

Instructional Leadership of Program Vokasional Menengah Atas (PVMA) Principals in Malaysia

(Kepimpinan Instruksional Pengetua Program Vokasional Menengah Atas (PVMA) di Malaysia)

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Abstract

This study investigates the practice of instructional leadership among principals in schools implementing Program Vokasional Menengah Atas (PVMA), focusing on their roles in defining school missions, managing instructional programs, and developing positive school climates. Despite the acknowledged importance of instructional leadership, principals often confront challenges in balancing administrative responsibilities with direct classroom engagement. The research objectives center on assessing the level of instructional leadership practices among PVMA school principals, using a quantitative approach with a survey method administered to 324 PVMA teachers across Malaysia. The survey instrument, adapted from Thien (2020), comprised 50 items measuring principals' instructional leadership behaviors on a five-point Likert scale. Analysis of the data through descriptive statistics, particularly mean scores, reveals that principals in PVMA schools exhibit robust instructional leadership across all dimensions, notably in defining school missions, managing instructional programs, and developing positive school climates. Future research directions should explore innovative strategies to enhance instructional leadership effectiveness amid administrative demands, while also investigating its broader impacts on teacher satisfaction and student outcomes in diverse educational settings. This study concludes by emphasizing the pivotal role of instructional leadership in shaping school effectiveness and student success within vocational education contexts.

Keywords: Instructional leadership, teacher commitment, teacher self-efficacy, technical and vocational education

INTRODUCTION

The effectiveness of instructional leadership is a crucial determinant of teacher performance and student outcomes, shaping the strategic direction of schools (Shaked, 2024). Leadership effectiveness varies widely across educational institutions, influenced by the unique personalities, styles, and decision-making processes of individual leaders (Liu et al., 2022). As the primary leaders in schools, principals play a vital role in directing the school community and ensuring that school activities align with ministry goals (Bada et al., 2024). They serve as key intermediaries, translating higher management directives into actionable policies and programs for teachers (Kilag et al., 2024). The overall effectiveness of a school largely depends on the leadership practices of its principal, which guide the direction and success of school programs. In response to contemporary needs and behavioral changes, the role of principals has evolved significantly (Kilag & Sasan, 2023). Effective principals are expected to establish and shape school goals, manage programs, foster a positive school climate, and create a supportive environment (Hallinger et al., 2020). Instructional leadership is a critical factor in school performance, with studies showing its significant impact on student outcomes and teacher quality (Bellibaş et al., 2021). Although schools operate under a central ministry, tailored goal-setting is essential to meet the specific needs and readiness of the school community (Meyer et al., 2020). Effective program management requires principals' active involvement in planning and implementation to ensure alignment with the school's objectives.

Particularly in technical and vocational education, principals carry additional responsibilities due to the specialized goals and approaches required (Pamungkas et al., 2020). Effective leadership in these schools is essential to adequately prepare teachers and foster a positive school climate, which influences teachers' self-efficacy, commitment, and job satisfaction (Liu et al., 2020). The success of curriculum implementation relies on the combined effectiveness of principal leadership and teacher commitment (Bellibaş et al., 2022). However, recent reports highlight challenges, such as a significant number of students failing to achieve competency in vocational programs (Technical and Vocational Education Division, 2022). This underscores the need to assess principals' instructional leadership levels and their impact on teachers' efficacy and student outcomes. Given these challenges, it is crucial to evaluate the level of instructional leadership among principals. Understanding their leadership practices can provide valuable insights into improving school management and educational outcomes. Identifying areas for development can inform targeted training and support for principals, ensuring they are well-equipped to meet modern educational demands and enhance the effectiveness of their schools. Hence, this study intends to look at the level of principals' instructional leadership in PVMA schools across Malaysia.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Instructional leadership among school principals plays a crucial role in enhancing the quality of education and fostering school excellence. Principals who exhibit strong instructional leadership practices positively impact the teaching-learning process, school culture, and academic performance (Shaked, 2024). Studies emphasize the importance of principals incorporating a social justice perspective into instructional leadership to address inequities in outcomes, belongingness, and discipline within schools (Hallinger et al., 2020). Research also highlights the need for high school principals to implement instructional leadership approaches to promote the school's mission, values, and educational goals effectively (Shengnan & Hallinger, 2021). Instructional leadership began in the 1950s as a practical approach, with school leaders initially focused on administrative tasks (Hallinger et al., 2020). By the 1970s, this role evolved to prioritize teaching and learning processes, underscoring the principal's responsibility to enhance instructional practices to improve student outcomes (Hallinger, 2000). This shift was driven by educational reforms and the recognition of the strong link between effective leadership and student performance,

leading to the principal's expanded role in mentoring teachers, implementing evidence-based strategies, and fostering a collaborative school culture aimed at continuous improvement (Kilag & Sasan, 2023).

