Research Paper

A Bird's Eye View on Instructional Leadership

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ABSTRACT: *The No Child Left behind Act (NCLB), signed by President George Bush in 2002, strived to reform the American education system. Such act sought to skyrocket American competitiveness by bridging the gaps between high and low achievers. Accordingly, schools were held accountable for students' performances, achievements, and proficiencies. In addition, the act employed the 'Adequate Yearly Progress' (AYP), a follow-up method, to ensure that schools are kept on track towards their goals. Moreover, schools, which were not achieving their goals, were subjected to severe sanctions. In order to avoid sanctions and provide quality education, school principals started to hire highly talented teachers. Besides hiring talented teachers, school principals exercised a wide range of instructional leadership practices to keep an eye on teachers' performance, praise their points of strength, detect points of weakness, and remedy them.*
KEYWORDS
Instructional Leadership, Supervisory Models, Principals' Challenges, and Instructional Leadership Research

I. INTRODUCTION

The No Child Left behind Act (NCLB), signed by President George Bush in 2002, strived to reform the American education system. Such act sought to skyrocket American competitiveness by bridging the gaps between high and low achievers. Accordingly, schools were held accountable for students' performances, achievements, and proficiencies. In addition, the act employed the 'Adequate Yearly Progress' (AYP), a follow-up method, to ensure that schools are kept on track towards their goals. Moreover, schools, which were not achieving their goals, were subjected to severe sanctions. In order to avoid sanctions and provide quality education, school principals started to hire highly-talented teachers. Besides hiring talented teachers, school principals exercised a wide range of instructional leadership practices to keep an eye on teachers' performance, praise their points of strength, detect points of weakness, and remedy them (O'Doherty & Ovando, 2013).

To begin with, instructional leadership is noted as a process that focuses on "teaching and learning in a way that ensures an emphasis on three themes: subject content, principles of learning, and teaching processes" (Sergiovanni & Starratt, 2007, p. 284). Furthermore, David, Nguyen, Wong, and Choy (2015) deemed instructional leadership as vital practices, tied to teaching and learning. In addition, Southworth (2002) considered instructional leadership as activities, which indirectly impact students' learning and achievement. Besides, Salo, Nylund and Stjernstrom (2015) used of the term instructional leadership to refer to an array of practices, exercised by school principals, to enhance tutors' performance and growth. Also, Glickman (1985) described instructional leadership as a means of aiding teachers in a direct way. Even more, Gordon (1997) believed that instructional leadership is using sets of activities, which lead to teachers' growth. Last, instructional leadership is portrayed as an endeavor which gives voices to teachers (Smyth, 1997). Therefore, the aim of this paper is to shed the light on the notion of instructional leadership practices.

II. MODELS OF SUPERVISION

"Effective supervisory practices promote growth, development, interaction, fault free problem solving and a commitment to build resilience in teachers" (Zepeda & Mayers, 2014, p. 18). Such practices entail peer coaching, action research, portfolio development, developmental supervision, and clinical supervision. To begin with, peer coaching is deemed as "teachers helping others reflect on and improve teaching practices and implement particular teaching skills needed to implement knowledge" (p. 33). It is comprised of pre-observation conference, classroom observation, and post-observation conference. In the pre-observation conference, the coach and the teacher are to review the lesson plan, choose the skill to be observed, and opt for

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an instrument to collect data. Afterwards, the coach is to observe the teacher in action, and take notes on the skill, picked in the pre-observation conference. Last, both the coach and the teacher in the post-observation conference will discuss the collected data, analyze it, and plan for the future. Moreover, for a successful implementation of peer coaching, principals are in a dire need to hire more teachers so as to substitute those who will be engaged in the process of peer coaching, to allocate the needed resources, to encourage teachers to participate in peer coaching, and to provide emotional support to all teachers. In addition to peer coaching, action research is a well-known model of supervision, aiming at understanding classroom environments and improving teaching practices. When conducting action researches, teachers are mainly engaged in forming a research question which stems from classroom practices, choosing a tool to collect data, interpreting the data as well as exploring the study's limitations. Also, supervisors' roles in action research may range from intensive involvement to collaborative to a facilitator. As action research is concerned with teachers' growth and development, supervisors need to act as facilitators only.

