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The role of the principal is developing an instructional leadership team in school

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The instructional leadership role is one of the most critical and necessary roles of a school leader to promote students' learning. However, it is a common notion that the principal solely is the instructional leader in a school. Thus, this paper aims to discover who else works as an instructional leader and how an instructional leadership team can be formed. Findings from a semi-systematic literature review show that the principal is not alone the instructional leader in a school. Instead, he/she is the leader of the instructional leadership team, and the assistant principals and the content experts are the members of this team. Moreover, the paper also finds that the principal's role is critical to forming an instructional leadership team for the students' better academic outcomes.

Key words: Instructional leader, principal, teaching-learning, learners, instructional leadership team, school.

INTRODUCTION

In the K-12 school, a principal performs many duties and responsibilities to run a school. Among the duties a school principal performs are: creating a mission and vision, policy implication, budgeting, operation and management, connecting community, communication, continuous professional development for the teachers and staff. The primary role of the principal is to facilitate teaching and learning. According to Wagner et al. (2006), the primary purpose of schooling is teaching the students to help them achieving knowledge for their academic success. The principal leads the teaching-learning being an instructional leader. So, instructional leadership is the most vital role of a school leader to show effective teaching-learning, and it has risen to importance as a guiding principle of leadership in education over the previous twenty to thirty years (Boyce and Bowers, 2018; Gurley et al., 2015; Salo et al., 2015).

In the 1990s, the principal used to set up academic goals, manage resources for instructions, monitor curriculum and lesson plan as the instructional leader in a school (Lashway, 2002). According to Horng and Loeb (2010), traditional instructional leadership was a strong directive principal focused on curriculum and instruction. The authors also said that conventional instructional leadership was not afraid to work directly with the teachers. The leader used to go to the classroom very often. In the past, instructional leadership was principal-centered with the image of a heroic leader (Lashway, 2002).

In the 21st century, there is a different definition of instructional leadership. The school leader's role and responsibilities have notably changed after the No Child Left Behind (NCBL) Act (Thessin, 2019). According to the author, the school principal does not focus narrowly only

on classroom instruction; rather, the principal facilitates teaching-learning being an instructional leader, carries a more sophisticated view of professional development, and takes data-driven decisions for teaching-learning. Boyce and Bowers (2018) say that the relentless growth of standards-based accountability puts heavy pressure on the school principal to bring out tangible academic success.

The National Association of Elementary School Principals (2001) defines instructional leadership as a "leading learning community," and says that the instructional leadership means motivating teachers to teach and create a safe teaching-learning condition in the school. Horng et al. (2010) conducted a study in three large urban school districts on instructional leadership. They conclude that schools show growth in academic achievement for strong instructional leadership of the leadership team in teaching and learning. The authors also comment that as an effective instructional leader, the principal in the school, hire, support, and retain good teachers while developing or removing the less effective ones for successful classroom instruction.

According to Edmonton Public Schools (2018), instructional leadership involves principals becoming leading-learners who successfully collaborate with other school leaders and nurture a learning community that supports and improves student achievement. Thus, the role of the principal in instructional leadership is critical for a school. This leadership role in the school is neither new nor straightforward. It is evolving day by day, and it is not confined to the principal. A school leader's instructional leadership can be compared to the captain of a ship who leads the crews and passengers to the right destination. So, this study aims to explore the role of the principal who works as the building administrator in forming an instructional leadership team in a school. The research question is, "How can a principal form an instructional leadership team to bring out the learners' academic success in a school?" The findings of this study will provide an understanding of the school leaders regarding instructional leadership in the 21st century to meet the students' academic needs.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This article's methodology consists of a semi-systematic literature review (Snyder, 2019). According to the author, a semi-systematic study focuses on the progress and development of a research topic overtime. The author also added that this methodology aims to identify and understand relevant research that has implications for the topic and synthesizes using narratives.

Search strategies

For finding relevant literature of this study, three electronic databases are searches for obtaining free of cost research or scholarly articles. The first electronic database was the Educational Resources Information Center Search Engine (ERIC). Then Google Scholars and Open Journals in Education (OJED.ORG) were also searched.

Search limit

The author of this paper did not confine the search in a time limit to explore the researchers' and scholars' understanding of instructional leadership in the past. It also gave the author a scope to compare with the present researches on instructional leadership. Moreover, the author did not limit the search only to the United States. The author wanted to discover how the researchers evaluated instructional leadership in the different parts of the world since the schools everywhere have the same underlying purpose.

Search term and key words

The following terms/keywords are used to search for literature: Instructional leadership; Effective school leader; Instructional leadership team; Leadership for student success.

Selecting sources

After collecting articles from the database, the abstract was read first, and then the whole paper (when necessary). These readings gave the selection of 10 empirical research papers, 3 scholarly articles, 3 dissertations, 1 policy paper, and 1 meta-analysis that were relevant to this research paper.

Data

After reading and reading the secondary sources' abstract, findings, and conclusions, a summary for each source was recorded as data for this study.

