countries indicates that this leadership model has been accepted as a core element of school leadership in a broad context [16] for more than thirty years. Nowadays, many models of instructional leadership have been developed, but the most widely used as a reference by researchers is the model developed by Hallinger and Murphy in 1985 [16].

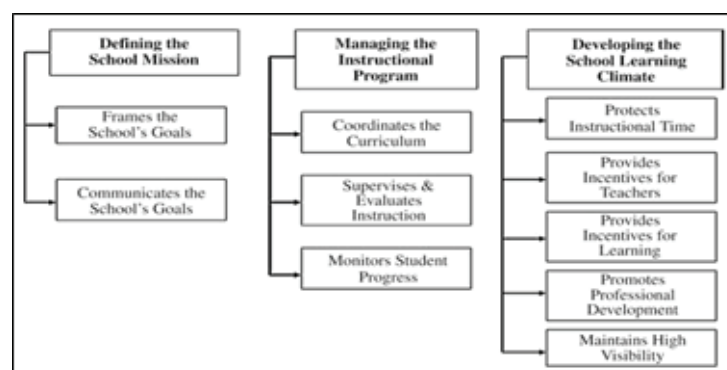


Figure 1: Scheme of Instructional Leadership Developed by Hallinger and Murphy (1985)

2.1. Dimension One: Defining the School Mission

This dimension refers to the role of principals in managing resources in certain places in some periods of time, for example one academic year. The principals should have clear, measurable, and attainable goals regarding student learning achievement [1, 18, 19]. This goal setting can be done by the principal himself or by the principals and staff. The

predetermined goals are then shared to all school members so that they understand and then support the attainment of the goals set [16].

2.2. Dimension Two: Managing the Instructional Programs

This dimension refers to the coordination and control of the principals over curriculum and learning processes [16]. They need to stimulate, supervise, and monitor teaching and learning in schools [18, 20]. The principals conduct formal and informal class visits and provides feedback on learning practices [8, 21, 22]. When supervising and evaluating teaching, they ensure that the learning processes and learning objectives are in line with the determined school missions.

2.3. Dimension Three: Developing Positive School Environment

The third dimension refers to the principals’ efforts to create conditions that make teachers and students more productive in learning, teaching, and improving school quality [23]. The principals make sure that students have adequate learning hours. In addition, they need to develop teacher professionalism, provide high visibilities, as well as give awards to teachers and students for their achievements [16].

3. Material and Methodology

This study aims to obtain an overview of the instructional leadership conducted by principals in three different public elementary schools in Bandung, Indonesia. The principals were selected by considering the length of time in principal position and the schools’ achievements measured from the students’ average scores obtained in school examinations.

TABLE 1: Tenure of The Principal and The Students’ Mean Score

School Principal (Anonymous)	Period in Charge	Student Average Score
Principal A	3 years	235.63/high
Principal B	3.5 years	181.01/moderate
Principal C	8 years	158.06/low

The data of this study were collected through semi-structured interviews. The interview guideline contained questions developed based on instructional leadership theories. The questions in the guideline were not specific to be answered, as they were general questions to start but had the greatest potential to generate relevant data. An

aide-memoire was developed. It translates guiding questions into a set of more specific questions [24, 25]. These questions were the starting points for exploring the aspects studied. As unforeseen issues emerged which gave rise to new questions, they were pursued.

The collected data were then transcribed and processed using the qualitative data analysis technique. The steps taken were to familiarize the data, to generate initial codes, to sort initially coded data into more overarching themes, to review the identified themes and further refine them, to identify and name the identified themes, and to produce the final report as the presentation of the empirical data, analysis, and discussion of the findings [26]. To measure the data validity, the researchers conducted audit trail and member checks in which researchers' interpretations send back to the study-participants, with the objective of asking them if the findings were credible to them [28].

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Results

Based on the results of the study, the three principals did their roles as instructional leaders although not optimally due to some problems explained in the following.

4.1.1. Defining School Mission

It was found that the three principals focused on improving student academic achievement. Principal A stated that

My goal as the principal of this school is that every student who graduates can excel in the academic aspect. Fortunately, in 2018 this school got provincial recognition although it did not get national recognition in both science and mathematics competitions. (Principal A)

Then, he added that one of the school missions was generating students with certain characters.

Learning in this school also leads to character building. The students getting score of 100 but no characters is meaningless. We do this character building with good behavior habituation, for example, all school members promote the 3S program/smiles and greetings. (Principal A)

Similarly, principal B stated the same thing but put more focus on learning process and exam results.