Besides peer coaching and action research, portfolio supervision is considered as a holistic, thorough examination of the teaching process with a colleague or a supervisor. Such model is grounded on the notion that people engage in meaningful learning in the company of others. To further elaborate, Vygotsky's theory of social constructivism asserted that social interaction allows people to develop their knowledge, exchange ideas, and generate understanding. He reached this conclusion by closely monitoring people's growth through interaction with individuals. Later on, he further developed his theory to encompass the 'zone of proximal development.' Notably, it is deemed as "the distance between actual development levels as determined by independent problem solving and level of potential development as determined through problem solving under guidance" (Li & Lam, 2013, p.2). Thus, people's zones of proximal development grow and advance when guided by either their colleagues or their supervisors. Furthermore, this model of supervision equips teachers with fundamental skills, like data collection, data analysis, and reflection. Also, the content of the portfolio is directly linked to the previously-agreed upon goals; the content may include an array of topics like classroom, personal, curricular, and professional growth. Similar to the peer coaching cycle, a teacher selects an area to focus on in the pre-observation conference. Then, either a supervisor or a colleague is to focus on such area in classroom observations. Finally, the data collected in classroom observations will be tackled in the post-observation conference. Therefore, it is safe to deem peer coaching, action research as well as portfolio development as models of differentiated supervision as a way of catering for the varying needs of teachers (Zepeda & Mayers, 2014).

In addition, developmental supervision is a model, focusing on augmenting teachers' capacity as a means of enabling them to accomplish various learning goals for the students. Such model is split into four categories: directive-control approach, directive informational approach, collaborative approach, and non-directive approach. First, the supervisor in a directive-control approach is in complete charge of the whole supervisory process; the teacher is immensely relying on the supervisor in all aspects. This approach could be employed with beginning or struggling teachers. Second, the supervisor in a directive informational approach guides the teacher on how to accomplish certain goals and objectives. Similarly, such model could be used with beginning and struggling teachers. Third, both the supervisor and the teacher in the collaborative approach model are equal; they are greatly immersed in problem-solving tasks, critical thinking, and decision making. Unlike the previous approaches, this model can be implemented with experienced teachers. Fourth, the supervisor in a non-directive approach has an extremely minor, yet vital role; the supervisor in this case is a thorough listener, who poses multiple open- ended enquiries to the teacher, who is responsible for one's development and growth. Such model, like the collaborative approach, can be utilized with tenure and experienced teachers. Equally important, selecting one of the developmental supervisory models should be done with caution since it will drastically impinge the relationship between the teacher and the supervisor.

Besides, clinical supervision includes three main stages: pre-observation conference, classroom observation, and post-observation conference. First, the pre observation conference serves as a platform, in which the teacher selects an area to be focused on during the next stage. Most importantly, pre-observation conferences aim at giving a voice to teachers, providing information about the students' nature, strengthening the relationship between teachers and supervisors as well as selecting a focus for classroom observations. In the next stage, supervisors need to select a proper tool for data collection during classroom observation. During the last stage, the supervisor and the teacher are to review, analyze, and reflect on the data collected during classroom observation and plan for the next step. To conclude, the point behind the existence of disparate supervisory models is to cater for teachers' different needs.

III. CHALLENGES

Principals encounter numerous challenges when attempting to achieve their instructional leadership roles. First, O'Doherty and Ovando (2013) interviewed four principals to unveil their challenges as instructional leaders. As a result, four obstacles were detected: succession, implementation of plans, motivating people, and balancing job complexities. To begin with, the principals admitted that succession, which is following the same leadership style of the previous principal, is burdensome. Thus, when they try to "establish their own credibility with the faculty based on their individual philosophy, it [becomes] an overwhelming task" (p. 543). Besides succession, the principals were forced to implement all the plans, which were developed under the supervision of previous principals. Also, the principals were unable to motivate teachers to alter their in-class performance by adopting new instructional techniques, instead of traditional ones. Last, the principals confessed that they were not able to juggle between their managerial and administrative roles.