Analyzing

Interpretive thematic analysis (Clarke et al., 2015) was used in this study to analyze data. According to the authors, interpretive thematic analysis finalizes themes from the meaning and the interpretation of the data. The following six steps of the analyzing process (Braun and Clarke, 2019) were used to finalize the themes: Familiarization: Reading and rereading the data; Coding: Identifying patterns or code from reading; Initial theme: Clustering codes and developing themes; Reviewing theme: Rereading theme from the previous step for better generalization; Defining theme: Finalizing themes; Reporting: Writing the report.

Positionality

The researcher was a high school assistant principal and principal. Besides, the researcher was a teacher trainer. Additionally, the researcher is now a scholar in an educational leadership program. The researcher was aware of his bias based on his experiences. However, the researcher has taken his positionality as a form of reliability (Creswell and Poth, 2018). Thus, the researcher"s experience has given an extra lens to conduct the study with reliability.

RESULTS

From the aforementioned analysis process, the following

three themes came out.

(1) Forming an instructional leadership team with experts.
(2) Managing instructional mismatch.
(3) Fostering teacher leadership to support the instructional leadership team.

Forming an instructional leadership team with experts

A team is a group of contributors who work together to provide a promising solution for a shared mission and vision (Forsyth, 2018). Thus, in the school, the principal's collaboration with other curriculum and instruction experts forms an instructional leadership team (Heffernan and Longmuir, 2019). According to the authors, the principal solely is not the instructional leader in a school and cannot achieve the academic target alone; instead, he/she is the leader of the instructional leadership team. Thus, an instructional leadership team is crucial to guide teaching-learning to attain student academic success (Stamper and Elder, 2019).

The principal needs to take the leading role in forming an instructional leadership team in a school. According to Edwards and Gammell (2016), "by bringing a small group of teachers and instructional coaches together to form an instructional leadership team, a principal can tap into the collective wisdom and energy of the staff to help move a school forward" (p. 20). Thus, the principal must acknowledge that the school needs an instructional leadership team with a group of assistant principals and content expert teachers to meet students' academic achievement needs. The principal must make sure that the instructional leadership team has an expert in each content area taught in the school. The different assistant principals should have expertise in a separate subject of teaching. Then the principal should include experienced and competent teachers based on the needs of the team. Besides, the principal can include the resource teachers of the core subjects (e.g., math, reading) in the team contacting the school district to form a balanced and effective instructional leadership team.

Additionally, the principal can form an instructional leadership team collaborating with other schools in the district. Liou and Daly (2020) define this team as the "Network for the instructional leadership team." According to the authors, this kind of leadership approach brings variety in coaching and guides teachers for various classroom approaches as experts from the different schools with different expertise work on that team.

The motto of creating a leadership team in a school is to support the classroom teachers for their useful classroom instructions. As the team leader, the principal should ensure that every classroom teacher is getting coordinated and balanced support from the instructional team members. The team members also should keep in mind that their work should be learner-focused, and their

contribution can make a positive change in the students' academic achievement (Godden, 2019). However, some issues might come up if any member of the leadership team shows authority while supervising rather than support the teachers (Weiner, 2016). Thus, the principal must be careful about these kinds of issues, affecting the teaching-learning environment.

So, in a nutshell, the principal should look for collaboration with one content and pedagogy expert in the subjects taught in the school to form an instructional leadership team. This collaboration might be intraschool and interschool based on the needs of the school.

Managing instructional mismatch

It is uncommon that the principal and the assistant principals have expertise in all subjects they supervise. A supervisor might have in-depth content and pedagogical knowledge in one discipline but has to oversee a grade-level where he/she needs to guide several teachers in several content-based courses. This supervisor will not be able to monitor, coach, or guide all teachers in that grade level, and it is called an instructional mismatch (Fuentes and Jimerson, 2019). According to the authors,

most leaders end up working either with teachers in grade levels they did not teach (e.g. a secondary teacher who becomes an elementary school administrator) or with teachers in unfamiliar content areas (e.g. a former mathematics teacher who supervises social studies and English language arts teachers) (p. 32).

This instructional mismatch is not uncommon, and the instructional leadership team needs to minimize this issue with the following initiatives.

(1) Recruiting assistant principal on content-based (Chitamba, 2019): The principal must hire assistant principals based on their expertise in the subject area that a school needs.
(2) Managing content expert (Ermeling and Yarbo, 2016): Only a principal and a few assistant principals cannot cover all subjects taught in a school. The principal must include content experts (skilled and experienced teacher, resource teacher) in the instructional leadership team for every subject.
(3) Supervising based on content, not the grade level (Fuentes and Jimerson, 2019): As the leader of the instructional leadership team, the principal must make sure that, the instructional team members supervise and assist based on their expertise. An instructional team member should not oversee teaching and learning a subject area where he/she does not have enough knowledge.
(4) Gaining knowledge of a different content-based subject (McNeill et al., 2018): The principal and the assistant principals should gain knowledge on different subjects other than their expertise. When there is a

shortage of experts in the instructional leadership team, they can manage it.

(5) Fostering relationship with content experts outside of the school (Robinson, 2020): The principal should make a good connection with the content experts outside of the school. This relationship will help the principal in including experts in the instructional leadership team.

