The Profiles of Principals' Instructional Leadership in High, Moderate, and Low Performing Schools

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Abstract: This study aims to examine 1) the profiles of the principal instructional leadership in three different school categories, namely high, moderate, and low-performing public primary schools: and 2) the differences of, if any, principal instructional leadership in those three different school categories. This was a descriptive study. The respondents were 233 classroom teachers, from 10 selected public primary schools in Bandung District, West Java, Indonesia. They were required to fill up a questionnaire in which they assess the instructional leadership behaviors of their principal. The questionnaire was tested for its validity and reliability before being distributed to the respondents. The collected data was then analyzed using quantitative data analysis techniques. The results show that the profiles of principal instructional leadership in the three different school categories were relatively similar, viewed from the aspects of determining the school missions focusing on academic achievement, managing teaching programs, and developing a positive learning climate. Of those three dimensions, determining school missions was the most prominent. Looking at more details, supervising and monitoring students' learning, managing effective learning hours, and maintaining high visibility were the least performed. Finally, this study found that there was no behavioral difference in the principal instructional leadership in the three school categories

Keywords: instructional leadership, principal leadership

Introduction

The instructional leadership model first emerged in the USA in the early 80s. Since then, it has gained popularity as it is believed as an effective school leadership model to succeed in school reforms (Hallinger 2003; Lee, Hallinger, & Walker, 2012). Studies show that this leadership model, which focuses on instructions and curriculum, has a significant effect on student learning and achievement (Alig-Mielcarek 2003; Campbell, et al., 2019; Lee, Walker, & Chui 2012), commonly measured by student achievement in mathematics and language subjects (Darling-Hammond et al, 2009; Bush, 2014, Leithwood, Jantzi, & Steinbach, 1999; Mulford, 2008).

Today, the instructional leadership model does not seem to fade away. It is still considered one of the ideal school leadership models (Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Hallinger 2005; Hallinger, 2010; Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins 2008; Mattar 2012; Setwong & Prasertcharoensuk 2013) not only in Western but also in Asian contexts (Mulford, 2008). It is believed that this leadership model enables school leaders to meet the high pressure of school accountability, especially in terms of student academic achievement within school-based management's framework (Bush, 2011; Sofo et al., 2012).

Recent studies have shown that the effectiveness of this leadership model can be achieved through its contributions to school missions that are directed to improve students' learning and outcomes as well as teachers' teaching practices through effective professional learning (Campbell, et al., 2019). These findings are in line with previous studies showing that this leadership positively and significantly affects

teacher professional development (Blase & Blase, 1999) and teaching practices (Dinham, 2013) and may lead to the improvement of student academic achievement.

In Indonesia, the instructional leadership model is believed to be one of the most effective leadership models to improve education quality. It has been one of the topics delivered in national training for prospective school principals and current school principals since 2013 (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2013; Yusup, 2015). Interestingly since 2018, the training curriculum development has combined the topic of the instructional leadership model with change leadership. Therefore, the graduates of the training are expected to become professional school leaders who are competent to carry out their roles by applying instructional leadership and then successfully leading changes in schools.

Sofo, et al., (2012) who investigated instructional leadership in the Indonesian context share a similar view. They point out that the educational system in Indonesia needs to adopt this leadership model for the success of the school reform under a school-based management policy. This type of leadership is believed to be an effective strategy to improve and sustain school achievement, especially in terms of students' academic achievement. Also, it makes principals' administrative work which was previously just an effort to meet policy expectations for accountability become a part of student learning quality improvement.

However, recent studies suggest that there are some barriers to exercising instructional leadership (Andriani, 2017; Wahyudi, et al., 2019). Principals are not always able to carry out supervision duties. They conduct classroom observations, but post-observation feedback for teachers is not provided. They are highly occupied by managerial, administrative, and teaching duties. Thus, they manage supervision solely to meet the administrative requirements and government regulations. Also, the culture of being 'pekewuh' (feeling reluctant to give comments on others' performances) often becomes a barrier too.

