






Research Paper in Education	    
DINA AL HUSSEINI M.Ed. Student, The British University in Dubai, The UAE	THE IMPACT OF HEAD TEACHERS' INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP ROLE ON TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL PRACTICES IN FOUR PRIVATE SCHOOLS IN DUBAI, THE UAE
Dr. SOLOMON ARULRAJ DAVID Assistant Professor, Faculty of Education, The British University in Dubai, The UAE; Visiting Fellow at University of Glasgow, The UK & Visiting Research Associate, University of Johannesburg, South Africa	<p style="text-align: center;">ABSTRACT</p> <p>The study was explored to obtain an understanding on how the head teachers' instructional leadership role may affect teaching and learning in the classroom, curriculum implementation and assessment. This study was conducted in Dubai and the target population was randomly selected from four primary and secondary private schools. The data were collected through sequential mixed methods. The study's findings revealed that head teachers as an instructional leaders play a significant and a vital role in improving teachers' professional practices through monitoring teaching and learning, helping teachers' develop themselves professionally, improving their teaching skills and gaining sufficient knowledge in delivering curriculum, modifying its content and applying assessments. It was also concluded that head teachers' contribute largely in supporting teachers' professional development through supervision, feedback, encouraging peer coaching and facilitating the appropriate professional development workshops.</p> <p>Keywords. Instructional Leadership, Teacher's Performance, Professional Practices.</p>

Introduction

Instructional leadership, which is described as the most enduring approach has emerged in the 1960s in the United States of America with the aim to improve students' achievement, teachers' instruction and school effectiveness (Hallinger & Murphy, 2013; Mestry, Koopasammy & Schmit, 2013). The importance of instructional leadership relies on fulfilling the new millennium's requirements by helping principals identifying clear vision for the school, promoting positive learning environment, supporting teachers' learning and improving classroom-based strategies to enhance teaching and learning to meet curriculum standards (Mestry, Moonsammy-Koopasammy & Schmidt, 2013). The aim of this study is to explore the critical roles and responsibilities of head teachers in assisting teachers in three main areas: daily classroom instruction, curriculum and assessment. The study was keen to answer these two main research questions, as the purpose of the study was to investigate the impact of head teachers' instructional leadership on teachers' professional practices in four private schools in Dubai.

1. Is there a positive impact of head teachers' instructional leadership role on teachers' professional practice?
2. How do the head teachers in the selected four private schools in Dubai evaluate their teachers' performance?

Literature Review

The key theories that guided this study and helped to explain the conceptual models are; the instructional leadership, transformational leadership, role theory and symbolic interactionism theory. Exploring these theories helped to thoroughly understand the role of schools' head teachers in enhancing classroom practices through supervision, feedback, peer tutoring and supporting teachers' professional development. Since the start of instructional leadership, concept and principals were the main and the only focus. Most of the studies have discussed how instructional principals play an important role in enhancing the quality of schools' educational outcomes starting from choosing and hiring the most qualified staff and following that with the continuous professional support, supervision, evaluation & implementing retention programs and teachers' induction (Fancera & Bliss, 2011 and Ham & Kim, 2015). The new focus of instructional leadership has shifted from principals as the only source of leadership in school, to head teachers and other schools' leaders. The role of head teachers' in literature has been repeatedly mentioned in several studies as their influence can make the difference between the success and failure of a school (Millette, 1988) as cited by Kasandi & Wamocha (2008). Supervision is considered to be one of the most important sources that school head teachers must rely on in

order to evaluate and support their teachers' professional growth and to determine the quality of instruction in classrooms (Igbo, 2002) as cited by Kotirde & Yunos (2014). According to Heck (1992) in Manaseh (2016, p. 42) "the amount of time HODs spend observing classrooms and instruction is one of the most important factors in both teachers' and students' achievement". The core duty of the school leaders aims mainly to improve teaching and learning quality in schools through recording, analyzing and designing the appropriate supports after discovering teachers' strengths and weaknesses (Manaseh, 2016).

In the current era of education, there is an urgent need for teachers to improve their educational practices including pedagogy, methods and content knowledge (Cavanaugh, 2013). One of the most powerful tools that many educators agree on its positive impact on teachers' performance is feedback. It is strongly believed that feedback is a powerful technique that school leaders can use to lead the organization towards improved outcomes and help teachers improve and develop their performance. Peer tutoring which is considered to be an extremely influential tool in enhancing teachers' instructions' and teaching skills from many scholars and educators' point of view, is another main task that head teachers perform as part of their instructional role. Stillwell, (2009) points out that observing another skillful teacher conducting classes effectively can be very powerful in inspiring and motivating other teachers to do the same.

