Best Practice Of Framing And Communicating School Goals Among Principals Of Cluster Secondary Schools Towards Realization Of Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2025

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Abstract:

The study aims to examine the best practice of framing and communicating school goals among principals of cluster secondary schools Malaysia according to principals and teachers perceptions. The Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale (PIMRS) modified by Hallinger and Murphy (1985), Latip (2006), and, Hatta (2010) was used as the data collection instrument through survey questionnaire. There were 871 respondents of different genders, ethnics, type of schools, and, position of responsibilities at schools were participated. The result of the study shows that three highest score were respectively on items 'Discuss the school's academic goals with teachers at faculty meetings' mean 4.25, 'Communicate the school's academic goals to people at school' mean 4.24, and, 'Refer to the school's goals in student assemblies' mean 4.21. It is hoped that this research will provide useful findings which will effectively assist the process of instructional leadership enhancement among principals and teachers of cluster secondary schools in order to improve students' academic performance in achieving the first class human capital who are compatibly excellent nationally and internationally towards realization of the Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2025.

Keywords: Principals' best practice - framing and communicating school goals – Cluster Secondary Schools Malaysia

1.0 Introduction

The Ministry of Education Malaysia announced the implementation of cluster secondary schools aim to develop and produce excellent students in the curriculum and co-curriculum. The schools comprises of the excellent perfomance in various area and specialization. In the cluster schools, the achievement of the students is in the full power and authority of the principal especially through the effective instructional leadership practices. This system managed to achieve the objectives in developing and producing excellent students who are internationally competence and accepted to pursue studies in the world prestigous universities. The establishment is highly essential to facilitate the realization of Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2015.

2.0 Literature Review

The quality of education in Malaysia including the Cluster Secondary Schools is one of the most important agendas frequently discussed among educational leaders in the country. The Ministry of Education Malaysia has exerted various efforts to improve, enhance and excel the schools achievement especially in the curriculum and co-curriculum. All are expected to play their part in solving instructional problems through collaboration, teamwork, delegation of authority, effective communication and recognition. The Minister of Education Malaysia (2012) stressed

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that in our increasingly inter-connected world, being able to lead and work effectively with others is critical. The education system will help every student reach his or her full potential by creating formal and informal opportunities for students to work in teams, and to take on leadership roles (Ministry of Education 2012).

This aspiration requires involvement by all members of the school begins by providing input and participating in developing the goals, mission and values of the school. The effective implementation of education system and achievement of the objectives is intuitively and directly related to the responsibility and accountability of school principal as a school leader. The fundamental task of a school principal is to plan, implement, monitor and evaluate the effective implementation of teaching and learning with significant outcomes in accordance with the objectives of the Malaysian Philosophy of Education. It is stated that the Malaysian school curriculum is committed to developing the child holistically along intellectual, spiritual, emotional, and physical dimensions, as reflected in the National Education Philosophy. Programmes and initiatives to develop non-academic components are present both during formal class time as well as through a variety of after-school co-curricular activities (Ministry of Education 2012).

The achievement and realization of this aspiration is part and parcel of educational leadership and its being an integral element of the whole leadership process in schools especially through the instructional leadership. Good educational leaders constantly keep student learning at the centre of their work, no matter what task or activity they undertake. Instructional leadership does not depend solely on the principal. It depends on other administrators, senior staff and even ordinary teachers.

Instructional leadership is a process that involves all the efforts of school administrators and staff that are directed towards improving instruction. An instructional leader requires an in-depth understanding of the learning process and the relationship between teaching and learning,

instructional objectives, methods, processes, instructional materials and the prevailing organizational culture and the management skill to integrate all these elements, in formulating a course of action to enhance teaching instruction. This unwavering attention helps to maintain the focus on the core and the true business of educators.

The study adapted the dimensions of instructional leadership formulated by Hallinger and Murphy (1985) and Latip (2006). However, this study focuses only on the dimension of 'defining school mission' comprises two functions namely 'framing school goals' and 'communicating school goals'. This key factor is the role of the principal as instructional leader (McEwan, 2003), particularly, to improve students' academic performance in achieving the first class human capital who are compatibly excellent nationally and internationally.