This study aims to examine principals' instructional leadership profiles at primary schools that might face many barriers. To achieve this aim, two research problems are formulated: 1) What do the profiles of principals' instructional leadership in high, moderate, and low-performing public primary schools look like? 2) Are there any differences in principals' instructional leadership in those three different school categories?

Instructional Leadership Model

This study is mainly drawn upon Hallinger & Murphy's instructional leadership model. This leadership model is the most widely cited in many studies in various countries (Halllinger, Wang, Chen, & Li, 2015). This model conceptualizes instructional leadership in three dimensions, namely defining the school missions, managing instructional programs, and developing a positive learning climate (Hallinger & Wang, 2015)

Defining school missions

This activity is related to the principal's actions in communicating the school vision that focuses on learning and encouraging the school community to realize it. Therefore, this dimension has two functions, namely independently or collaboratively formulating the school academic objectives and sharing the formulated objectives while building common understanding simultaneously.

Managing Instructional Program

It is related to the principal's responsibility to monitor and evaluate teaching and coordinate the curriculum. These activities may be carried out by the principals themselves, or the tasks may be delegated to teachers or other school leaders who are competent.

Developing Positive Learning Climate

This activity is related to principals' efforts to create an environment that encourages and supports teachers and students to be active and productive in learning. This dimension includes 'securing' teaching time, promoting professional development, maintaining high leadership visibility, providing incentives for teachers, and providing learning incentives to students (Hallinger 2003, 2005; Hallinger & Lee 2014; Hallinger & Wang., 2015).

Methods

Research Design

This is a descriptive study aiming at explaining one variable, the principal's instructional leadership, without making comparisons or connections with other variables (Sugiyono, 2017).

Research Setting

This study was conducted in ten public primary schools located in Bandung, West Java, Indonesia. They were high, moderate, and low-performing schools in terms of student academic achievement. They were selected based on the criteria as follows:

1. The school performance was consistently high, moderate, or low, as measured by the average school exam scores of students in grade 6 for three consecutive years: 2017, 2018, and 2019. The information on school performance was obtained from the District Education Office of Bandung.
2. This study assessed the principals' instructional leadership from the teachers' perception. Thus, selected schools should have principals who had been serving there for at least one year.

Research Population

The population of this study was 223 teachers from the purposively selected schools. The list of the selected schools, the average school exam scores, principals' years of service, and the number of samples taken are presented in the table below.

Table 1. Research Respondents

School Performance		Average of School Exam Scores				Category	Year of Service (principal)	Number of samples (teacher)
		2017	2018	2019	Average scores in 3 years			
High	A1	221.94	224.04	231.08	225.69	High	3	30
	A2	230.17	215.42	221.97	222.52	High	4	19
	A3	232.85	223.20	232.55	229.53	High	3	36
	A4	242.85	216.88	216.03	225.25	High	1	23
Moderate	B1	207.28	230.82	207.24	215.11	Moderate	3	11
	B2	231.25	207.98	208.07	215.77	Moderate	1	39
	B3	223.90	213.55	199.45	212.30	Moderate	3	22
Low	C1	184.83	184.17	177.69	182.23	Low	4	7
	C2	183.93	167.36	173.75	175.01	Low	3	17
	C3	194.15	195.82	201.42	197.13	Low	8	19
Total Respondents								**223**

Data Collection Technique

Data were collected through a survey distributed to teachers from selected schools. They were required to fill in the questionnaires about their opinion on the instructional leadership practices of their principal.

Research Instrument

The instrument used in this study was a questionnaire adopted from the Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale (PIMRS) questionnaire originally developed by Hallinger and Murphy. The questionnaire had experienced some changes and recently, it was statistically tested for its validity and reliability (Bellibas et al., 2015). It measured principal instructional leadership from three dimensions, namely determining the school's missions, managing teaching programs, and developing a positive school climate. Those dimensions were developed into 10 sub-dimensions. Each sub-dimension was represented by 5 questions, so there were 50 questions in total. The Likert scale, 1-5, ranging from never to always, was used to measure the behavior.

