



## Principals Instructional Leadership Role: The Case of International Schools in Sri Lanka

**H. M. Lalitha Kumari**

Senior Lecturer, Department of Social Science Education, Faculty of Education, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka

**Abstract:** This study examines the instructional leadership (IL) role of international school principals in Sri Lanka. The main aim of this study was to identify how do principal's play instructional leadership roles as instructional leader in international schools. The objectives of the study were to find out principal's role as instructional leader in international schools and to identify what activities principals engage in promoting the education of students and upgrading the pedagogy of teachers in international schools. The multiple case study method was used in the current study. Accordingly, Semi-structured interviews and focused group discussions were used as data collecting tools. As the study sample three principals, and nine teachers were selected using purposive sampling for interviews and group discussion. The study found that all principals in the sample success to balance their general administrative responsibilities and instructional leadership roles. All the principals in the sample mentioned that they implement innovative methodologies to promote the education of students and upgrading the pedagogy of teachers. The study further found that principals pay a significant attention on teachers professional development, provision of instructional materials and incentives for teaching and learning by international schools principals as instructional leaders. It was further found that principals in international schools face difficulties in terms of retention of qualified trained teachers as a significant number of teachers (nearly 30%) are leaving the country. Therefore it is recommended that the international school principals need to be taken immediate action in order to retain qualified experienced teachers in their schools.

**Keywords:** Instructional leader, Leadership roles, International Schools, Motivation.

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### Introduction

There are widespread beliefs that the quality of leadership makes a significant difference to school and student outcomes. It has been found that the main purpose of engaging in instructional leadership role is to support teachers to improve their pedagogical skills which directly benefit students' high level of educational performance (Bush 2008, Southworth 2004, Kumari 2022a, 2022b.). According to Southworth (2004) efficient and effective leaders exercise both direct and indirect influence in implementing reforms and improving students' educational achievement. Researchers found that classroom observation is one of the most common ways of reflecting on pedagogical practices which can help teachers evaluate their strengths and weaknesses (Farrell 2011). According to Waters et al., (2004) and Pillegedara et.al (2021) effective leadership of school principals can significantly enhance pupil achievement. According to them when principals engage in instructional leadership roles such as monitoring the teaching learning process, holding post observation conferences and providing feedback and support, providing incentives and resources on time, coordinating curriculum, evaluate students progress, protect instructional time, provide incentives for teaching and learning will directly affect

improving the quality of the teaching learning process.

The success of the school is mostly dependent on the principal's ability to engage in instructional leadership roles and work as a team to improve the quality of classroom instruction. (Blasé, Blasé & Philips, 2010; Smylie, 2010, Kumari 2014, 2019). Anderson et al., (2008) and Kumari (2022e) recognized instructional leadership of the principal as one of the most important tools that can be used in building effective professional development of teachers. Anderson et al., (2008) and Kumari (2022e) recognized instructional leadership of the principal as one of the most important tools that can be used in building effective professional development of teachers. Mulford et al.,(2003) carried out a study to identify the effects of leadership on student learning and found that there are two main factors that affect to improve student outcomes. Similarly, Quinn (2002) shows that the leadership role of the principal is important in creating a happy working environment and thereby achieves exceptional educational outcomes.

According to UNESCO (2005) the major tasks of the school principal as instructional leader include: determining school goals, curriculum coordination, organizing diverse programs particularly for professional development of teachers, engaging in school supervision and evaluation, monitor students' progress, taking remedial actions, and creating a conducive school climate. These references are very cogent for the current study which focuses on instructional leadership roles of principals working in international schools in Sri Lanka as the study focus to find out extent to which more effective adoption of instructional leadership practices by international school principals enhance pedagogical performance and students educational achievement.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Instructional leadership focuses on the instructional process and the principal's influence is aimed at improving student learning and teacher motivation (Blasé & Blasé 2010). School leadership literature highlighted that all school leadership tasks should be aimed at enhancing teachers professional development and students educational achievement. (Waters et al., 2004, Quinn 2002, Kumari 2021a, 2021b, 2022e, Sothworth 2004, Bush 2008, Hallinger & Murphy 1986, Kumari 2019, 2020, Malkanthi 2021, wickramanayake 2022a, 2022b). Hallinger and Murphy (1986) stated that the principal as an instructional leader of the school should engage in instructional leadership roles such as supervision of instruction, holding post observational conferences and providing the feedback necessary for teachers to enhance skills with regard to classroom teaching, providing incentives, coordinating the curriculum and protecting instructional time. Accordingly, it is clear that the main purpose of instructional leadership is to support teachers to improve their pedagogical skills which directly benefit students' high level of educational performance. However, there was dearth of research conducted on practices of international school principals' role as instructional leader. Therefore, this study focused on investigating the role of instructional leadership of international school principals in Sri Lanka.