Teachers and administrators benefit to a great extent from all the professional development opportunities they get that can be in a form of in-service programs, funding for outside workshops and conferences, professional development opportunities and most importantly encouraging teachers to enhance their pedagogical skills through advance academic study (Monahan, & Tomko, 1996; Ocham & Okoth, 2015). Parsey (1992), Ocham & Okoth (2015, p. 819) defined staff professional development as "a way of giving the staff a chance to update and improve their skill, knowledge, and qualifications in order to be adoptive to their job". The main theories that this study was based on were the instructional leadership theory, the transformational leadership theory, the role theory and the symbolic interactionism theory. One of the most dominant theories in educational leadership is instructional leadership, which was started in the early 1980s and aimed to improve schools' educational outcomes

through changing the principals' role from an administrative to instructional leaders (Emmanouil, Osia & Paraskevi-Ioanna, 2014 and Plessis, 2013). With a great consensus between scholars and practitioners, (IL) is considered to be a very strong tool to create an effective environment in schools to promote teaching and learning (Manaseh, 2016).

The other distinguished theory that plays a vital role in head teachers' instructional leadership role is the transformational leadership theory. The theory was defined by Burns (1978) as "an effort to satisfy followers' needs to move followers to a higher level of work performance and organizational involvement by displaying respect and encouraging participation" as cited in (Hauserman & Stick, 2013). The Role theory, which was presented by Linton (1963), depends on the concepts of role, expectations and social position as it deals with issues of unclear and uncertainty role definitions. Abu Afifeh & David (2016) indicate that school leaders' motivation, expectations, traits, style, attitude, approach play critical role and affect the performance of the teachers.

According to Linton (1936), Merton (1957), Andrew, Richards and Levesque-Bristol (2014), the theory explains how a position of leaders as head teachers would affect their behavior and the behavior of others based on the leaders' status and the leader's characteristics (Grint, 2005) as cited in (Gallant, 2014). The last theory that was adopted in this study for its significant effect on understanding head teachers' instructional leadership role is the "symbolic Interactionism theory" which is a major sociological framework theory that was first presented by the American philosopher George Herbert Mead in the 1920s. The theory explains that people behave on a certain way based on their previous consumptions, not on what the real thing is. This theory has been investigated in this study in order to understand how and why teachers and head teachers behave towards each other in a certain way.

Methodology

This study is both quantitative and qualitative in nature. The quantitative method that was used in the study was a cross-study questionnaire. The other method used to collect data in this study was face-to-face in depth interviews with participants and it involved semi-structured open-ended questions that were few in number in order to extract participants' point of views and opinions in the subject (Creswell, 2013). The samples were selected

from four private Primary and secondary schools, with 109 teachers for the questionnaire and 10 schools' heads for interview. The questionnaires' items that were used in the study were developed with reference to other studies and were related to the research objectives.

The questionnaire started with the demographic data, then the questionnaire items were thematically divided into four sections; supervision, professional development, curricula and assessment. Each section corresponds to a number of items. Through the analysis of the twenty-eight questions in the questionnaire, it can be concluded that the teachers stress the importance and the value of head teachers and school management. The analysis of the open-ended question in the questionnaire gave useful insights into the understanding of head teachers' role in schools and the effect of this role on their professional practices. The question asked the teachers to state-out of their experience; if having a supportive, experienced and qualified head teacher contributed effectively to their professional development or not.

The Demographic Information

Frequency analysis was used to analyze the demographic information of the current study. The analysis shows that the percentage of female was much more than the male participants in this study. In addition, the table reveals that most teachers were in the age range of 26-36 and above. The sample comprised of experienced teachers who can judge the roles of their head teachers. Moreover, the responses reveal that most of the participants had a bachelor degree in their discipline. Furthermore, the responses reveal that most of the participants had 1-4 years of experience. The participants seem to fall under the normal range of teachers in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) schools; in terms of age, gender, professional experience and the educational level.

Analysis

This study adopted thematic analysis for qualitative data based on the participants' responses to the questions that were asked during the interviews. The themes that emerged from interview sessions with head teachers in the four private schools in Dubai were supervision, feedback, promoting professional development of teachers, support curriculum implementation and assessment.

Classroom Supervision

This theme is directly linked to the first research question and it provides an explanation to the role and impact of instructional leadership in teachers' quality. The findings from the interviews with schools' instructional heads showed that ten out of ten conducted regular classroom observations as priority task and a vital tool to evaluate teachers' performance and support classroom instruction. It was important to know how often head teachers conducted classroom observations. The findings from interviews with head teachers also revealed big variations in the frequency of supervision between the four schools.

Feedback

The findings revealed that the theme of head teachers' role in providing feedback to enhance teachers' classroom teaching is considered as one of the most important duties for head teachers. When the interviewees were asked if they provide teachers with feedback after classroom observations, all of them stated that they did. The interviews revealed variations in the form of the given feedback. One school principal described feedback as the most powerful tool to improve teachers' performance through highlighting the teachers' strengths and weaknesses. In the high performing schools, feedback comes in a formal sheet that is emailed to the teachers and to other schools' leaders, after conducting a meeting with the teachers to discuss his/her weaknesses and set a professional growth plan.