The process of adopting the questionnaire covered some stages - translation process, item modification to Indonesian context, trial to 30 teachers, and testing the results of the trial to check the validity and reliability. The validity test employed the Product Moment Correlation formula, while the reliability was tested using Cronbach's alpha formula. The result of the tests showed that all items were valid because the r_{count} value (0.4439-0.8558) was greater than r_{table} (0.3494). The questionnaire was reliable because Cronbach's Alpha value was greater than 0.60, which is 0.979.

Data Analysis Technique

Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data. The statistical calculations included calculating the average score or mean (M) of respondents' answers. The lowest score of the respondent's answers was 1 and the highest score was 5. The results of this calculation were then used to categorize the principal's leadership.

The class interval to categorize the schools was calculated using Sekaran & Bougie's (2016) formula below.

$$Class\ Interval = \frac{The\ Highest\ Score - The\ Lowest\ Score}{The\ Number\ of\ Classes}$$

Based on the formula above, the class interval for each category is   5-13=1.33.

Table 2. The Category of Principals' Instructional Leadership (Sekaran & Bougie., 2016)

Range of Score	Category	Meaning
1.00 – 2.33	Low	Rarely performed
2.34 – 3.67	Moderate	Often performed
3.68 – 5.00	High	Frequently performed

This study also examined whether there were behavior differences among principals in three different school categories. Kruskal Wallis test formula with SPSS version 25 was used because the data were not normally distributed and not homogeneous (Ostertagová, Ostertag, & Kováč, 2014). It determines:

.   If the value of Asymp. Sig > 0.05, H_0 is accepted and there are no differences in instructional leadership among high, moderate, and low achievement schools.

a.   If the value of Asymp. Sig < 0.05, H_0 is rejected and there are differences in instructional leadership among high, moderate, and low achievement schools.

Results and Discussion

Result

1.   The profiles of Principals' Instructional Leadership in High, Moderate, and Low Performing Public Primary Schools

The profiles of principals' instructional leadership in high, moderate, and low-performing public primary are presented in the figure below.
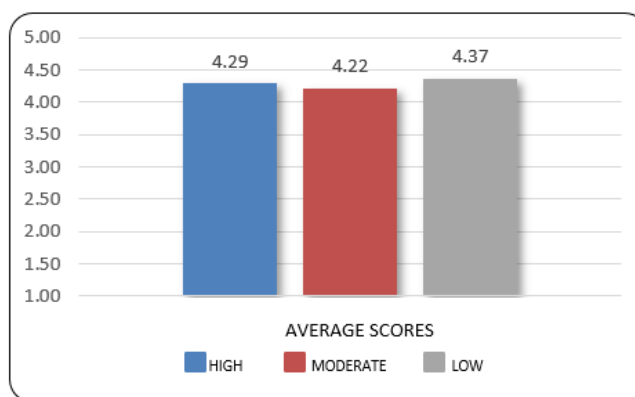

Figure 1. The Profiles of Principals' Instructional Leadership in High, Moderate, and Low Performing Public Primary Schools

Figure 1 shows that the average score in all school categories is similar, higher than 4. The principals working at low-performing schools gained an average score that is slightly higher than the principals in the other two school categories. It means that, according to the teachers, instructional leadership is often performed by school principals.

a.   Profile of Principals' Instructional Leadership in High Performing Public Primary Schools

