CURRENT PRACTICES OF BASIC EDUCATION HIGH SCHOOL PRINCIPALS AS INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERS

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Abstract

This study aimed to investigate the practices of basic education high school principals as instructional leaders in selected basic education high schools. Mixed-method research design was used in this study. For quantitative study, two research instruments, questionnaire (1) for principals and questionnaire (2) for senior teachers, including seven instructional leadership practices developed by Chell (2002), were used to collect data. Survey data were collected from 131 participants (5 principals and 126 teachers), and 10 participants were interviewed. Descriptive statistics, one-way ANOVA and Post Hoc Multiple Comparison Tests (Turkey HSD) were used to analyze the data in this study. Analysis of principals' instructional leadership rated by principals themselves revealed that principals from high schools in Monywa township practised positive school climate, group development, and school and community involvement mostly as their important instructional leadership practices. On the other hand, teachers' perceptions of their principals' instructional leadership practices indicated that the principals most frequently practiced positive school climate, group development, and curriculum implementation. There were significant differences in instructional leadership practices among selected high schools. This study suggests that good instructional leadership requires collaboration with colleagues to solve instructional problems.

Keywords: Instructional leader, Instructional leadership, School principal

Introduction

Education is the most important factor for producing qualified human resources, which is vital for the progress of every country. The need for education has now become as fundamental and crucial as the need for food. Moreover, the demand for education is of unprecedented dimensions and strength. For the continual fulfilment of the demand, school is the key component of the whole educational process. The school occupies a very important position in the life of the child and makes major contributions to the growth and development of the school child. Like any other organization, schools need strong leadership to succeed or achieve their set goals and objectives; hence, leadership and management are needed for an effective school.

Marzano (2003) has argued that leadership is the most crucial component of any school reform, and it may be the most crucial component of successful school reform. However, Heck, Larsen and Marcoulides (1990) opine that the behaviors and practices of the head teacher have an indirect impact on students' achievement: In managing the work structure of the school, principals do not affect the achievement of individual students in the same manner that teachers do, that is, through direct classroom instruction. Nonetheless, principals have the responsibilities of making decisions about how to set school goals and organize classrooms for instruction. In fact, principals' leadership can influence in creating a conducive learning environment for students. Therefore, principals' good leadership practices can contribute to students' academic achievement and school excellence.

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Significance of the Study

In the 21st century, one of the main focus areas in education has been the ongoing demand for increased accountability to promote student achievement. National and state expectations require schools to ensure that all students achieve mastery of curriculum objectives, and local schools focus on implementing those requirements to the best of their ability. As a result, leading instructional efforts in a school has evolved into a primary role for school principals.

Strong instructional leadership by the school principal is essential for achieving academic excellence. Thus, it is the principal who should forge a partnership with teachers with the primary goal of the improvement of teaching and learning processes (Hoy & Miskel, 2006). Instructional leadership is a series of behaviors that is designed to affect classroom instruction. In this regard, principals are responsible for informing teachers about new educational strategies, technologies and tools that apply to effective instruction (Davies, 2003, cited in Abdullah, 2009).

Nowadays, every school needs effective instructional leaders who are well-prepared and capable of leading the changes in instructions that will result in higher levels of achievement for all students. Many principals understand that they should take instructional leadership responsibilities, but it is rare to practice effective instructional leadership in daily life (Chell, 1995). By investigating the current practices of basic education high school principals as instructional leaders, certain measures of improvement in education will be explored. In this way, this research may be helpful for the effective continuous development of instructional leadership skills of principals and for upgrading the quality of education.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of the study is

- to investigate practices of basic education high school principals as instructional leaders based on supervision of instruction, staff development, curriculum implementation, group development, action research, positive school climate, and school and community involvement.

The specific objectives of the study are as follows:

- To investigate the principals' self-reported instructional leadership practices
- To explore the instructional leadership practices of principals as perceived by teachers
- To find out whether there is any difference in the perceptions of principals' instructional leadership between principals and teachers
- To examine whether there is any significant difference in instructional leadership practices among the selected schools

Research Questions

This study deals with the following research questions:

1. What are the most important instructional leadership practices rated by principals themselves?
2. What are the most important instructional leadership practices indicated by teachers?
3. What differences are there in the perceptions of principals' instructional leadership between principals and teachers?
4. Is there any significant difference in instructional leadership practices among the selected schools?