### **Purpose and objectives of the Study**

The main purpose of this study was to examine the practices of international school principal's role as instructional leader. Therefore the specific research questions of the study were built as follows.

1. What roles international school principal's play as instructional leader? and
2. What activities do international school principals as instructional leaders engage in promoting the education of students and upgrading the pedagogy of teachers in international schools?

### **Methodology**

#### **Research Method**

The qualitative multiple case study approach was used in the current study. The data are

collected in verbal form rather than numerical, data are analyzed inductively and researchers are concerned with the entire process in qualitative research (Bogdan et,al 2007). The qualitative research discovers attitudes and behavior, experience through multiple forms of data such as interviews, observation and documents as it doesn't rely on a single data source. A case study is thus appropriate for the current study as it attempts to describe a particular situation.

### **Sampling Method**

As explained by Cohen et al., (2013) careful and effective sampling helps researchers in order to overcome challenges in terms of time, resources and also access. They further highlighted that the quality of any research depends on careful sampling and researchers need to make sure the size of the sample and also its accessibility, as the accuracy of data needed is determined by the sample selected. Therefore, considerable attention needs to be paid in choosing a reliable study sample. They further stated that the size of the sample depends on purpose and the nature of the research. In particular the nature of the research can be quantitative, qualitative or mixed method. Therefore, according to them there are no clear cut rules for correct sample size. However, Cohen et al., emphasized the importance of considering methods of sampling when selecting an appropriate sample for a study. As mentioned by them under the purposive sampling method sampling is deliberate, depending on the needs of the researcher and the purpose and scope of the study. Therefore, purposive sampling method was choose as the best suite sampling method for the current study.

### **Study Sample**

The idea behind qualitative research is to purposefully select participants or sites that will best help the researcher understand the problem and the research question. Therefore, purposive sampling was used as the sampling methodology in the current study. Accordingly, three international school principals, nine international school teachers were selected as the study sample for data collection. The researcher's chosen schools were from the Colombo District in order to findout instructional leadership roles played by international school principals.

### **Data collection tools**

As qualitative data collection tools in the current sdtudy Semi-structured interviews and focused group discussions were employed. Accordingly, semi structured interviews was conducted with principals and teachers. Focus group discussions were conducted with teachers as they can give adequate information in terms of instructional leadership role of the international school principal in their school.

### **Interview as data gathering tool**

Numan (2007) stated that there are various types of interviews in social science research known as structured, semi structured and unstructured interviews. In the current study the researcher used semi-structured interview mainly because the researcher wanted to know specific information which can be compared and contrasted with information gained in other focus group discussions and interviews. In order to fulfill this, the same guiding questions were asked in each interview schedule. Accordingly, individual interview was conducted with international school principals in addition to the focus group discussion with teachers. The researcher was responsible for no interview took longer than 40 minutes.

### **Focus group discussions as data gathering tool**

Focus group discussions have been identified as one of the most important and popular data collection instruments. As explained by Kvale et, al. (1996) focus group discussion is a type of group interview which encourages interaction among participants. In particular focus group discussions allows participants to communicate and make a discussion among them on a particular issue or theme and then provide authentic information. They further emphasized the importance of using focus group discussions when the interviewer wishes to motivate respondents to come up with their own ideas, views and also suggestions on a particular issue

that is being studied.

Similar to this Newby (2010) shows that focus group discussion can be used for exploring participants' knowledge and experience. In addition the interviewer can obtain in-depth information on a particular issue being studied. Mainly because as an effective data collection tool focus group interviews permit participants to express what they think and also why they think in that manner on a particular theme. Tolich (2009) identified focus group discussion as a type of public meeting. According to him all participants in the group can hear what each person says about the issue or theme. This supports others in the group to decide what to say about the same issue. However, Halcomb *et al* (2007) recognized some ethical issues of focus group discussion. According to them it is difficult to ensure confidentiality as the nature of the focus group discussion is a kind of public meeting.