The profiles of the principals' instructional leadership in high-performing public primary schools are presented in Figure 2.
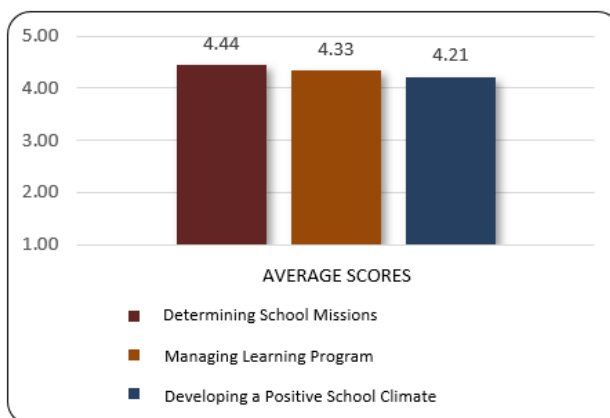
Figure 2. The profiles of Principals' Instructional Leadership in High Performing Public Primary Schools

Figure 2 shows that the average scores of the three dimensions are similar. The dimension of determining the school mission achieved the highest average score (4.44). Then, managing the teaching program was the second-highest dimension with an average score of 4.33. At last, the average score for developing a positive school climate dimension was 4.21.

The detailed results of principals' instructional leadership based on the 10 sub-dimensions are presented in Figure 3.
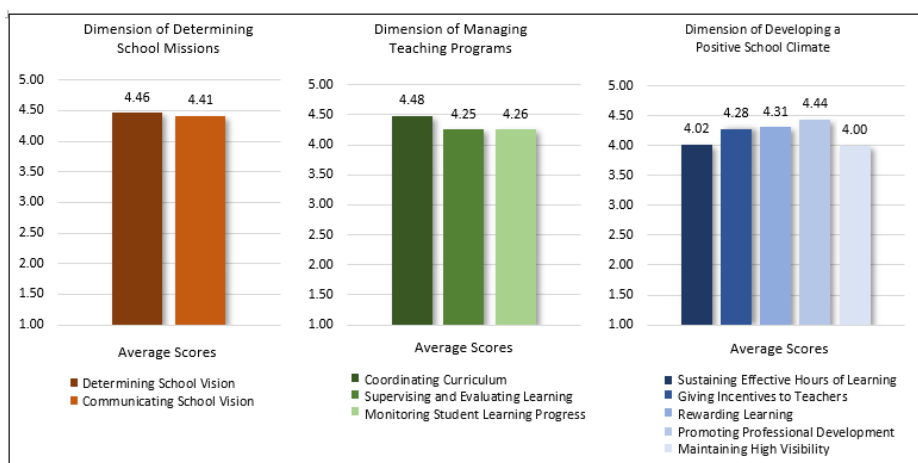

Figure 3. The profiles of Principals' Instructional Leadership in High Achievement Schools Viewed from the Sub-dimensions

Figure 3 shows that all sub-dimensions get high average scores, higher than 4 out of 5. This means that instructional leadership was often displayed by the principals. Further, some sub-dimensions gained scores lower than the average score of their dimension. These sub-dimensions were supervising and evaluating learning, monitoring student learning progress which are part of the managing teaching programs dimension; promoting professional development, and maintaining high visibility which was a part of the dimension of developing a positive school climate.

b. The Profiles of Principals' Instructional Leadership in Moderate Performing Public Primary Schools

The profiles of principals' instructional leadership in moderate achieving schools are presented in Figure 4
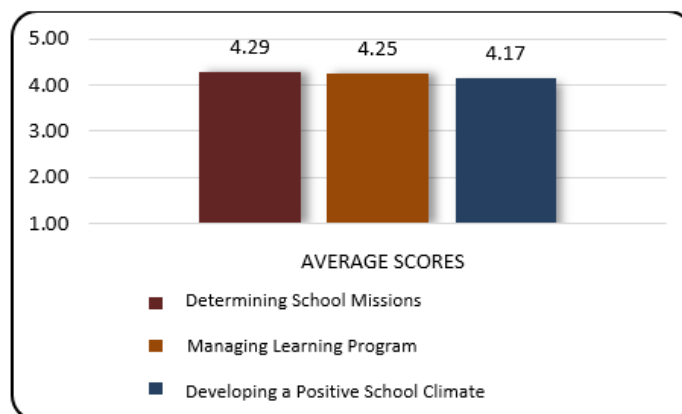
Figure 4. Profile of Principals' Instructional Leadership in Moderate Performing Public Primary Schools

Figure 4 shows that the average scores of the three dimensions are relatively similar. The dimension of determining the school mission gained the highest average score (4.29). It is followed by managing a teaching program with an average score of 4.25. At last, the average score for developing a positive school climate dimension was 4.17.