The school goal is to generate students who are able to compete in the aspects of academic and character. Thus, the academic aspect is measured from learning processes and exam results. (Principal B)

Principal C shared the same opinions with other principals that every school should have similar goals.

Every school must have the same goals of improving students' skills, producing students with excellent characters, and in terms of academic aspect, improving student achievement every year. (Principal C)

The three principals revealed that they involved teachers in determining school goals. They shared the same opinions that it would be easier for the teachers in accepting the goals set. However, they realized that there were challenges in the process, especially in relation to setting student achievement targets. Teachers were of the view that schools should not always have high hopes for student academic achievement as students of each academic year may have different academic competency. Besides, many parents ignore their children learning achievements. Thus, it was important to adjust the academic achievement with these conditions.

Student academic competency may be varied in each academic year. It depends on the student interest in learning and parents' support. That's what the teachers say, and I have the same opinion. (Principal A)

Teachers often say that this year may be different as we have student with different competencies. Thus, the learning achievement may fluctuate. It is definitely not stable. (Principal B)

Principal C explicitly stated that the majority of students who enrolled to his school were of average ability and some had lack ability. He stated that

The students admitted in this school have lower academic competency than those in favorite schools. Thus, it is hard to achieve high level of achievement standard. (Principal C)

Principal C added that majority of student parents had lack supports of improving student learning achievement.

In this school there are small numbers of smart students and supportive parents. Most parents don't care, even though elementary school-age children are still dependent on their parents. This is due to the parents' low academic background and income. The students have limited learning facilities at home. This condition makes it hard for us to set high achievement. (Principal C)

The results of this study show that the three principals had shared their vision, mission, and goals to parents and students in many ways. The principals put posters of the vision, mission, and goals on the school walls and other strategic places. They also informed about them in routine ceremonies on Monday morning. However, they stated it was hard to talk to the parents because of the absence of a large space to meet all parents of students at one time. At the same time, they have no time to talk to the parents of each class individually.

The principal should convey the vision and mission, especially to the first grader parents who have just admitted to the school. However, sometimes I have meetings here and there. So, I left it to the class teacher. I realize this is less effective but the situation is really difficult. (Principal A)

In this school, there is a meeting at the beginning of each academic year. The meeting is conducted in each class, so the first day is for the first grade, the next day is for the second grade, and so on. Thus, if I want to directly inform the parents about the school vision, missions, and goals, I need to come to each class. This is impossible because I have no schedule for that. (Principal B)

Based on above elaboration, it is concluded that student characteristics and parent supports are the main consideration for the principals to set student learning achievement standards.

4.1.2. Instructional Program Management

The three principals mentioned that they asked teachers to develop fun learning that focus on local wisdoms, creativity, and productivity by providing role models.

I like to share my teaching experiences with teachers, such as how to make learning less monotonous. I also teach in a class where the teacher is unable to attend or is late. (Principal A)

I come to a class where there is no teacher. I try to create learning that is motivating and fun. I teach with games and chants. I also give input to the teachers to do the same thing so that learning is fun “(Principal B)

I used to teach before I become the principal of the school. I share experiences with the teachers on how to create a fun learning atmosphere for children. One of them is to use the environment as a teaching aid. For example, I once brought all kinds of oranges because the learning topic was fruits. There are many kinds of oranges that I brought, such as lime, lemon, grapefruit, and mandarin oranges. Thus, the students know various kinds of oranges, then we eat the oranges together. (Principal C)

Furthermore, principals A and B had additional class for the six grade students who had not acquire certain competencies for school exams.

We have additional class conducted after school hour for students who do not have adequate competencies for exams. (Principal A)

We provide additional class for the sixth grade to prepare for the exam, 30 minutes before the first class starts. If it is held after school hours, only a few children will participate. They say that they are tired. So we arranged it in the morning before the lesson starts. (Principal B)

It was hoped that the program would improve student learning achievement so that they might pass the standard competency or minimal criteria set.

The three school principals also carried out teaching supervision. The supervision in the three schools was relatively the same, consisting of three stages: pre-observation, observation, and post-observation. In the pre-observation stage, the principals called the teachers to check the readiness of teaching administration such as lesson plans, learning media, and teaching tools. In the next stage, observation, the principals observed teaching learning processes. They assessed whether the teacher taught according to the lesson plan made. The post-observation stage was a face-to-face meeting between the teachers and the principals. The teacher conducted self-evaluation of the implementation of teachers’ teaching and then the principals provided input.