In the current study focus group discussions were used to gather in –depth information from teachers about leadership practices of international school principals. Teacher focus group discussions discussed questions related to professional development opportunities available for teachers in their schools, special duty or task they hold in their school, collaborative work practices and team work culture in the international schools and teacher participation for decision making processes in their school. Teacher focus group discussions also discussed attitudes about leadership education, challenges to leadership roles of international school principals and teachers.

Accordingly, focus group discussions were carried out with teachers in the international schools. Six teachers in the international schools were selected randomly. There were nine teachers in three groups who participated in the focus group discussions from the three international schools.

### **Data collection procedure**

Invitation letters and information sheets and participants' consent letters were posted to the selected schools after developing the data collection instruments, After a week the researcher visited to schools selected and obtained permission, contact details and a date to hold the initial meeting. Obtaining permission was quite easy as the researcher had posted the invitation letters to the selected school in advance and the principals were made aware of the study when the researcher was visiting the schools. Therefore, once they agreed to participate in this study, the researcher set an appointment with each of them. The researcher herself followed certain procedures mentioned below before starting the field work.

### **Initial Meeting**

After obtaining permission from the principals, an initial meeting was held with the teachers to introduce the researcher, review the information sheet and discuss about the study in depth. The initial meeting lasted around 40 to 50 minutes. The participants' consent form was discussed at the initial meeting. In addition, the participants were given the opportunity to ask questions. At the end of the meeting all the participants agreed that they understood the aim of the research and agreed to participate by signing the consent form. After three days all the participants without withdrawing their consent confirmed their decision by phone.

### **Conducting Interviews**

In order to conduct successful interviews there are some basic guidelines identified in the literature. As mentioned by Leary (2001) there are four such guidelines that can be used by interviewers. According to them the first one is making a friendly environment. According to them a good relationship with interviewees can be established through a friendly environment. Also a mutual relationship helps interviewees to respond without any hesitation. The second guideline is, adhering to the interview schedule. In this guideline they require the interviewer to follow the prepared interview schedule without any change. Accordingly it is expected to ask all participants each question in the same manner. The third guideline is stay away from

supporting to obtain answers from the interviewees. As explained by Kvale et al., (1996) when interviewers support the interviewee to obtain answers this will lead to interrupt the interviewee's flow of thought. Therefore they advised interviewers to retrain from supporting to get answers. The last guideline is about organizing interview sections. Under this guideline it is expected that the interviewer will organize the interview questions in a logical manner. In particular they are advised not to begin with sensitive or emotional questions. Following these guidelines, the researcher conducted three interviews with the international school principals, and three focus group discussions with teachers.

### **Data Analysis**

In qualitative research data analysis involves collecting open ended data provided by respondents. Accordingly, the interviews were conducted in English Language and the interviews were recorded using a tape recorder. Once the interview was concluded, each audio file were transcribed. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the main data obtained through different interviews. Braun and Clarke (2006) identified thematic analysis as a method for identifying, analyzing, reporting patterns or themes within data. The transcripts were studied and, in the process, units, categories and themes were identified. After that the interpretations of the results were done. The data collected from different interviews were closely examined so that organizes into categories on the basis of themes and similar features. In this process the researcher first listened to the recordings of each interview. Then the transcripts were read several times to get general idea of the interview, identify categories and units of meanings. Accordingly, similar categories were then grouped together and arranged into themes. Grouping related categories that show interrelationships helped reduced themes. Most of the themes that emerged from the interviews matched with the literature available for instructional leadership roles. Accordingly, four themes such as; principal role in framing and communicating the school vision and mission, principal's involvement in managing of curriculum and instructional programs, principal's role in organizing professional development programmes for staff and principal's role in creating positive climate for teaching and learning. The themes that have been identified were discussed and supported with relevant quotations from the interviews.

### **Validity and Reliability**

Cohen et al., (2007) show the importance of validity and reliability in research. They stated that an invalid research is worthless. According to Basit, (2010) issues of validity in research can be addressed. Validity in qualitative study has to do with being truthful. It refers to the bridge between a construct and the data. Therefore researcher in this study used triangulation strategy and thick descriptions to address validity concerns. Reliability in qualitative research deals with the consistency and dependability of the research findings. Dependability will be obtained through triangulation as well as a detailed report on the processes followed in the study so that future researchers may repeat the work. The taped interviews and transcription of the interviews will be stored and kept safely for verification purposes. Accordingly the issue of validity and reliability in qualitative research may be addressed through honesty, richness and scope of the data achieved. Accordingly it is clear that the validity and reliability of a research depend on several factors. They have been identified as the ability of the researcher to obtain real data and the extent to which the research explains the phenomenon. Further, the generalizability in terms of usefulness is also important. Hence, the researcher tried to enhance validity and reliability in her study through various aspects such as exploring the issue in detail and triangulating data.