The further results of the profile of the principal's instructional leadership in moderate-performing public primary schools are viewed from the sub-dimensions presented in Figure 5.
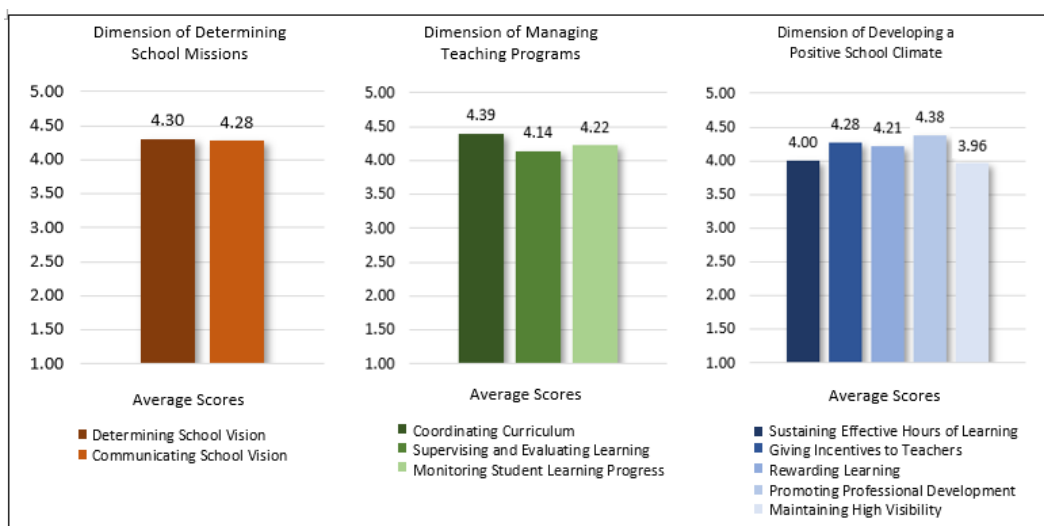

Figure 5. The Profiles of Principal's Instructional Leadership in Moderate Performing Public Primary Schools Viewed from the Sub-Dimensions

Figure 5 shows that 9 of the 10 sub-dimensions of instructional leadership achieved a high average score, which was equal to or greater than 4 with a maximum score of 5. This means that the principal often performed his role as an instructional leader. The figure also shows that some sub-dimensions namely supervising and evaluating learning, sustaining effective hours of learning, and maintaining high visibility gained a low average score within their dimension.

c.   The Profiles of Principal's Instructional Leadership in Low Performing Public Primary Schools
Figure 6 shows the profile of principals' instructional leadership in high-achieving schools seen from three dimensions.
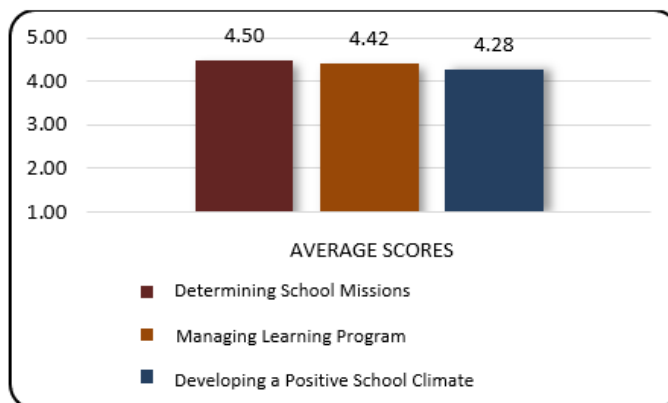
Figure 6. Profile of Principal's Instructional Leadership in Low Performing Public Primary Schools

Figure 6 shows that the average scores in the three dimensions are almost the same. The highest average score, 4.50, was obtained for the dimension of establishing the school's mission, followed by the dimension of managing learning programs, 4.42, and the dimension of developing a positive school climate, 4.28. The average scores in the three dimensions are almost the same.