Definitions of Key Terms

- **Instructional Leader:** Instructional leader is one who involve themselves in setting clear goals, allocating resources to instruction, managing the curriculum, monitoring lesson plans and evaluating teachers to promote growth in student learning (Flath, 1989).
- **Instructional Leadership:** Instructional leadership is simply behavior influencing (particularly encouraging) student achievement (Weisman & Goesling, 2000).
- **School Principal:** School principals are school leaders who have been entrusted with the responsibilities of heading the schools for the purpose of achieving the set objectives and goals. They are instructional supervisors who influence teachers' instructional activities for improvement of academic achievement (Samoei, 2014).

Theoretical Framework

The primary goal of instructional leadership is to improve student learning. The principal has the responsibility of instructional leadership to shape and create schools where students continue to learn. Glickman (1990) offers many suggestions for becoming a successful instructional leader. Using his works as the base and including other research findings, effective instructional leadership is comprised of seven major practices such as supervision of instruction, staff development, curriculum implementation, group development, action research, positive school climate, and school and community involvement (Chell, 2002).
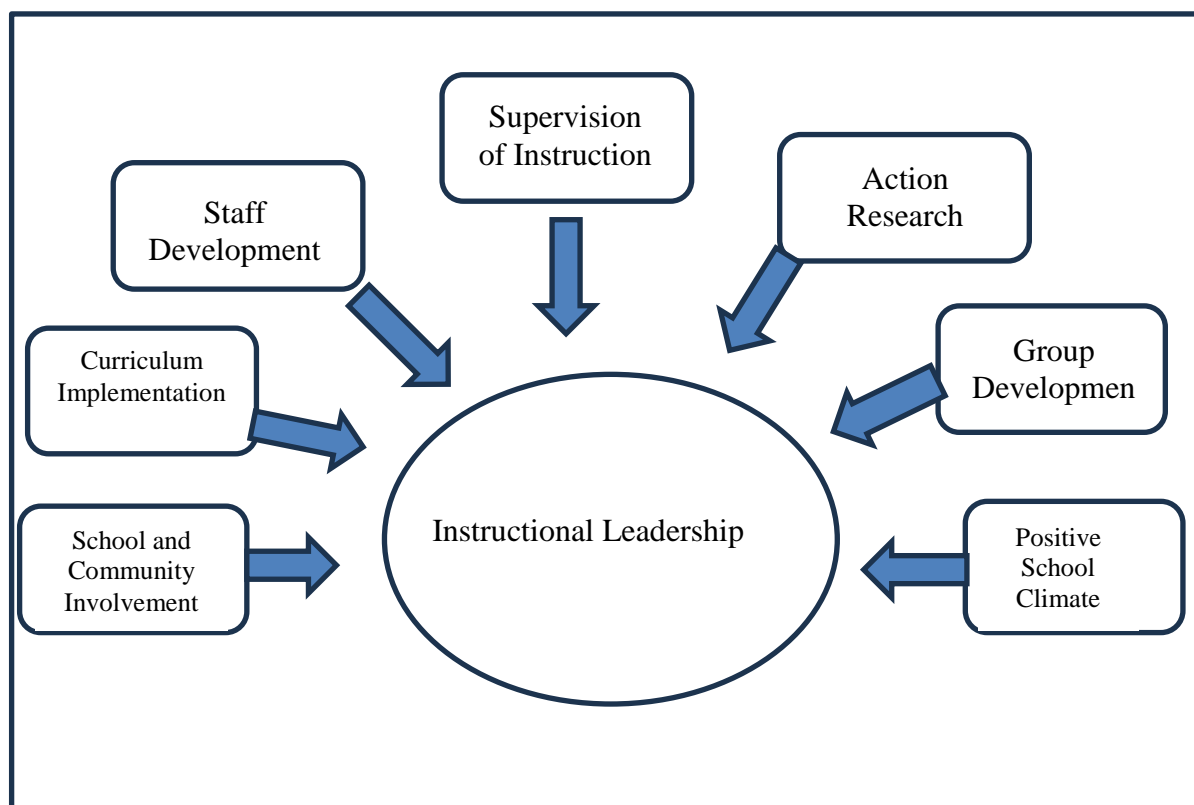
Figure 1 Model of Instructional Leadership

Source: Chell (2002).