I observe the class without any plan. This way I know the real condition of the class. (Principal C)

Moreover, the principals stated that not all supervision tasks were done individually. They sometimes asked senior teachers to supervise as this is in accordance with the directions of the Education Office.

The Education Office requires principals to supervise senior teachers, and senior teachers are asked to supervise fellow teachers. Supervision reports are recapitulated and reported. (Principal A)

The results of supervision were then used by principal C as one of the considerations in evaluating teacher performance. Besides, principal B used the results to develop teacher professionalism.

The supervision was not always held well or in accordance with the expectations. The principals sometimes found it difficult to manage their time to supervise because they needed to do other tasks.

Actually there is a teacher supervision schedule, the curriculum team usually makes it, but I often can't implement it on time or have to postpone it because I have to attend meetings outside of school. (Principal A)

When I agree with the teachers to supervise his classroom, suddenly there is a meeting call from the Education office. So, I only observe the teaching for a while, at the beginning of the lesson only. This makes the supervisions are not optimally done. (Principal B)

I usually don't supervise until the class ends. At most, I observe the opening quickly, then I observe the core activity for a while, and I also observe the closing time. If I have to observe from beginning to the end of the class, I still have other work to do. Besides, sometimes teachers are nervous about being supervised. (Principal C)

The above explanation shows that principal supervision was not optimally conducted because the principals had limited time but so much workload.

4.1.3. Developing Positive School Environment

The three principals think that conducive learning environment should be developed in order to improve student

I rarely call teachers and students during learning hours unless there is an urgent matter. For example, students are picked up by their parents to go home early because a family member passed away. I also don't call the teacher while they were teaching. If it is possible, I will share the information via the WhatsApp group. (Principal A)

Actually, it is important to collaborate with several sponsors, but I have to sort it out. I do not accept everything because it can interfere with student learning. In addition, I avoid sponsor presentations during learning hours. (Principal B)

The announcement during lessons is only for an urgent situation. It is mostly announced during flag ceremonies, morning lines, and parents WhatsApp group. (Principal C)

It is believed that the learning process was effective if students were not disturbed. Besides, the three principals supported teachers to develop their teaching skills by participating in trainings, seminars, and workshops. They believe that competence development would lead to the improvement of teaching quality and teacher career.

There are workshops at KKG 2-3 times a year for all teachers. The school pays for the teachers to participate. (Principal A).

Every time there is a training offer for teachers from the Education Office, I will definitely ask teachers to participate. I select potential teachers to convey the results of training to fellow teachers at school. The school also pays for it. (Principal B)

Senior or junior teachers, civil servants or non-civil servants, all have the same opportunity to develop. If I have to recommend a teacher to attend trainings, they will participate in turn. I am sure that the knowledge that teachers get in training will improve the quality of student learning. (Principal C)

However, the three principals revealed that it was difficult to motivate senior teachers to develop their competences. They were reluctant to participate because they felt that they had adequate skills and that they would soon be retired. Moreover, most of them were not confident to join trainings especially those related IT.

I often conduct IT training at schools for teachers. I ask the teachers to implement what they learn in teachings. Senior teachers do not want to participate, are not interested and do not want to develop (Principal A)

If there is a training, junior teachers are more active in participating while senior teachers don't want to. If required to do so, they want to participate, but if asked to vote, senior teachers prefer to teach in schools only. It's okay to teach 2 classes too. (Principal B)

All teachers have the same opportunity to take part in trainings, but because of the age factor, the older teachers are less motivated to take part in training. (Principal C)

It was also found that principals A and B conducted meeting forums to share teaching experiences and skills. In these forums, problems related to teaching were solved.

We usually hold workshops at the end or beginning of the academic year by inviting supervisors. All teachers are obliged to attend the meetings. Sometimes I also take advantage of meeting time. In the last session, I give the opportunity to teachers who had just finished participating in training to share the knowledge they get. (Principal A)

We hold training in our own schools. I usually choose the training topic based on problems found by teachers. It is related to lesson plan making, selecting learning materials, and etc. (Principal B)

To improve the effectiveness of the forums, principals A and B often invited speakers from outside of the schools, for example education supervisor, principals, or teachers.

4.2. Discussion

The results of this study show the instructional leadership performed by the three principals. They formulate school mission that focuses on improving student learning achievement and character, providing fun and relevant learning programs for students, and creating positive teaching learning environment for both teachers and students. However, they face some problems.