The more detailed results of the profile of the principals' instructional leadership in low-performing public primary schools seen from the sub-dimensions are presented in Figure 7.
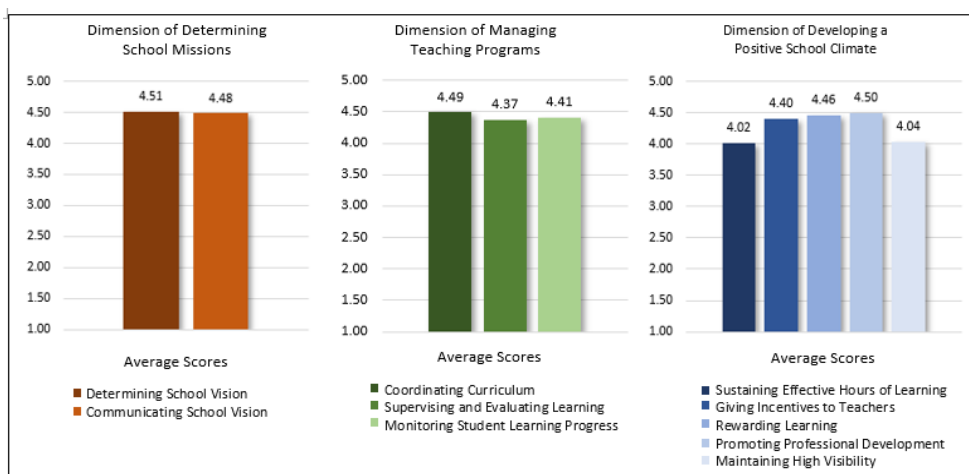

Figure 7. The Profiles of Principal Instructional Leadership in Low Performing Public Primary Schools Viewed from the Sub Dimensions

Figure 7 shows that 9 of the 10 sub-dimensions of instructional leadership achieved a high average score, which was equal to or greater than 4 with a maximum score of 5. This means that the principal often performed his role as an instructional leader. The figure also shows that some sub-dimension namely supervising and evaluating learning, promoting teacher professional development, and maintaining high visibility obtained the low or lowest average score within their dimension.

Based on the results, this study can conclude several points. First, the principal instructional leadership in high, moderate, and low-performing schools obtained a high average score, 4 out of a maximum score of 5. It means that, according to the teachers, this leadership role has been performed by the principals. Second, the principal instructional leadership was more evident in low-performing schools than in high and moderate ones indicated by its highest average score. Third, the principal instructional leadership profiles in the three school categories show similarity where the highest average score lies in the dimension of formulating the school's mission, followed by the dimension of managing teaching programs, and finally the dimension of developing a positive school climate. In addition, the low or lowest average scores in the three school categories are found in supervising and monitoring student learning progress, sustaining effective hours of learning, and maintaining high visibility.

2.   **Differences in Principal's Instructional Leadership in schools with high, moderate, and low achievement.**

This study conducted a different test to determine whether there were differences in the principals' instructional leadership behaviors in the three categories of schools, using a Kruskal Wallis test with SPSS Version 25 software.

Table 3. Results of Kruskal Wallis Test

Test Statistics[a,b]

Kruskal-Wallis H	2.466
df	2
Asymp. Sig.	.291

a.   Kruskal Wallis Test
b.   Grouping Variable: school_category

The test results show the Asymp value. Sig. is 0.291 or greater than 0.05 so H_0 is accepted. The conclusion is that there is no significant difference in the instructional leadership behaviors of principals in schools with high, medium, and low student achievements.