Instructional leadership encompasses a multifaceted approach focusing on the development of teaching and learning processes within educational institutions (Shaked, 2024). It involves various dimensions such as defining the school mission, managing the instructional program, and fostering a positive learning climate to address inequities in outcomes, belongingness, and discipline. Instructional leaders play a crucial role in ensuring academic performance by supporting teachers, students, and school staff through activities like planning, curriculum design, professional development, teacher evaluation, and student assessment. Effective instructional leadership practices include building and sustaining the school vision, monitoring curriculum and instruction, leading a learning community, data gathering, assessing, and shared leadership, which significantly impact school performance (Akram et al., 2022). This leadership model requires principals to be actively engaged in curricular and instructional matters to promote social justice and equity in schools. Instructional leadership has been shown to have a significant positive impact on teachers' professional development.

Studies have found that when school leaders engage in instructional leadership practices such as setting school goals, supervising teaching, and promoting professional development, it positively affects teachers' professional growth (Amzat et al., 2022). School leaders who exhibit effective instructional leadership behaviors can inspire and motivate teachers, provide support for their professional development, and create a positive learning climate in the school (Shengnan & Hallinger, 2021). Additionally, instructional leadership indirectly affects teachers' professional learning through teachers' self-efficacy, highlighting the principal's crucial role in shaping teachers' professional development (Liu & Hallinger, 2018). Moreover, instructional leadership also positively impacts teachers' self-efficacy and collective efficacy. Instructional leadership behaviors have been found to enhance teachers' confidence in their ability to engage students and facilitate learning (Sumiati & Niemted, 2020). Teachers' trust in school leaders and perceived low power distance between teachers and leaders also play a significant role in boosting teachers' self-efficacy (Ma & Marion, 2021). Furthermore, strong instructional leadership increases teachers' collective efficacy, which in turn strengthens their self-efficacy (Siriparp et al., 2022).

METHODOLOGY

This current study employs a quantitative research design to investigate the level of principals' instructional leadership in schools that implement PVMA in Malaysia. The study was conducted through a quantitative approach using a survey method. The study population encompasses 1135 PVMA teachers across Malaysia with the minimum sample size is 291. The data collection procedure has managed to collect responses from 324 respondents through a multi-stage cluster sampling technique based on geographic zones (Southern, Central, Northern, Eastern, and Borneo). The survey was executed through the administration of a set of questionnaires to measure the principals' level of instructional leadership. Adapted from Thien (2020), the questionnaires consist of three constructs, that are defining the school's mission, managing instructional programs, and developing a positive school climate. Whereas there are two sub-constructs for the first construct, that are setting school goals and communicating with school goals, three sub-constructs for the second construct (supervising and evaluating teaching, coordinating the curriculum, and monitoring student progress) and five sub-constructs for the third construct (protecting teaching time, maintaining high attendance, providing incentives for teachers, promoting professional development, and providing instruction for learning). Each sub-construct consists of five items, making the total number of items in the questionnaire 50. The scale used is a five-point Likert which aims to measure the frequency of principals'

practice of instructional leadership. The data was analysed using descriptive analysis based on the mean score. The mean score was classified into different levels based on the suggestion of Pallant (2007) as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Mean score interpretation

Mean score	Instructional leadership level
1.00 – 2.33	Low
2.34 – 3.66	Moderate
3.67 – 5.00	High

RESULT

Descriptive analysis was conducted to identify the level of principals' instructional leadership in schools that implement PVMA across Malaysia. The total number of respondents is 324 teachers with different backgrounds in terms of gender, age, teaching experience and highest academic certificates. The results are presented based on the three constructs of instructional leadership.

Table 2 shows the findings obtained for items within the construct of defining school missions among principals in schools implementing PVMA. "The principal at my school sets annual school goals" recorded the highest mean score (mean = 4.54, SD = .57). This is followed by "The principal at my school discusses academic achievement targets with teachers:" (mean = 4.52, SD = .60) and "The principal in my school ensures all school members understand the annual school mission" (mean = 4.43, SD = .64). Meanwhile, the items ranking in the bottom three positions are "The principal in my school sets annual goals based on student achievement performance" (mean = 4.29, SD = .64), "The principal in my school consults with teachers when making curriculum-related decisions" (mean = 4.24, SD = .71), and "The principal in my school receives feedback from teachers before setting annual school goals" (mean = 3.98, SD = .71). Overall, all items in this construct reached a high level. This suggests that principals have effectively defined the school's mission. The construct defining school mission recorded a mean score of 4.33 and a standard deviation of .48. This mean score indicates a high level of practice, with data scattered only .48 across the collected data.