Promoting Professional Development of Teachers

The interviews' data reveal that instructional head teachers in this study promoted professional development as part of supporting effective instruction in various ways. All the interviewees agreed on conducting a two weeks orientation activity at the beginning of the year, there was an obvious variation in the degree of support. One head teacher stated: "Workshops and training is hardly useful, I personally believe they are 30% beneficial, we prefer self-learning and being innovative in learning new teaching skills".

Curriculum Implementation

Curriculum implementation was a theme revealed through the interviews. The main focus of this theme is on the role played by head teachers to assist teachers in curriculum implementation and modification. It is a major task that head teachers contribute in, especially when the

teacher is new or when he/she is new to the school's curriculum.

Assessment

The interviews revealed that assisting teachers with assessments is another important duty that head teachers perform. All interviewees assured that they take part in investigating and approving assessments forms and later on in checking results, analyzing data and use it to perform instructional improvement plans for students. Furthermore, one deputy head stated that her instructional role goes beyond checking and approving tests to helping teachers adjusting questions to meet students' different levels.

Discussion

Overall, 109 questionnaires were completed by teachers, and ten semi-structured interviews were conducted among head teachers from four private schools in Dubai. The analysis of both the interviews and the questionnaires resulted in identifying five major themes such as supervision, feedback, promoting professional development of teachers, support curriculum implementation and assessment. The discussion has come up in comparison with other related research findings in order to have reliable results in order to answer the research questions that were driven from the study's objectives. Only the highest percentages, means and frequency results were considered in the interpretations as the study tried to investigate the impact of head teachers' instructional leadership on teachers' professional practices in four private schools in Dubai.

Looking into the data analyzed, the findings reveal some interesting facts. The first theme that emerged from the findings revealed that supervision is the main and the most important task that head teachers perform, and it affects teachers' performance largely. This result concurs with another study by (Manaseh, 2016) who stated that supervision is one of the main duties of head teachers to monitor teaching in the classrooms' through direct observation done regularly. Another study that agrees with this study's results is the study by Alhassan (2015) who reveals that successful private schools are the ones that include an effective supervision system to evaluate their teachers, and without this system, teachers are unlikely to deliver the desired service level.

Another finding of this study revolves around the powerful effect of feedback on teachers' performance. This

theme leads to answering the first and second research questions. The findings of the questionnaires revealed that the feedback given to teachers after head teachers attended their classes occur immediately and casually in a small chat to talk about how well was the lesson, while in one high performing school the feedback is a systematic process and follows specific procedures as meeting up with the teacher individually, setting up improvement goals and sending an email with the feedback to the teacher and to the other school leaders.

Assisting teachers' professional growth as a main instructional role for head teachers was the third important finding from the current study, and this finding can be linked to the research questions of head teachers' instructional leadership's impact and duties. The results revealed that more than half of the participants believe their head teachers play a vital role in their professional growth. Another study by Ghavifekr and Ibrahim (2014) agrees with this finding in confirming the direct and indirect impact of head teachers on teachers' teaching skills. Furthermore, another study by Blasé and Blasé (1999) revealed that effective instructional leaders promote professional growth through encouraging peer coaching, model teaching, praising and giving feedback.

The findings concluded that instructional leaders, who facilitate the appropriate programs and workshops for teachers to attend, exhorted many efforts to model teaching, encourage peer coaching and support collaboration between educators, the higher impact can be seen on their teachers' performance. The practice of exposing teachers to professional development is supported by various scholars (Davis & Nicklos, 1986; Supovitz & Poglinco, 2001 in Bhengu & Mkhize, 2013). Another important finding from the qualitative and quantitative data has indicated that head teachers do play an important role in implementing curriculum, evaluating it and applying the appropriate adjustments and modifications.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study's findings revealed that head teachers as an instructional leaders play a significant and a vital role in improving teachers' professional practices through monitoring teaching and learning, helping teachers' develop themselves professionally, improving their teaching skills and gaining sufficient knowledge in delivering curriculum, modifying its content and applying assessments. It was also concluded that head teachers'

contribute to a great extent in supporting teachers' professional development through supervision, feedback, encouraging peer coaching and facilitating the appropriate professional development workshops. Moreover, the study found out that supervision is practiced frequently in private schools, while it is conducted more than frequently in high performing schools, and associates it with constructive feedback which is given after supervision enables teachers to learn from their weaknesses and strengths. Due to the finding of this study, the following recommendations are made.

1. The study revealed the vital role of head teachers' instructional leaders, therefore it is recommended to pay attention to the leaders' qualifications and talents and to the schools' support to head teachers.
2. It is recommended that teacher supervision should be done frequently to improve the quality of teaching and learning.
3. It is recommended that head teachers give constructive feedback, make suggestions and give advice to improve teachers' instruction.
4. Head teachers should promote teachers' professional development through conducting in-service workshops and other staff development programs.
5. Provide the opportunities and time for model teaching, peer coaching, and collaboration between teachers.

Future studies that focus on instructional leaders and how to choose and train them for the position are highly recommended for its impact in enhancing schools' outcomes and to contribute to the limited empirical database in the field.

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