4.2.1. Determining School Mission

The results show that the principals have clear school vision, mission, and goals of generating excellent students with characters. The principals also state that they involve teachers in determining the vision, mission, and goals because they believe that teacher involvement is important to build commitment to reach the shared goals. This is in line previous studies revealing that clear goals and commitment contribute to success [29, 30].

However, the results of the study indicate that the school goals, in particular the student achievement standards agreed upon by the principal and the teacher, are not

always higher or better than the previous academic year. The main consideration is that the quality of student input is not the same in each academic year. In addition, there are still many parents who do not care about their children's education. They fully trust their students' education to schools. If the school's academic goals do not take these two things into account, the principal and the teachers worry that they will not be able to achieve them. The results of this study support various research results which show that instructional leadership is contextually dependent. Context determines what can and cannot be done by leaders [16, 30, 32]. Context, such as student characteristics, family background, education in the family, therefore, may strengthen, weaken, or neutralize the direct or indirect influences of school leadership on student achievement [16, 33].

4.2.2. Managing Instructional Program

The results show that the three principals try to make the learning programs fun so that it encourages student creativity, activity, and productivity. Two school principals conduct remedial programs and provide additional programs for the sixth graders to prepare for school exams. It is hoped that their exam scores are good. The principals supervise the classroom to see the level of teaching skills both formally and informally. The results of this study are in line with previous studies revealing that in order to produce high student achievement, the principal needs to manage the teaching program. They should supervise, evaluate the learning process, coordinate the curriculum, and monitor student progress [16, 18, 20, 30, 34].

The results also show that the principals share the supervision responsibilities with senior teachers. The principals assign senior teachers to supervise junior teachers, while they themselves supervise senior teachers. These actions are consistent with the view [35] that the managerial workload in the current decentralization era tends to be high [17]. Therefore, they need to share leadership roles. Moreover, the research results show that when principals share a leadership role with teachers, the teacher's academic capacity increases which leads to the improvement of student achievement [36, 37]. Various instructional leadership responsibilities that may be distributed to teachers or management assistants include determining the amount of incentive for teachers, coordinating curriculum, making sure of effective learning hours [38], and providing advice to improve teaching skills [39–41].

In relation to supervision to junior teachers, the results show that principals find barriers. They often do not have time to perform this role. This is in line previous studies showing that managerial work is time consuming. Accordingly, principals lack

time for some instructional leadership tasks [1, 6, 42–44, 45], for example classroom supervision [46], [47]. The studies also found that supervision is carried out only to fulfill administration as mandated. If they do classroom observations, they do not provide post-observation feedback. This condition needs to be taken more seriously considering that supervision by the principals has a direct and significant effect on teacher teaching skills which leads to improvement of student learning achievement [48].

4.2.3. Creating Conducive Learning Environment

The results show that the principals try to develop a conducive learning environment by eliminating or minimizing interference for students, providing supports for teachers to participate in trainings or workshops, and making a space for teachers to share their teaching experiences and skills to fellow teachers. In accordance with previous studies, as an instructional leader, the principals need to create a conducive school environment that supports productivity of teachers and students [31], [36], [40] by providing opportunities for teachers to participate in trainings, scheduling meetings where teachers can discuss their lessons in class, holding workshops in schools, and supervising [49, 50].

Formal and informal meetings with teachers are held by the three principals. The meetings serve as forums for teachers to share teaching skills and experiences and solve learning problems. This leadership strategy will provide better results for developing teacher competency and student learning [6, 31, 36, 40]. The development of professional learning, for example professional discussions between teachers, both formal and informal, are helpful to address learning problems in the classroom. This activity serves as a catalyst for reflective analysis of teacher teaching practices and data-based teaching decision making. Moreover, it will improve teacher teaching quality that leads to the improvement of student learning achievement. In line with this finding, successful principals in today's accountability era tends to emphasize the professional development of teachers and staff as a strategy to develop school capacity in responding government policies [51].

5. Conclusion

The three principals show instructional leadership by determining school vision, mission, and goals which are directed at improving academic achievement and student character, managing relevant and conducive learning programs, and creating a positive

learning environment. They share their leadership role with senior teachers, especially regarding the supervision role. Even though the principals have shared their instructional leadership role with senior teachers, they still find it difficult to perform this type of leadership. Besides, parents' supports is considered low. Thus, it is challenging for the principals to achieve high student achievement. Therefore, this study suggests that principals' instructional leadership should put more efforts to increase parent involvement in student learning.

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