Second, Mestry, Schmidt, and Moonsammy-Koopasammy (2013) interviewed six principals to highlight their challenges as instructional leaders. In effect, two fundamental obstacles were revealed: balancing the administrative and instructional roles, and promoting positive school climate. To elaborate, all principals stressed on the fact that their workload does not allow them to monitor teachers' performances in classes. Yet, they accentuated that they conducted unannounced class visits whenever their schedule allowed so as to ensure that students are receiving proper education. Moreover, all principals asserted that they do their best to create a positive school climate by teaching classes from time-to-time so as to be well-aware of the complaints and frustrations, encountered by teachers.

Third, Castello (2015) interviewed ten public school principals about their hardships as instructional leaders. In fact, all principals posited that they often lack content and pedagogical knowledge in some subject areas that they supervise and evaluate. Similarly, they confessed that they turn a blind eye on their instructional leadership tasks due to their intense workload; unfortunately, their schedules are always crammed with "managerial responsibilities, administrative tasks, student issues, personnel management, external agencies, conflict resolution, resource management, and parents" (p. 4). Fourth, Fink and Silverman interviewed six principals about their duties as instructional leaders (2014). Likewise, all principals admitted that they do not receive proper professional development to improve their skills; thus, they deem themselves as incompetent. Equally important, they disclosed that they do not have the time to enhance teaching and learning in their schools due to their intense workload (Holland, 2004; Wanzare & Costa, 2001). In conclusion, such challenges put the processes of teaching as well as learning at stake in schools.

IV. INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP ROLES

Since school principals' schedule is burdensome, which inhibits them from performing their instructional leadership roles, personnel, like teachers, assistant principals, and department chairs have exhibited great effectiveness in performing such roles. For example, a case study was conducted to examine the teachers' effectiveness as instructional leaders in a public school (Kenney & Roberts, 1984). Such a study was part and parcel of a US voluntary school improvement program, entitled SITIP (School Improvement through Instructional Process). Also, Kenney and Roberts employed semi structured interviews as an instrument to collect data. Having analyzed their data, they highlighted that the teachers, who took part in the program, demonstrated extreme effectiveness as instructional leaders due to three vital factors. First, such teachers were provided with adequate training prior to the study, which enabled them to acquire major leadership skills, like decision-making, problem-solving, and critical thinking. Second, the school principal provided all teachers with the needed emotional support to augment their productivity when performing their newly assigned roles. Third, the teachers enjoyed a different type of support, the administrative one, in terms of materials, logistical assistance, and acknowledgment of efforts. In addition, almost all teachers were over the moon to train and coach other colleagues in the school.

Moreover, a study was launched in four public schools to unveil the assistant principals' current responsibilities and the duties they should be performing in schools (Glanz, 1994). Glanz employed open-ended questionnaires to collect data from a 200 American assistant principal. After analyzing the data, Glanz revealed that assistant principals' duties are limited to ordering books, organizing schedules, handling disruptive conduct, meeting with parents, and monitoring lunch duty. Also, over 90 percent of assistant principals detested their administrative duties; instead, they yearned to perform instructional leadership tasks, like supervision, curriculum development, evaluation as well as staff development. Furthermore, almost all assistant principals agreed on the fact that they must be well-trained in order to effectively perform their roles as instructional leaders.