### **Etical Cosideration**

This section focuses on the ethical issues that related to the current study. Obtaining informed consent from the participants is a one of the basic requirements of any research. Accordingly, the researcher prepared a straightforward consent form for the participants including important information with regard to the current research. Each participant signed the consent form before the researcher started the data collection. Accordingly, relevant permission was obtained

to conduct interviews and observations from principals sectional heads and teachers.

As highlighted by Rubin and Rubin (2011) it is vital for every researcher to be careful about what the respondent says or provides. It is therefore the researchers' responsibility to protect their participants. In order to protect participants' identities Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest researchers use pseudonyms in their research reports. The individuals who participated in a research also have moral and legal rights to receive privacy, confidentiality and anonymity. In particular if the participants do not feel secure and comfortable they will not fully contribute to providing accurate information. Therefore the quality of the research findings on the one hand depends on the level of security and comfort of the research participants. Therefore, in order to avoid any implications on the reputation of the schools and participants the researcher decided not to use their real names when writing her report.

In any research trustworthiness is one of the key aspects which is frequently questioned. Lincoln and Guba (2004) stated that there are several ways to judge trustworthiness of a research. The first one is achieving the credibility of the research. For this every researcher needs to show that the subject was appropriately identified and described. Due to this, every researcher is required to give a description about every stage of his/her research in order to convince readers. Therefore, in the current study, the researcher provided a complete explanation in order to achieve credibility. According to them the second way of judging trustworthiness is transferability. Transferability is the researchers' ability to show the usefulness of findings to other similar situations even though every research is different in its nature. They believe that some aspects of a research are applicable to other situations. Therefore, in this current study this was also considered and the necessary effort was made to give sufficient information. The third way of judging trustworthiness is conformability. The conformability shows that the data and their explanation are not creations of the researchers' thoughts. In the current study the researcher provided a detailed description of the procedure of data collection and analysis. Also the current study was further reinforced by audio-recorded data and their transcription.

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## **Findings**

### **Interview data**

Data obtained from the different interviewees were analyzed and discussed in this section. Accordingly, the main four themes such as principal role in framing and communicating the school vision and mission, principal's involvement in managing of curriculum and instructional programs, principal's role in arranging staff development programmes and principal's role in creating positive teaching and learning atmosphere were developed. All four themes that have been identified were discussed and supported with relevant quotations from the interviews.

### **Findings of the Interviews**

In this section the researcher presented the following major findings of this study based on the interviews data

#### **1. Principal's role in framing and communicating the school vision and mission**

In terms of framing and communicating the school vision and mission, all the principals from the entire principal sample stated that vision and mission statements are framed in their schools and

has displayed so that teachers as well as students and the school community can read it.

This was supported by teacher focus group discussion 2 from international school 2 school.

“There is a vision and mission statements in our school and we have read it and we are motivated ....”

(Teachers focus group discussion 2 from international school 2 school)

According to Hallinger, P. and Murphy, J. (1985) one of the most important instructional leadership roles is formulating and defining a clear mission, goals and objectives together with the staff members and communicating them to stakeholders to realize effective instructional process.

## **2. Principal’s role in managing and monitoring curriculum and instructional program.**

It was revealed from the interviews that the management of curriculum and instructional programs is a shared responsibility of principal and the school management team in international schools. This view is highlighted by principal 3 from 3 international School.

“Managing and monitoring curriculum and instructional program should be the central focus of international schools. In this process principals need support from the school management team to make sure instructional processes are taken place as planned and. ....”

(Principal 3)

Supporting to above quote Teacher focus group 1 from international School 1 highlighted that,

“...School management team in international schools conducts instructional observation. However, they find it difficult to give constructive feedback for teachers as they have very busy administrative roles to be played. Therefore, we suggest school management to allocate sufficient time so that the team can identify teachers strengths as well as the areas that they need to be developed and thereby enhance professional development of the staff ....”