(1) Supervision of Instruction

Supervision is one way of assisting teachers in enhancing their instruction. Glickman's (1990) model of clinical supervision offers a comprehensive framework that includes (a) teacher pre-conferencing (b) classroom observation techniques (c) analysis or interpretation of observation based on directives or interpersonal interactions (d) a post-conference for corrective measures, and (e) critique.

(2) Staff Development

Principals can use purposeful in-service training to improve teachers' instruction. On the other hand, teachers must always be learning as education is a lifetime endeavor. Some of the ways that teachers can continue their learning are school in-service days, workshops, university courses, staff meetings, school visits, conferences, travel, and professional reading.

(3) Curriculum Implementation

The curriculum of the school consists of educational objectives, knowledge, learning experiences and evaluation. Instructional focus has shifted from being passive and teacher-directed to being active, transactional, and student-centered. The nature of interpersonal interactions has changed. As a result, interpersonal relationships between teacher and students can increase empowerment, divergent contacts and cooperation of students.

(4) Group Development

Having collaborative skills with teams to solve educational issues is one of the principals' instructional leadership practices. This principal's leadership abilities involve an understanding of effective groups and group leadership styles. Moreover, addressing problematic members and settling issues are also important.

(5) Action Research

In school context, teachers conduct action research to examine their teaching methods with the main goal of enhancing their instruction. According to Glickman (1990), it involves defining objectives, planning—which includes schedules, tasks, required resources, and data to be gathered—evaluating—which entails gathering, analyzing, and interpreting the data—and, lastly, adjusting or changing the initial objectives.

(6) Positive School Climate

The principal plays a pivotal role in fostering an environment that facilitates the learning of students. Buffie (1989) asserts that in order to create a positive school climate, the principal and staff must work together to identify supportive elements and those that inhibit a positive climate.

(7) School and Community Involvement

Schools exist in the centre of every community. The principal must take an important role in fostering the relationships between the school and the community that are mutually beneficial. There are numerous ways that the community can support a school's learning environment. For example, in finding volunteers to assist at school events, selecting speakers for the classroom, serving as a mentor. Furthermore, research has shown that when parents show interest in their children's education and take an active role in it, student achievement increases. The principal may consult with parents and community groups before making decisions. Parents should be encouraged to take on leadership roles and participants in school activities should be invited.

Methods

Research Method: In this study, mixed-method research design was used. As quantitative approach, survey research design was used and as research instrument, a questionnaire based on Chell's instructional leadership tasks (2002) was used in order to gather the required data. As qualitative approach, semi-structured interview was conducted to capture phenomenon related to instructional leadership in schools.

Sample: For survey research, the sample comprised five Basic Education High Schools in Monywa Township. A total of 5 principals and 126 teachers were selected from six Basic Education High Schools in Monywa Township. Moreover, ten teachers from selected high schools were selected as participants and engaged in the semi-structured interview process.

Instruments: The survey questionnaire was developed for principals and for teachers after studying Chell's (2002) instructional leadership tasks. The questionnaire measures seven dimensions: supervision of instruction, staff development, curriculum implementation, group development, action research, positive school climate, school and community involvement. Each of the seven dimensions is measured using seven items. It included questions regarding background information and the current instructional leadership practices with 49 items where answers could be given on a 5-point Likert scale, including (1) never, (2) rarely, (3) sometimes, (4) often, (5) always.

The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with 10 participants who wish to participate in exploring the most important instructional leadership practices. The interview took between 20 and 30 minutes, with eight questions.

Procedure: After the permission had been received from the responsible person, questionnaires were distributed in selected Basic Education High Schools in Monywa Township, Sagaing Region. All the questionnaires were collected after two weeks and were completely answered.

The interview data were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim. Transcripts were reviewed and analyzed into the new emerging themes emerged from the data related to instructional leadership practices.

Data Analysis: Descriptive statistics was used in order to know the mean and standard deviation and one-way ANOVA was conducted to test significant differences among schools on instructional leadership practices.

Ethical Considerations: Firstly, the researcher ensured that the participants were aware the research purpose. Participation in the research was voluntary, and withdrawal was possible at any time if they should feel insecurity and uneasy.