Discussion

The results show that the average value of principals' instructional leadership, viewed from three dimensions in the three different school categories was relatively high. It means that all principals in the three categories exercised and focused their leadership role on improving student learning and outcomes. The results of this study support the findings of the previous studies that in primary schools the role of the principal as an instructional leader is likely performed better than in secondary schools where school sizes tend to be larger with more complex structures (Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Hallinger & Murphy, 2012). The results also show that the profiles of the principal instructional leadership in the three school categories were relatively similar. It is believed that several conditions can partly explain the results of this study.

Principals in the three school categories scored the highest average on the dimensions of formulating school missions that were focusing on student learning and achievement. It shows that the principals had a clear vision and objectives which shared with school communities and were directed at improving student achievement. Hallinger and Heck (2010) indicate that a clear vision provides an overview of the intended direction while goals provide specific targets that need to be achieved to realize the vision. These give a focus to principals, teachers, and staff when performing their daily work (Gawlick, 2018). They know what they are doing or need to do, why they are doing it, and where it is going (Campbell, et al., 2019), which have an impact on the improvement of student achievement (Oznacar & Debes, 2020). In line with this, studies show that defining a mission has the most significant contribution to the improvement of student learning (Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Hallinger, Leithwood, & Heck, 2010). The principals also revealed, communicated, and built support and commitment within the school community to achieve the objectives (Al-Mahdy, Emam & Hallinger, 2018; Hallinger & Lee, 2014; Hallinger & Wang 2015; Shaked, et al, 2018).

Principals in all three school categories also scored high average on the dimension of managing instructional programs. It means that the principal had monitored and evaluated the learning process, coordinated the curriculum implementation, and monitored student learning progress (Al-Mahdy, Emam & Hallinger, 2018; Hallinger & Wang, 2015; Gawlik, 2018; Hallinger & Lee, 2014). They conducted class visits to monitor teaching and curriculum implementation. They also inspired teachers and provided feedback on their teaching practices (Hallinger et al, 2017; Pan, Nyeu, & Chen, 2015). Drawing upon such practices, principals had a better understanding of learning and teaching and what they wanted to improve. In the absence of it, they would not be able to work together effectively with teachers to improve learning (Neumerski, 2013). They should also be able to modify the curriculum to suit the needs and characteristics of students which would make students learn faster, and their potential developed optimally (Campbell, et al., 2019).

However, the more detailed results show that the dimension of managing instructional programs, supervising, and evaluating learning always obtained the lowest average scores in the three school categories. These findings are in line with Ahmad and Hussain's study (2015) that teaching supervision by school principals in Indonesia is generally weak. Principals did not always supervise their teachers.

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If they did, for example, conduct classroom observations, they did not provide post-observation feedback. Some reasons were the high managerial, administrative, and teaching workloads of the principals. As a result, most school principals did supervision only for completing administrative requirements or obeying government regulations. The "pekewuh" culture or the reluctance of supervising senior colleagues or those with higher education was also an obstacle (Andriani, 2017; Wahyudi, et al, 2019).

The studies in many different countries also identify similar obstacles to academic supervision faced by school principals. In Ghana, principals did not have time to supervise teachers. They did not provide meaningful feedback after conducting class observations because of their high teaching workload. Class observations were usually carried out briefly to meet the administrative requirements (Abonyi & Sofo, 2019). Similar conditions were found in Turkey (Gumus & Akcaoglu, 2013) and the United States (Gawlik, 2018). Principals obtained the lowest scores in staff development while teachers' teaching competencies were poor. According to the teachers, the underlying problem was related to the principal's high emphasis on managerial work (Gumus & Akcaoglu, 2013). Supporting the results of this study, Hallinger & Murphy (2012) found that day-to-day managerial tasks often consumed principals' time which hindered them to carry out their role as instructional leaders properly (Hallinger & Murphy, 2012). In South Africa, for example, principals were busy with financial management, human resource management, and school policy-making (Taole, 2013). In Ghana, principals were often busy with projects for facility development, school hygiene, and management of medical and first aid services (Oduro & Macbeath, 2003; Zame, Hope, & Repress, 2008). Therefore, it is not surprising that principals thought that their responsibility was more directed to administrative, and logistics as experienced by principals in Australia (Campbell, et al, 2019). Therefore, the research results suggest the need for principals to delegate or cooperate with vice-principals, heads of departments, and teacher leaders in carrying out teaching supervision (Al-Mahdy, Emam & Hallinger, 2018).