(Teacher focus group 1)

According to Hallinger et, al (1985) one of the of principal’s role as instructional leader is to engage in instructional supervision and evaluating instruction on a regular basis and ensuring that classroom objectives of teachers are consistent with the stated goals of the school. However, the focus group interviews revealed that the supervisory role of international school principal’s and management team was not sufficient as they failed to provide constructive feedback for teachers’ professional development

## **3. Principal’s role in staff development program**

It revealed from the interview that principal as instructional leader in international school pay considerable attention on teachers professional development. As stated by the principals 2 from international school 2,

“Providing professional development opportunities for teachers within the school is very important as it provides opportunities for teachers to update their knowleg and improve skiils pertaining to pedagogical practices. In this connections I have advised the management team to plan, organized and implement pertinent workshopes and series of seminars and implement innovative methodologies to promote the education of students and upgrading the quality of pedagogical practices. , .....”

(Principal 3)

Supporting to above quote Teacher 2 from focus group interview 3, School 3 highlighted that,

“There were several school based teacher training programmes and workshops organized within the school. Almost all the teachers in our schools got an opportunity to engage in professional development programmes organized by school as well as outside educational organizations ....”

(Teacher (1) from focus group interview 3)

According to the above extracts it is clear that organizing and implementing professional development programmes in international schools are possible for principals and management teams in international schools. Du Four et. al. (1995) emphasized that the principal as an instructional leader in the school should create opportunities for teachers to obtain professional development and thereby enhance the quality of teaching and learning. Thus, based on the findings of this study the researcher concluded that, the professional development of teachers which is the most important aspect of the instructional leadership roles played considerable attention by international school principals.

#### **4. Principals' role in creating positive climate for teaching and learning.**

##### **4.1. Principals' role in providing instructional resources:**

Principals as instructional leaders in schools need to provide physical and trained human resources for the effective management of the instructional programs (Andrews et. al. 1994). Accordingly, the findings of this study revealed that the availability of physical resources in international school was satisfactory. However, it was revealed from this study that the trained human resource was not satisfactory in international schools as a considerable percentage of trained teachers (nearly 30 %) were leaving the country during last couple of years. These views were supported by Teachers focus group discussion 2 in international School 2.

.....“There was issues pertaining to adequate trained teachers to teach some core subjects such as Science, Mathematics and English in our schools as qualified experienced teachers are migrating to other countries. However, , provisions of instructional materials on time were satisfactory...”

(Teachers focus group discussion 2 in international School 2)

It is clear from the findings of this study that the principals as instructional leaders in international schools success to provide adequate physical resource on time.

##### **4.2. Motivating teachers and students:**

Principals as instructional leaders should provide rewards for both students and teachers for their best performance and thereby creating a positive school climate (Hallinger and Murphy 1985). The data obtained from interviews showed that both teachers and students are rewarded by principals in international schools. Responding to this the teacher 2 from the focus group discussion 1 school 1 stated that

“...We are praised by principals and the school management team in our school for both our students' academic achievements as well as achievements related to extra-curricular activities and .....

(Teacher 2 from the focus group discussion 1 school 1)

In terms of students reward system all of the respondents mentioned that students are rewarded based on their educational achievements and performance exhibits on extra-curricular activities. Accordingly, the findings revealed that principals as instructional leaders in international schools motivate teachers and students for successful teaching and learning to take place in their schools.

#### **5. Conclusion**

The findings of the study revealed that the instructional leadership role is mostly played by International schools principals and the management team. It was clear from this study that there is balance between administrative roles and instructional roles of the principal's in international schools as they pay careful attention on enhancement of the quality of instruction and educational achievements of students.

## 6. Recommendations

Based on the study findings and conclusions the researcher suggests following recommendations so that principals as instructional leaders in international schools could further improve the quality of pedagogy in international schools in Sri Lanka.

### **Principals' role in providing instructional resources:**

it was revealed from this study that the trained human resource was not satisfactory in international schools as a considerable percentage of trained teachers ( nearly 30 %) were leaving the country during last couple of years. Therefore, principals as instructional leaders in international schools need to pay careful attention on this and take immediate action in order to retain qualified experienced teachers in their schools.

### **Principal's role in managing and monitoring curriculum and instructional program.**

It was further revealed from this study that School management team in international schools conduct instructional observation. However, they find it difficult to give constructive feedback for teachers. Therefore, I recommend international school principals to allocate sufficient time so that the supervisory team can identify teachers strengths as well as the areas that they need to be developed and thereby enhance professional development of the staff .

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