Findings

Quantitative Research Findings

The purpose of the study was to investigate practices of basic education high school principals as instructional leaders. The data were analyzed in terms of mean values and ANOVA, Post Hoc Multiple Comparisons (Turkey HSD). The findings were presented in the following.

Table 1 shows the mean scores for principals' instructional leadership practices rated by principals themselves. According to the principals' ratings, among five selected high schools, it was found that "positive school climate", "group development" and "school and community involvement" were the most important instructional leadership practices performed by principals.

Table 1: Mean Values for Principals' Instructional Leadership Practices Rated by Principals

Instructional Leadership Practices	Schools					Total
	A	B	C	D	E	
Supervision of instruction	4.57	4.71	4.71	4.14	4.57	4.54
Staff Development	4.57	4.14	4.57	5.00	4.43	4.54
Curriculum Implementation	4.71	5	4.14	4.71	4.71	4.66
Group Development	4.71	4.71	4.43	5.00	5.00	4.77
Action Research	5.00	4.57	4.29	5.00	4.86	4.74
Positive School Climate	4.86	4.86	5.00	5.00	5.00	4.94
School and Community Involvement	4.29	5.00	4.57	5.00	5.00	4.77
Overall	4.67	4.71	4.53	4.84	4.79	4.71

Scoring Direction: 1.00-1.49= low   2.50-3.49=satisfactory   4.50-5.00= high
                              1.5-2.49=moderately low   3.50-4.49= moderately high

Table 2 shows the mean scores for principals' instructional leadership practices rated by teachers. According to the teachers' ratings, among five selected high schools, it was found that creating "positive school climate", "group development" and "curriculum implementation" were the most important instructional leadership practices performed by principals.

Table 2:Mean Values for Principals' Instructional Leadership Practices Rated by Teachers

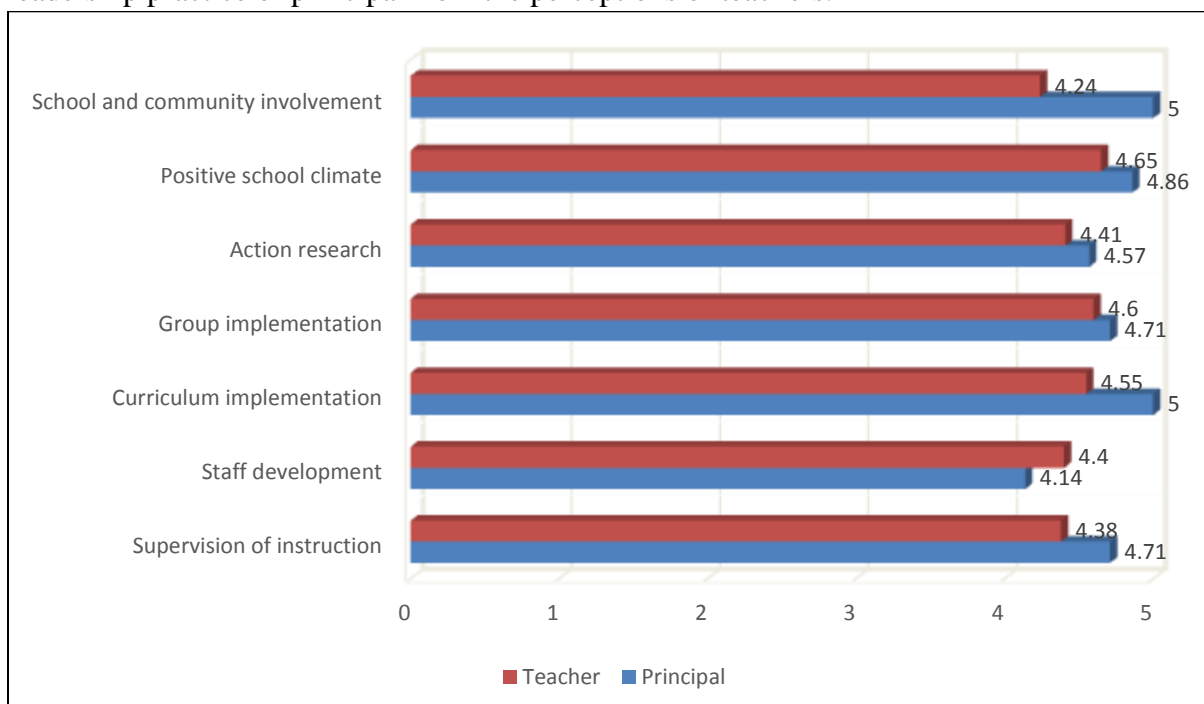| Instructional Leadership Practices	Schools					Total
	A	B	C	D	E	
Supervision of instruction	4.33	4.38	3.69	3.84	3.82	4.03
Staff Development	4.42	4.40	3.75	3.93	3.91	4.10
Curriculum Implementation	4.79	4.55	3.84	4.23	3.98	4.29
Group Development	4.72	4.60	3.67	4.41	4.22	4.37
Action Research	4.47	4.41	3.63	4.24	3.85	4.15
Positive School Climate	4.69	4.65	4.39	4.56	4.51	4.57
School and Community Involvement	4.47	4.24	4.01	4.14	3.96	4.16
Overall	4.56	4.46	3.85	4.19	4.04	4.33