Table 2. List of items, mean, and standard deviation for defining the school's mission construct

Item	Mean	SD	Level
The principal at my school sets the school's goals every year.	4.54	.57	High
The principal at my school discusses student academic achievement targets with the teachers.	4.52	.60	High
The principal at my school ensures that everyone in the school understands the school's annual mission.	4.43	.64	High
The principal at my school states the school's goals during school assemblies.	4.35	.66	High
The principal at my school formulates the school's goals based on the teachers' areas of responsibility.	4.31	.63	High
The principal at my school sets goals that are easily understood by the teachers at the school.	4.31	.64	High
The principal at my school displays the school's academic achievement targets on the school bulletin board.	4.30	.75	High
The principal at my school sets annual goals based on student performance.	4.29	.64	High
The principal at my school holds discussions with the teachers when making decisions related to the curriculum.	4.24	.71	High
The principal at my school seeks feedback from the teachers before formulating the school's annual goals.	3.98	.71	High
Defining school's mission construct	4.33	.48	High

Table 3 depicts the findings obtained for items in managing instructional programs constructed among principals in schools implementing PVMA. The item "The principal at my school discusses academic performance decisions in teacher meetings to identify curriculum strengths and weaknesses" recorded the highest mean score (mean = 4.35, SD = .63). This is followed by "The principal at my school is always rational in making decisions regarding the curriculum" (mean = 4.27, SD = .63) and "The principal at my school actively participates in discussing effective teaching techniques" (mean = 4.27, SD = .64). The three lowest-ranked items are "The principal at my school actively participates in discussing effective teaching techniques" (mean = 3.98, SD = .73), "The principal at my school discusses student progress individually with teachers" (mean = 3.88, SD = .74), and "The principal at my school discusses weaknesses in teaching with teachers," which recorded the lowest mean score (mean = 3.80, SD = .04). Overall, this construct recorded a mean score of 4.12 and a standard deviation of .50. This mean score reflects a high level of practice, with data dispersion of only .50 across all collected data. All items in this construct achieve a high level. This indicates that the principal has effectively managed instructional programs.

Table 3. List of items, means, and standard deviations for managing instructional programs construct

Item statements	Mean	SD	Level
The principal at my school discusses academic performance decisions in teacher meetings to identify curriculum strengths and weaknesses.	4.35	.63	High
The principal at my school identifies that the curriculum coordinator is performing well.	4.27	.64	High
The principal at my school is always rational in making decisions regarding the curriculum.	4.27	.63	High
The principal at my school prioritizes the strengths of teachers in teaching.	4.24	.65	High
The principal at my school assesses the school curriculum objectives based on school achievement.	4.24	.63	High
The principal at my school informs students about the school's academic progress.	4.22	.69	High
The principal at my school ensures that classroom completeness is prioritized.	4.17	.70	High
The principal at my school evaluates before making any changes to achieve school goals.	4.15	.67	High
The principal at my school monitors classroom conditions from time to time.	4.14	.73	High
The principal at my school monitors curriculum implementation in classrooms to achieve school curriculum objectives.	4.14	.66	High
The principal at my school assesses classroom teaching based on student work outcomes.	4.01	.67	High
The principal at my school informs teachers of school achievements in written form.	3.99	.69	High
The principal at my school actively participates in discussing effective teaching techniques.	3.98	.73	High
The principal at my school discusses student progress individually with teachers.	3.88	.74	High
The principal at my school discusses weaknesses in teaching with teachers.	3.80	.69	High
Managing instructional programs construct	4.12	.50	High

Table 4 displays findings obtained for items in the construct of developing a positive school climate among principals in schools implementing PVMA. Two items achieved the highest mean scores, "The principal at my school emphasizes student attendance" and "The principal at my school encourages teachers to use teaching time effectively" (mean = 4.64, SD = .03). They are followed by "The principal at my school gives recognition to students who achieve outstanding performance in formal ceremonies (e.g., school assemblies)"

(mean = 4.55, SD = .59). Meanwhile, the items with the lowest mean scores are: "The principal at my school guides students in solving their problems" (mean = 3.80, SD = .72), "The principal at my school contacts parents to inform them of student achievements in school" (mean = 3.74, SD = .74), and "The principal at my school arranges substitute classes for teachers on official leave" which recorded the lowest mean score (mean = 3.59, SD = .78). Overall, all items in this construct except for "The principal at my school arranges substitute classes for teachers on official leave," indicate a moderate level. This suggests that overall, the principal has developed a positive school climate effectively. The developing a positive school climate construct records a mean of 4.18 and a standard deviation of .44. This mean indicates high practice levels, with data dispersion of only .44 across all collected data.