2.1 Defining the School Mission

An important dimension of the principal's role as instructional leader is to define and communicate a mission or purpose for the school. Instructional leaders are often said to have a vision of what the school should be trying to accomplish. Defining a school mission involves communicating this vision to the staff and students in such a way that a sense of shared purpose exists, linking the various activities that take place in classrooms throughout the school. The principal's role in defining the mission involves framing schoolwide goals and communicating these goals in a persistent fashion to the entire school community (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). Krug (1992 as cited in Terry, 1996) stated that operating without a clear mission is like beginning a journey without having a destination in mind. Chances are you will not know when you get there.

2.1.1 Framing School Goals

This function refers to a principal's role in determining the areas on which the school staff will focus their attention and resources during a given school year. Instructionally effective

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schools often have clearly defined goals that focus on student achievement. The emphasis is on fewer goals around which staff energy and other school resources can be mobilized. A few coordinated objectives, each with manageable scope, appear to work best. The goals should incorporate data on past and current student performance and include staff responsibilities for achieving the goals. Staff and parent input during the development of the school's goals seem important. Performance goals should be expressed in measurable terms (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985).

Activities that define the school goals are the most important function where the schools need a vision to accomplish reform goals (Uchiyama & Wolf, 2002). Schlechty (1990, cited in Uchiyama & Wolf, 2002) noted that visions are intended realities that reinforce the school's focus.

McEwan (2003) stated also that instructional leaders are responsible for giving guidance while defining school goals. Therefore, when framing school goals, it is better to involve staff and teachers because their experiences will be created as a foundation for determining school goals. Moreover, involving staff will also give other important information which refers to their experience in defining school goals.

Leithwood et al. (1999) noted that effective leaders will involve staff in determining and defining school goals and objectives to be implemented and evaluated at the end of the year. This condition will increase their commitment to cooperate in achieving the school's goals. Therefore, each school will be confident of being a success if it has a clear vision and mission as well as teacher commitment.

2.1.2 Communicating School Goals

After defining school goals, principals need to communicate those school goals to the school community. Communicating and explaining school goals is one of the crucial roles of the principal as an instructional leader. Clear goals and high expectations commonly shared among the school community are one of characteristics of an effective school. Common sense, if nothing else, indicates that a clearly defined purpose is necessary for any endeavour hoping for success. Within the limits imposed by the common public school philosophy, schools need to focus on those tasks they deem most important. This allows the school to direct its resources and shape its functioning towards the realization of those goals (Purkey & Smith, 1983).

This function is concerned with the ways in which the principal communicates the school's important goals to teachers, parents, and students. Principals can ensure that the importance of school goals is understood by discussing and reviewing them with staff periodically during the school year, especially in the context of instructional, curricular, and budgetary decisions. Both formal communication (e.g. goal statements, staff bulletins, articles in the principal or cite-council newsletter, curricular and staff meetings, parent and teacher conferences, school handbook, assemblies) and informal interaction (e.g. conversations with staff) can be used to communicate the school's mission (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985).

All school communities, especially staff and teachers as well as students need to understand the school goals to enable them to contribute in developing school performance and achieving the school mission aspired by the school leader. This is in line with one of the education shifts or transformation of the Blueprint 2013-2025 that the school principals would be given significant support by the Ministry of Education especially in planning curriculum programs, implementing instructional responsibilities, providing sufficient facilities for co-curricular activities, and, greater operational flexibility for school improvement towards higher accountability and performance of students' outcomes (Ministry of Education, Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025).

Therefore, it is hoped that this research will provide useful findings which will effectively

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assist the process of instructional leadership enhancement among principals and teachers of cluster secondary schools in Malaysia. This is really essential in order to improve students' academic performance in achieving the first class human capital who are compatibly excellent nationally and internationally as stipulated in the purpose of establishing the cluster schools by the Ministry of Education Malaysia and realization of the Education Development Plan 2013-2025.

3.0   Research Objectives
The objectives of the study are to seek answers to the following questions:
1.   What are the Practices of Defining School Mission of Instructional Leadership among the Principals of Cluster Secondary Schools Malaysia

2.   What are the Practice of Framing the School Goals among Principal of Cluster Secondary Schools Malaysia according to Principals and Teachers Perceptions

3.   What are the Practice of Communicating the School Goals among Principal of Cluster Secondary Schools Malaysia according to the Principals and Teachers Perceptions

4.   What are the best practiced of Defining School Mission of Instructional Leadership among Principals of Cluster Secondary Schools Malaysia?