Principals from all three school categories also scored high on the dimensions of developing a positive learning climate. This means the principal had 'saved' teaching time; promoted professional development; maintained high leadership visibility; provided incentives for teachers; and provided learning incentives to students. In addition, principals developed a culture that encouraged and appreciated professional learning processes and continuous teacher professional development (Hallinger & Lee, 2014). One good example was encouraging professional discussions among teachers, both formal and informal, to overcome problems or weaknesses in classroom learning (Campbell, et al., 2019). Those leadership practices created an environment that motivated and supported teachers and students to be active and productive in learning at schools (Hallinger 2003, 2005; Hallinger & Lee 2014).

However, the results also show that on the dimension of developing a positive learning climate and sustaining effective hours of learning, the average scores were the lowest or close to the lowest one in the three school categories. One possible reason for this situation was the lack of teachers in primary schools. An insufficient number of primary school teachers often caused a condition in which a teacher must teach two classes at the same time. This made it difficult to create effective learning. The research results of Andriani et al. (2019) explain this situation, especially for primary schools in remote areas. To solve such a difficult situation, primary schools commonly recruit temporary or honorary teachers. Thus, the percentage of honorary primary school teachers in Indonesia is the largest compared to the number of them in secondary schools and special schools, which is 36.04% (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2018). Unfortunately, this solution has some issues related to low payment since the amount of payment depends on the school's financial condition. As a result, they usually need a side job to fulfill their financial needs. Considering this situation, primary school principals need to tolerate honorary teachers who must leave school or class early to work (Andriani, et al, 2019; Febriana, Karlina, Nurkamto, Rochsantiningsing, 2018). Supporting this finding, the results of ACDP's research (2014) show the average absenteeism rates of primary school teachers in class and high school are quite high - 13% and 9%.

In addition, maintaining high visibility also gained the lowest or close to the lowest one in the three school categories. It means that the principal did not always have time to talk to teachers and students to understand their issues, concerns, and opinions. The high workload of managerial, administrative, and teaching tasks as previously stated might be parts of the background. Indeed, recent studies in various countries show that the principals' workloads have been increasing significantly and are more complex which makes it difficult for principals to focus on their role as instructional leaders

(NSW Department of Education, 2017; Oplatka, 2017). Taking these results into account, Oplatka (2017) emphasizes the importance of a principal preparation program that can equip principals with the necessary skills to be able to cope with the high amount and complexity of principal work.

The results also show that there was no difference in the instructional leadership behaviors among principals in the three school categories. Accordingly, the findings encourage future research that explores instructional leadership in various contexts and its supporting and inhibiting conditions as, indeed, school instructional leadership is contextually bound (Gumus & Akcaoglu, 2013; Hallinger & Murphy, 2012; Lee & Hallinger, 2012). Moreover, the results of this study also reveal that the principal instructional leadership was more evident in low-performing schools where most students of the schools in this study come from underprivileged families. Their parents were less concerned with their children's education, and the school resources were inadequate.

Conclusion

In conclusion, principals at high, moderate, and low achieving primary schools had carried out their roles as instructional leaders assessed from three dimensions, namely formulating school missions that were focused on teaching, managing teaching programs, and developing a positive learning climate. Of the three dimensions, establishing the school's mission was the most noticeable dimension. In addition, in the dimensions of managing teaching programs and developing a positive learning climate, supervising, and monitoring student learning progress, handling effective hours of learning, and maintaining high visibility were the weakest behaviors.

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