Besides, a study, which was initiated in three US public schools to highlight department chairs' roles as instructional leaders, lasted for two and half years (Kelly & Salisbury, 2013). To clarify, the three public schools, which were involved in the study, were Pennant Hills, Lismore, and Winchester. Such a study aimed at bridging achievement gaps in the three high schools. In addition, Kelly and Salisbury employed semi-structured

interviews to collect data. First, department chairs' duties in Pennant Hills were limited to managing budgets, meeting parents, developing curriculum, and ordering books. However, in a departmental meeting, the principal considered department chairs as instructional leaders, who were in charge of enhancing students' learning, motivating teachers, building trust, achieving the shared vision, and providing continuous professional development. On a weekly basis, the principal scheduled meetings with the department chairs to ensure their alignment with their new roles. After collecting and analyzing the data, Kelly and Salisbury revealed that department chairs were fully-committed to their new roles; yet, they feared that teachers would not deem them as true leaders since they lacked certain leadership skills. On the other hand, department chairs in Lismore were engaged in instructional leadership duties, like nurturing teachers' growth, handling resources, developing a shared vision, and observing and evaluating teachers. The data collected from the interviews stressed on the fact that department chairs as instructional leaders were energetic and motivated to enhance teaching as well as learning in their school. Furthermore, similar to Lismore, department chairs in Winchester were already assuming instructional leaders' roles. Their duties were centered on enhancing students' learning, amending teachers' instructional practices, developing curriculum, and fostering teachers' growth. Also, the interviews reflected that department chairs were enthusiastic about their leadership roles; however, all of them longed for proper trainings to better accomplish their roles. Thus, tutors, assistant principals and department chairs have exhibited great effectiveness and trustworthiness as instructional leaders.

V. RESEARCH ON INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

Previous research has documented solid body of literature on instructional leadership in Europe. To start, a study was launched in a public school in England to depict the characteristics of an effective leadership (Southworth, 1999). He employed semi-structured interviews to collect data from ten teachers. After data analysis, six major attributes were ascertained: hard work, determination, school improvement, positivity, approachability, and group work. First, all teachers acknowledged that their principal worked hard; they deemed such feature as an integral part to a successful leadership. Their principal often stayed after school hours to conclude their tasks. Second, all teachers stressed that their principal was determined to enhance the processes of teaching and learning in the school by offering the teachers additional learning resources. Third, teachers pinpointed that the principal utilized various strategies to amend the processes of teaching and learning, like professional dialogues, which were fostered through teamwork, meetings, class visits as well as staff development, monitoring, which was developed through reviewing students' work, keeping an eye on their progress, and evaluating assessments' information, and modelling, which was advanced by coaching staff members and reinforcing values, and practices. Fourth, all teachers stressed that the school principal had faith in teachers' efforts, which contributed to the enhancement of students' achievement as well as learning. Fifth, all teachers confessed that the school principal was approachable; in fact, they had constant dialogues with him. Sixth, the teachers accentuated that when team members share a clear vision, behave professionally, remain consistent in teaching and planning, and seek a better learning environment for the students, they are then deemed as an effective teaching unit.

Moreover, a study was initiated in 20 compulsory schools in Iceland in an attempt to unveil teachers' perceptions of supervision and principals' roles as supervisors (Hansen & Larusdottir, 2015). Hansen and Larusdottir collected their data through the use of questionnaires from teachers and interviews with principals. Questions in the questionnaire focused on the nature of instructional leadership in the schools. As a result, 76% of teachers underscored the fact that collegial collaboration highly contributed to their growth compared to principals' sporadic initiatives. In addition, almost 96% of teachers admitted that their school principals rarely conducted in-class visits to observe and evaluate their performances. Furthermore, two themes were generated after analyzing school principals' responses during the interviews. Such themes were initiative and activity, and supervision. As for the initiative and activity, almost all principals viewed their role as that of monitoring, which included supporting teachers' growth through professional development projects, and acknowledging their efforts. Others deemed their role as that of encouraging, which entailed being quite aware of teachers' talents and strengths. In regards to the supervision, one of the principals admitted conducting class visits, followed by a series of meetings to provide teachers with advice based on classroom observations. On the other hand, some principals confessed that they rarely conduct class visits to monitor teachers' performances because of their hectic schedule. In addition, the vast majority of principals provided teachers with indirect support and supervision by creating a friendly environment based on support and motivation and offering multiple venues for professional development. Thus, instructional leadership is of major importance to the success of students as well as teachers.