4.0   Research Methodology
The Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale (PIMRS) modified by Hallinger and Murphy (1985), Latip (2006), and, Hatta (2010) was used as the data collection instrument through survey questionnaire. There were 871 respondents of different genders, ethnics, type of schools, and, position of responsibilities at schools were participated. The data was analyzed by using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 20.

In this study, the practiced of the principals in the function of defining school mission of instructional leadership are categorized into five levels: Mean 1.00 – 1.99 is Low, Mean 2.00 – 2.99 is Simple High, Mean 3.00 – 3.99 is High, Mean 4.00 – 5.00 is Very High. This category is in accordance with the category of responses as Mean 1.00 – 1.99 is 'Seldom', Mean 2.00 – 2.99 is 'Sometime', Mean 3.00 – 3.99 is 'Frequent', Mean 4.00 – 5.00 is 'Always'.

5.0   Finding of the Study
This section reports the results of the data analysis of the practice of defining school mission among principals of cluster secondary schools in Malaysia.

Research Question 1:
What are the Practices of Defining School Mission of Instructional Leadership among the Principals of Cluster Secondary Schools Malaysia
The dimension of 'defining school mission' comprises two functions namely 'framing school goals' and 'communicating school goals'.

Table 1 presents the practice of framing and communicating school goals of instructional leadership by the principals of cluster secondary schools Malaysia.

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Table 1:
The Practices of Defining School Mission of Instructional Leadership among the Principals of Cluster Secondary Schools Malaysia
(N = 871)

The Functions of Instructional Leadership: Defining School Mission	Mean	Std. Dev.	Rank
Framing School Goals	3.910	0.912	
Communicating School Goals	4.123	0.871	
Average	**4.016**	**0.891**	**Very High**

* Implementation:
Low = 1.00-1.99; Simple High 2.00–2.99; High = 3.00-3.99; Very High = 4.00- 5.00.

Table 1 shows that the practice of principals on 'Defining School Mission' obtained average mean of 4.016 and Standard Deviation 0.891. Specifically, 'Framing School Goals' obtained mean 3.910 and standard deviation 0.912. Responses to 'Communicating School Goals' acquired mean score of 4.123 and standard deviation 0.871.

The result indicates that the practiced of principals of cluster secondary schools on communicating school goals is higher than the framing school goals.

Research Question 2:
What are the Practice of Framing the School Goals among Principal of Cluster Secondary Schools Malaysia according to Principals and Teachers Perceptions

Table 2 shows in detail the mean score, standard deviation and the level of implementation of each task involved in the framing of the school goals according to teachers' perceptions.

Table 2:
The Practice of Framing the School Goals among Principal of Cluster Secondary Schools Malaysia Perceived by Principals and Teachers
(N = 871)

No.	Items	mean	Std. Dev.	*Level of Implementation
1.	Develop goals that seek improvement over current levels of academic performance	3.99	.894	High
2.	Frame academic goals with target dates	3.98	.897	High
3.	Frame the school's academic goals in terms of staff responsibilities for meeting them	4.03	.905	Very High
4.	Use needs assessment or other questionnaires to secure staff input on goal development	3.33	1.070	High
5.	Use data on student academic performance when developing the school's academic goals	4.19	.838	Very High
6.	Develop goals that are easily translated into classroom objectives by teachers	3.94	.868	High
	Total	**3.910**	**0.912**	**High**

* Implementation:
Low = 1.00-1.99; Simple High 2.00–2.99; High = 3.00-3.99; Very High = 4.00- 5.00.

The finding of the study indicates that two tasks of framing the school goals were implemented by the principals at a 'very high' level. The highest score was item 'Use data on student academic performance when developing

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the school's academic goals' with mean 4.19 and standard deviation 0.838. The second highest was item 'Frame the school's academic goals in terms of staff responsibilities for meeting them' mean 4.03 and standard deviation .905.