Table 4. List of items, mean, and standard deviation for developing a positive school climate construct

Item statements	Mean	SD	Level
The principal at my school emphasizes student attendance.	4.64	.57	High
The principal at my school encourages teachers to use teaching time effectively.	4.64	.53	High
The principal at my school gives recognition to students who achieve outstanding performance in formal ceremonies (e.g., school assemblies).	4.55	.59	High
The principal at my school recognizes excellent students.	4.53	.57	High
The principal at my school ensures all teachers participate in Professional Development Programs (PDP)	4.46	.58	High
The principal at my school ensures that in-service training attended by teachers is continuous.	4.31	.61	High
The principal at my school encourages teachers to apply skills learned in PDP to teaching.	4.31	.60	High
The principal at my school encourages teachers to motivate students during teaching and learning sessions.	4.30	.65	High
The principal at my school gives recognition to teachers who achieve outstanding performance.	4.28	.72	High
The principal at my school encourages high-performance achievement among teachers.	4.26	.68	High
The principal at my school promotes teacher involvement in continuous professional development.	4.26	.64	High
The principal at my school plans suitable professional development workshops within PDP.	4.21	.65	High
The principal at my school discusses school issues with teachers.	4.16	.69	High
The principal at my school provides opportunities for teachers to share information obtained from PDP during school meetings.	4.16	.69	High
The principal at my school personally praises teachers for their efforts.	4.12	.77	High
The principal at my school avoids extracurricular activities during teaching and learning sessions.	4.05	.75	High
The principal at my school attends extracurricular activities.	4.02	.74	High
The principal at my school rewards teachers for their efforts with professional recognition.	4.01	.76	High
The principal at my school reduces the frequency of school announcements to avoid disrupting teaching.	3.96	.75	High
The principal at my school recognizes excellent student work by meeting with the students in the office.	3.84	.81	High
The principal at my school ensures students are not called to the office during teaching sessions.	3.83	.73	High
The principal at my school takes time to interact with students and teachers during break times.	3.80	.75	High
The principal at my school guides students in solving their problems.	3.80	.72	High
The principal at my school contacts parents to inform them of student achievements in school.	3.74	.74	High

Table 4 (Continued).

The principal at my school substituted classes for teachers on official leave.	3.59	.78	Moderate
Developing a positive school climate construct	4.18	.44	High

Next, Table 5 illustrates the mean and the standard deviation of all the ten sub-constructs and the three constructs. Analysis shows that the constructs of defining school goals recorded the highest mean score (mean = 4.33, SD = .48), followed by the constructs of developing a positive school climate (mean = 4.15, SD = .45), and the constructs of managing instructional programs (mean = 4.12, SD = .50). All constructs of instructional leadership practices by school principals implementing PVMA were found to be at a high level. Meanwhile, findings regarding sub-constructs indicate that the sub-constructs of communicating school goals recorded the highest mean score (mean = 4.37, SD = .53), followed by setting school goals (mean = 4.29, SD = .51) and promoting professional development (mean = 4.29, SD = .53). On the other hand, the sub-constructs with the lowest mean scores are monitoring student progress (mean = 4.12, SD = .50), supervising and evaluating teaching (mean = 4.07, SD = .53), and maintaining high attendance (mean = 3.88, SD = .56). All sub-constructs of instructional leadership practices by principals are at a high level. The survey on instructional leadership by principals recorded a mean of 4.18 and a standard deviation of .44. This mean score reflects high levels of practice, with data dispersion of only .44 across the entire dataset collected. Overall, all constructs in this survey have achieved a high level. This indicates that principals have demonstrated effective instructional leadership practices.

Table 5. Mean, standard deviation and level of instructional leadership based on sub-construct and constructs

Constructs and sub-constructs	Mean	SD	Level
Defining the school mission	4.33	.48	High
i) Setting school goals	4.29	.51	High
ii) Communicating with school goals	4.37	.53	High
Managing instructional programs	4.12	.50	High
i) Supervising and evaluating teaching	4.07	.53	High
ii) Coordinating the curriculum	4.18	.54	High
iii) Monitoring student progress	4.12	.54	High
Developing a positive school climate	4.15	.45	High
i) Protecting teaching time	4.22	.45	High
ii) Maintaining high attendance	3.88	.56	High
iii) Providing incentives for teachers	4.18	.59	High
iv) Promoting professional development	4.29	.53	High
v) Providing instruction for learning	4.19	.51	High
Instructional leadership	4.18	.44	High

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the current study underscores the critical role of instructional leadership in driving school effectiveness and student success within the context of the PVMA curriculum. Principals demonstrated strong capabilities in defining the school's mission, managing instructional programs, and developing a positive school climate, aligning with established educational principles. However, challenges persist, particularly in balancing administrative responsibilities with direct engagement in classrooms. Future research could explore innovative strategies for enhancing instructional leadership effectiveness, addressing these challenges while further investigating how instructional leadership impacts teacher satisfaction, student engagement, and overall school performance in diverse educational settings. These efforts will contribute to refining educational practices and maximizing outcomes for students, educators, and school communities alike.

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