In addition, a study was carried out to explore teachers' perspectives of school principals' roles in public schools in Eritrea in facilitating change in teaching and learning processes (Fessehatsion, 2017). Also, he randomly selected sixty-two teachers to act as participants in the study. Moreover, he utilized interviews and questionnaires as a means of collecting data. In regards to the interviews, the teachers were asked to respond to

questions, focusing on the changes introduced by the principals, principals' supervisory roles, and the allocation of resources. Furthermore, the questionnaire revolved around four main aspects, which were leadership style and administration, resource allocation, principals' supervisory roles, and platforms for professional development. After analyzing the teachers' responses in the interviews, Fessehatsion had revealed that almost all teachers underscored the fact that school principals brought about drastic changes in schools in terms of peer coaching education, and workshops. Besides, all teachers admitted that school principals executed their supervisory roles effectively; principals were monitoring teachers' performances by conducting in-class visits constantly. Last, all teachers highlighted that school principals exerted great efforts to allocate the needed resources to all staff members. As for the leadership style and administration aspect in the questionnaire, 72.6% of the teachers agreed that they were given freedom to make classroom decisions, while 11.3% disagreed. Also, 80.77% of the teachers believed that the leadership style of their school principal is exemplary, whereas 3.2% disagreed. In addition, 88.7% reported being treated fairly by their school principals, yet 1.6% disagreed. Besides, 56.5% reflected that they were given many chances to make decisions on the school level, while 72.6% refuted such statement.

Furthermore, 56.5% consented on the fact that they are positively influenced by their principals, however 6.4% disagreed. In terms of the resource allocation aspect, 95.2% accentuated that they were provided with the needed materials and 60% agreed that the process of resource allocation is equitable. In case of the principals' supervisory role, 48% of the teachers agreed that peer coaching is greatly encouraged in their schools, while 51.6% refuted such statement. In addition, 87.1% of the teachers agreed that they are provided with constructive feedback, yet 64.5% rejected that statement. Also, 88% reported that their work is constantly monitored, while 11.3% of the teachers disagreed. Besides, 51.6% highlighted that the supervisory process is planned by the teachers and the principals, whereas 17.8% depicted that such process is planned by the teachers only. Last, 64.5% of the teachers assured that they are constantly encouraged to reflect on their practices, yet 14.6% rejected the statement. With regards to the professional development aspect, 87.1% agreed that discussions on the issues of instruction are encouraged, while 3.2% disagree. Moreover, 66.1% consented on the fact that all teachers are encouraged to gain knowledge, whereas 4.8% refuted the statement. Finally, 66.1% admitted that various development programs are offered for them in the schools, however 12.9% disagreed. Finally, if they effectively execute their roles, school principals can facilitate the learning and teaching processes.

In regards to the research, conducted on instructional leadership in Egypt, a study was launched in public schools to reveal teachers' viewpoints about principals' instructional behaviors (Al-Samadi & Al-Mahdy, 2016). Six-hundred and four teachers were randomly selected to act as participants in the study. Besides, the researchers employed a questionnaire as a data collection tool; it entailed principals' duties in forming a positive school climate, managing the instructional program, and creating a school mission. As a result, Al-Samadi, and Al-Mahdy unveiled, after the data analysis process, that all teachers provided low scores to the three dimensions, especially the last behavior. Unfortunately, such results reflected the incapacity of public school principals to exercise leadership roles. To sum up, principals' incapability to execute their leadership roles can impinge students' performance and achievement. Although research on instructional leadership is scarce in Egypt, there is plenty of literature in such scope in Africa and Lebanon.