Table 2 also presents that four tasks implemented by the principals at 'high' level are 'Develop goals that seek improvement over current levels of academic performance' mean 3.99 and standard deviation 0.894, 'Frame academic goals with target dates' mean 3.98 and standard deviation 0.897, 'Develop goals that are easily translated into classroom objectives by teachers' mean 3.94 and standard deviation 0.868, and , the lowest is 'Use needs assessment or other questionnaires to secure staff input on goal development' mean 3.33 and standard deviation 1.070.

Meanwhile, according to teachers' perception, the average score of the principals' practices in the framing of the school goals was at a 'high' level with mean 3.910 and standard deviation 0.912.

Research Question 3:
What are the Practice of Communicating the School Goals among Principal of Cluster Secondary Schools Malaysia according to the Principals and Teachers Perceptions
Table 3 shows in detail the mean score, standard deviation and the level of implementation of each task involved in the communicating of the school goals according to teachers' perceptions.

Table 3:
The Practice of Communicating the School Goals
among Principal of Cluster Secondary Schools Malaysia (N = 871)

No.	Items	Mean	Std. Dev.	*Level of Implementation
7	Communicate the school's academic goals to people at school	4.24	.874	Very High
8.	Refer to the school's academic goals in informal settings with teachers	3.96	.951	High
9.	Discuss the school's academic goals with teachers at faculty meetings	4.25	.826	Very High
10.	Refer to the school's academic goals when making curricular decisions with teachers	4.07	.843	Very High
11.	Ensure that the school's goals are reflected in highly visible displays in the school (e.g. posters or bulletin boards indicating the importance of read or math) (	4.01	.881	Very High
12.	Refer to the school's goals in student assemblies	4.21	.849	Very High
	Total	**4.123**	**0.871**	**Very High**

* Implementation:
Low = 1.00-1.99; Simple High 2.00–2.99; High = 3.00-3.99; Very High = 4.00- 5.00.

The result on Table 3 shows that five tasks of 'communicating the school goals' were implemented by the principals at a 'very high' level with mean scores ranging from 4.01 to 4.25. The finding indicates that the highest score was item 'Discuss the school's academic goals with teachers at faculty meetings' mean 4.25 and standard deviation 0.826. It was followed by items 'Communicate the school's academic goals to people at school' mean 4.24 and standard deviation 0.874, 'Refer to the school's goals in student assemblies' mean 4.21 and standard deviation 0.849, 'Refer to the school's academic

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goals when making curricular decisions with teachers' mean 4.07 and standard deviation 0.843, 'Ensure that the school's goals are reflected in highly visible displays in the school' mean 4.01 and standard deviation 0.881.

On the other hand, Table 3 presents that the lowest score was item 'Refer to the school's academic goals in informal settings with teachers' mean 3.96 and standard deviation 0.951.

Meanwhile, according to teachers' perception, the average score of the principals' practices in the communicating of the school goals was at a 'very high' level with mean 4.123 and standard deviation 0.871.

Research Question 4:
What are the best practiced of Defining School Mission of Instructional Leadership among Principals of Cluster Secondary Schools Malaysia?
Table 4 presents the best practice of Defining School Mission of Instructional Leadership among Principals of Cluster Secondary Schools Malaysia as perceived by principals and teachers. The dimension of 'defining school mission' comprises two functions namely 'framing school goals' and 'communicating school goals'.

Table 4:
Best Practice of Defining School Mission of Instructional Leadership among Principals of Cluster Secondary Schools Malaysia as perceived by principals and teachers. (N = 871)

Items	Mean/ SD	*Level of Implementation	Rank
Discuss the school's academic goals with teachers at faculty meetings	4.25 .826	Very High	1
Communicate the school's academic goals to people at	4.24 .874	Very High	2

school			
Refer to the school's goals in student assemblies	4.21 .849	Very High	3
Use data on student academic performance when developing the school's academic goals	4.19 .838	Very High	4
Refer to the school's academic goals when making curricular decisions with teachers	4.07 .843	Very High	5
Frame the school's academic goals in terms of staff responsibilities for meeting them	4.03 .905	Very High	6
Ensure that the school's goals are reflected in highly visible displays in the school (e.g. posters or bulletin boards indicating the importance of read or math) (	4.01 .881	Very High	7

* Implementation:
Low = 1.00-1.99; Simple High 2.00–2.99; High = 3.00-3.99; Very High = 4.00- 5.00.