From the aforementioned discussion on managing instructional mismatch, it is evident that subject-based experts are necessary to assist teachers with content and pedagogy in an instructional leadership team. It will be a mismatch when a person supervises without expertise in that subject. Thus, the principal should manage or develop experts for all subject areas taught in the school to manage instructional mismatch in the supervision.

Fostering teacher leadership to support instructional leadership team

The classroom teacher is one of the most influential persons in students" lives. Thus, the role of a classroom teacher should not be confined only to classroom instruction. These teachers need a leadership role in the overall development of the students (Wilson, 2016). According to the author, teacher leadership refers to the teachers" initiatives to support and improve teaching beyond their classroom. Teacher leadership forms learning teams that engage in a learning cycle that includes analyzing data, setting learning goals, and implementing new instructional strategies to bring students" academic success. Lowery-Moore et al. (2016) say that teacher leadership is not parallel leadership with the school leadership team. It is "just a teacher" to "teacher leader." The authors define teacher leadership as the teachers" "perceptions of personal and professional growth in knowledge, skills, and dispositions, as well as confidence in abilities as change agents who positively influence school environments" (p. 1). According to these authors, teacher leadership can bring out the teachers (a) confidence and well-being as a teacher; (b) a better use of research and assessment to drive curricular and instructional decisions with a concomitant greater awareness of multicultural decision points; and (c) a deeper understanding of the relationship of the classroom and the classroom teacher to the school and the community (p. 5).

The importance of teacher leadership is unquestionable. They are the leader of change in school. Researches show that teacher leadership helps to form professional learning communities to move the school forward and promote students" academic achievement (Jacobs, 2016; Wilson, 2016). Sebastian et al. (2016) say that the school leadership team can promote teacher leadership by engaging teachers in the organizational decision-making process. Berg et al. (2019) propose three programs that

the school leadership team can apply to form teacher leadership. These are

(1) Arranging preparatory programs for teachers to enhance their skills that help them to lead teaching-learning.
(2) Positioning the teachers in leadership role based on their expertise.
(3) Formally recognizing the teacher through the award, or other forms of appreciation for their leadership role teaching-learning and other activities that foster students" learning.

Teacher leadership has a positive effect on student outcomes as it has a significant contribution in developing curriculum, designing instructional practices, and assessing learning outcomes in the school (Shen et al., 2020). Similarly, Sebistian et al. (2016) showed that teacher leadership helped the principal to achieve better academic outcomes in the school through their influential works related to classroom instruction.

Thus, teacher leadership is essential in school. This leadership role will empower teaching and learning as the teacher directly connects with the students. They can identify collaboration with other experts and provide significant support to the instructional leadership team. When a teacher gains expertise in a subject area can contribute to the instructional leadership team.

DISCUSSION

The literature review research aims to find answers to how a principal can form an instructional leadership team to bring out the learners' academic success in a school. After reading and rereading a number of scholarly works, this study has found three final themes, and these are (1) forming instructional leadership team with experts, (2) managing instructional mismatch, and (3) fostering teacher leadership to support instructional leadership team.

The first theme shows that the main task of a principal is to lead teaching and learning to achieve the students' academic success. However, a principal alone cannot accomplish this task as the principal does not have expertise in all subject areas taught in a school. Thus, the principal should not be the instructional leader alone. He/she should form an instructional leadership team with the assistant principals and the content experts (e.g., experienced and skilled teachers, resource teachers) to lead teaching-learning.

The second theme shows that the principal must recruit members in the instructional leadership team on each content area that is taught in school. The principal should be strategic in hiring assistant principals based on their expertise in the subjects. Two assistant principals must not be hired who have expertise in the same subject. The

principal then recruits or manages content and pedagogy experts other than the assistant principals' and principal's subject area. As the instructional leadership team leader, the principal should make sure that a specific content expert is monitoring and assisting teachers on that subject.

The instructional leadership team can excellently foster teacher leadership to promote teachers to be creative and make them more meaningfully active in teaching-learning. Lumpkin et al. (2014) say that teacher leadership motivates the teachers to "transform classrooms into learning laboratories where every student is engaged in relevant and well-designed curricular content, every teacher embraces the use of more effective instructional strategies, and authentic assessments provide evidence of rich student learning" (p. 59). The instructional leadership team should engage the teachers in achieving school goals' by promoting teacher leadership. Additionally, through the teacher leadership program, new instructional leaders will come out and serve in the instructional leadership team.

So, the principal's role in forming an instructional leadership team is the most crucial as student academic outcome is the focus of a school. The principal's well-planned activities and well-communication with the assistant principals and the senior teachers who have expertise in the content are needed. The principal should lead the instructional leadership team with integrity. The leadership team must create policies that make them accountable for the activities and so the teachers.

Limitations

The first limitation of this study is that it has used secondary sources as data. Secondly, all of the scholarly works were not empirical studies. Third, this study has not shown any possible challenges for the principal to form an instructional leadership team. So, research can be done to understand the principal"s perception and challenges in developing an instructional leadership team in a school.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

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