First, a study was carried out in 8 public schools in Africa in an attempt to portray the features of instructional leadership, which lead to better teaching and learning (Merwe, 2016). Merwe employed interviews as a data collection tool in such a study. In addition, forty-eight teachers participated in the study. According to Merwe, the schools were selected for their excellent academic performance and physical infrastructure. In regards to their academic record, those schools "pertained to an annual pass rate of 90%" (p. 564). As for the physical infrastructure, such schools were equipped with the necessary gadgets. After the data analysis process, three themes were drawn: roles of school principals, factors hindering instructional leadership, and strategies for successful learning. First, all teachers agreed on that school principals as instructional leaders were in charge of developing the curriculum, motivating all teachers, nurturing teachers' growth, conducting class visits, creating a shared vision, motivating teachers, preventing teacher-parent conflicts, monitoring teaching and learning, and providing teachers with help and support. Second, interviews' responses were focused on factors, which hindered instructional leadership. One factor was time wasters, who were seen as a massive obstacle to such a process; yet being reminded constantly to adhere to time frames counteracted time wasters. Another factor, which impinged instructional leadership, was behaving unprofessionally; members' inability to tolerate criticism can lead to severe clashes with staff members. Third, all teachers referred to instructional techniques, leading to students' high academic achievement. Such techniques were motivating students, offering professional development to teachers, accommodating students' differences, integrating multiple methods of instruction, and mentoring teachers.

Furthermore, a research was launched in Lebanese public schools to discover the instructional leadership styles, adopted by the school principals. Two hundred and three tutors were randomly selected from

such schools to act as participants. Such participants were asked to select their principals' behaviour in a questionnaire using an attitude scale (Mattar, 2012). In fact, Mattar discovered that some statements, which described leadership styles, scored higher than others; such statements were: providing constant support to teachers, motivating them, conducting class visits, monitoring teachers' performance, and encouraging a spirit of collegiality. In contrast, some statements scored less by the teachers, which were: offering professional development, aiding teachers with lesson plans, monitoring students' achievement, evaluating teachers' performance, as well as providing teachers with feedback in regards to their performance. Therefore, it is safe to say that instructional leadership is essential to the enhancement of both students' and teachers' performances.

VI. CONCLUSION

In order to bridge the gap between high and low achievers, and provide quality education, principals had to exercise an array of instructional leadership practices. Accordingly, instructional leadership is esteemed as a fundamental process, aiming at enhancing teachers' performances, which will consequently augment students' achievements. In fact, instructional leadership practices entail many models, like peer coaching, action research, portfolio development, developmental supervision, and clinical supervision. Firstly, peer coaching is a process, in which teachers aid their colleagues in improving their teaching practices. Such a process includes pre-observation conference, classroom observation, and post-observation conference. In addition to peer coaching, action research is a well-known model of supervision, aiming at understanding classroom environments and improving teaching practices. When conducting action researches, teachers are mainly engaged in forming a research question which stems from classroom practices, choosing a tool to collect data, interpreting the data, and exploring the study's limitations. Besides, portfolio supervision is deemed as a thorough examination of the teaching process with a colleague or a supervisor. Such model rests on the fact that people engage in meaningful learning in the company of others. Also, developmental supervision is a model, which focuses on augmenting teachers' capacity as a means of enabling them to fulfil disparate learning goals for the students. Such a model is split into four categories: directive-control approach, directive informational approach, collaborative approach, and non-directive approach. Last, the clinical supervision model includes three main stages: pre-observation conference, classroom observation, and post-observation conference. In addition, when executing their instructional leadership roles, school principals admitted facing multiple obstacles, like successions, lack of pedagogical knowledge, implementation of plans, promoting positive school climate, and balancing job complexities. Regretfully, such challenges put the processes of teaching and learning in danger. Furthermore, since school principals' schedule is hectic, which wistfully obstructs them from achieving their instructional leadership roles, personnel, such as teachers, assistant principals, and department chairs exhibited sincere effectiveness in enhancing students' learning, amending teachers' instructional practices, developing curriculum, fostering teachers' growth, handling resources, observing and evaluating teachers, and providing continuous professional development.

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