The three highest score were items 'Discuss the school's academic goals with teachers at faculty meetings' mean 4.25, 'Communicate the school's academic goals to people at school' mean 4.24, and, 'Refer to the school's goals in student assemblies' mean 4.21.

These were followed respectively by items 'Use data on student academic performance when developing the school's academic goals' mean 4.19, 'Refer to the school's academic goals when making curricular decisions with teachers' mean 4.07, 'Frame the school's academic goals in terms of staff responsibilities for meeting them' mean 4.03, and, finally 'Ensure that the school's goals

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are reflected in highly visible displays in the school' mean 4.01.

The above findings indicate that the principals of cluster secondary schools in Malaysia truly exerted their commitment in enhancement of students' performance in academic and co-curriculum. This is the aspiration of the Ministry of Education in establishing cluster schools which was based on their different achievements in order to facilitate the process of development of first class human capital who are really competence worldwide in facing the challenges of globalization.

6.0   Discussion of the Findings

One of the fundamental objectives of Malaysian education system is to ensure that the students are being equipped with the knowledge and skills required for success in life. The support and resources that a system provides to schools play a critical role in how schools perform as they enable teachers to focus on their core business of delivering effective teaching and learning. The achievement of school performance is much depends on the effective practice of leadership style including instructional leadership by the school principal. The Ministry of Education stated that the quality of school leaders is the second biggest school-based factor in determining student outcomes, after teacher quality. Whilst, International research on school leadership shows that an outstanding principal, one who is focused on instructional leadership, can raise student outcomes by as much as twenty-percent (Ministry of Education 2012).

The above statement of the Ministry has relation with the functions of principal especially in ensuring the vision and mission of the school are delivered effectively to all the staff, including, school leaders, school administrators, teachers, students, and, other community of the school. One of the effective practices of principal is instructional leadership as formulated in the Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale (PIMRS) modified by Hallinger and Murphy (1985), Latip (2006), and, Hatta (2010).

One of the dimensions of instructional leadership formulated in the PIMRS was 'defining school mission' comprises of two functions namely 'framing school goals' and 'communicating school goals'.

The study shows that the best practice of defining school mission of instructional leadership among the principals of cluster secondary schools Malaysia were on items 'discuss the school's academic goals with teachers at faculty meetings', 'communicate the school's academic goals to people at school', 'refer to the school's goals in student assemblies', 'use data on student academic performance when developing the school's academic goals', 'refer to the school's academic goals when making curricular decisions with teachers', 'frame the school's academic goals in terms of staff responsibilities for meeting them', and, finally 'ensure that the school's goals are reflected in highly visible displays in the school'.

The above findings may be used as a guide for educational leaders and education offices in realizing the Ministry of Education effort to ensure every school will have a high-performing principal who is relentless in his/her focus on improving student outcomes, both academic and non-academic.

The findings also useful to all school leaders, principals, assistant principals, department heads and subject heads to fully utilize the decision-making flexibilities which will be accorded to them by the Ministry of Education Malaysia . This includes instructional leadership matters such as school improvement planning and curriculum and co-curricular planning, as well as administrative leadership matters such as allocation of school funds. As with teachers, the aspiration is to create a peer-led culture of professional excellence wherein school leaders mentor and train one another, develop and disseminate best practices and hold their peers accountable for meeting professional standards (Ministry of Education 2012).

Finally, it is believed that the best practice of defining school mission of instructional leadership by the principals of cluster secondary

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schools Malaysia would be beneficial to educational leaders in achieving and realizing the Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2025.

7.0 Conclusion

It is clear that the principals of cluster secondary schools Malaysia had practiced seven items at very high level and five items were practiced at high level. There was none on simple high and low level. It is hoped that this research will provide useful findings which will effectively assist the process of instructional leadership enhancement among principals and teachers of cluster secondary schools in Malaysia in order to improve students' academic performance in achieving the first class human capital who are compatibly excellent nationally and internationally as stipulated in the purpose of establishing the cluster schools by the Ministry of Education Malaysia and realization of the Education Development Plan 2013-2025.

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