Scoring Direction: 1.00-1.49= low   2.50-3.49=satisfactory   4.50-5.00= high
                              1.5-2.49=moderately low 3.50-4.49= moderately high

Figure 2 demonstrates the perceptions of principal and teachers from School A about instructional leadership practices. The principal's perception showed that "action research" was the most important instructional leadership practice. However, "curriculum implementation" was the most important instructional leadership practice of principal from the perceptions of teachers.
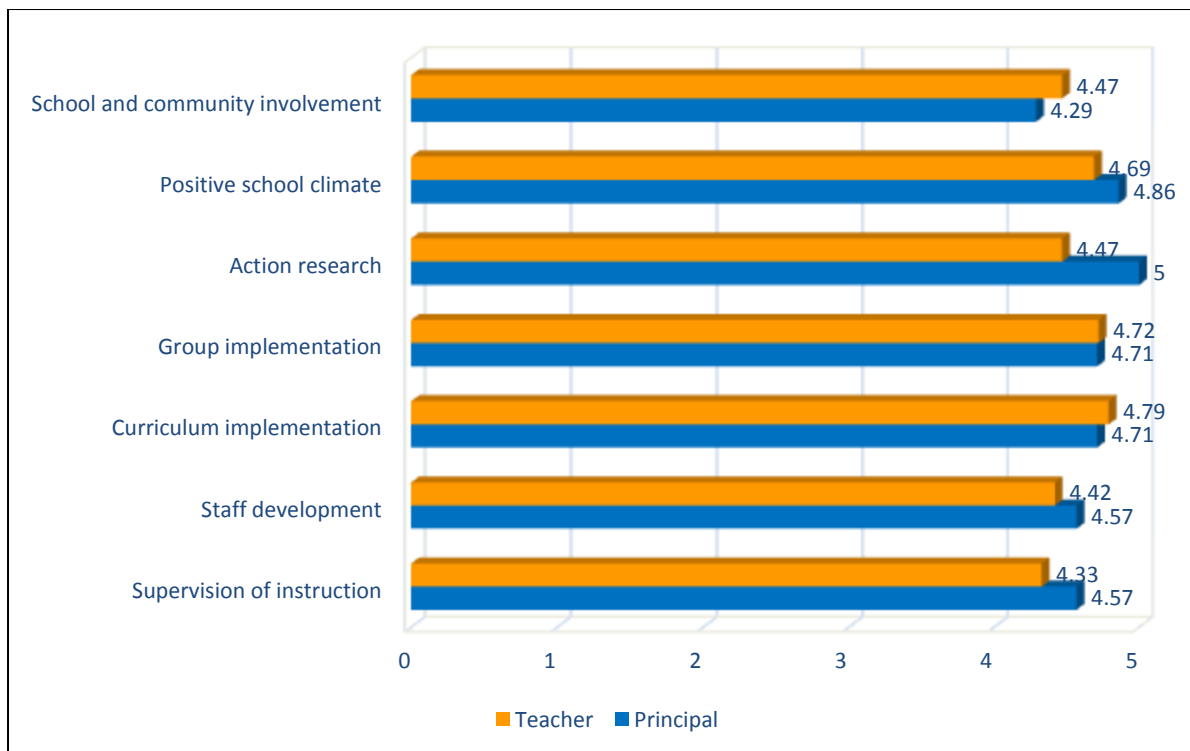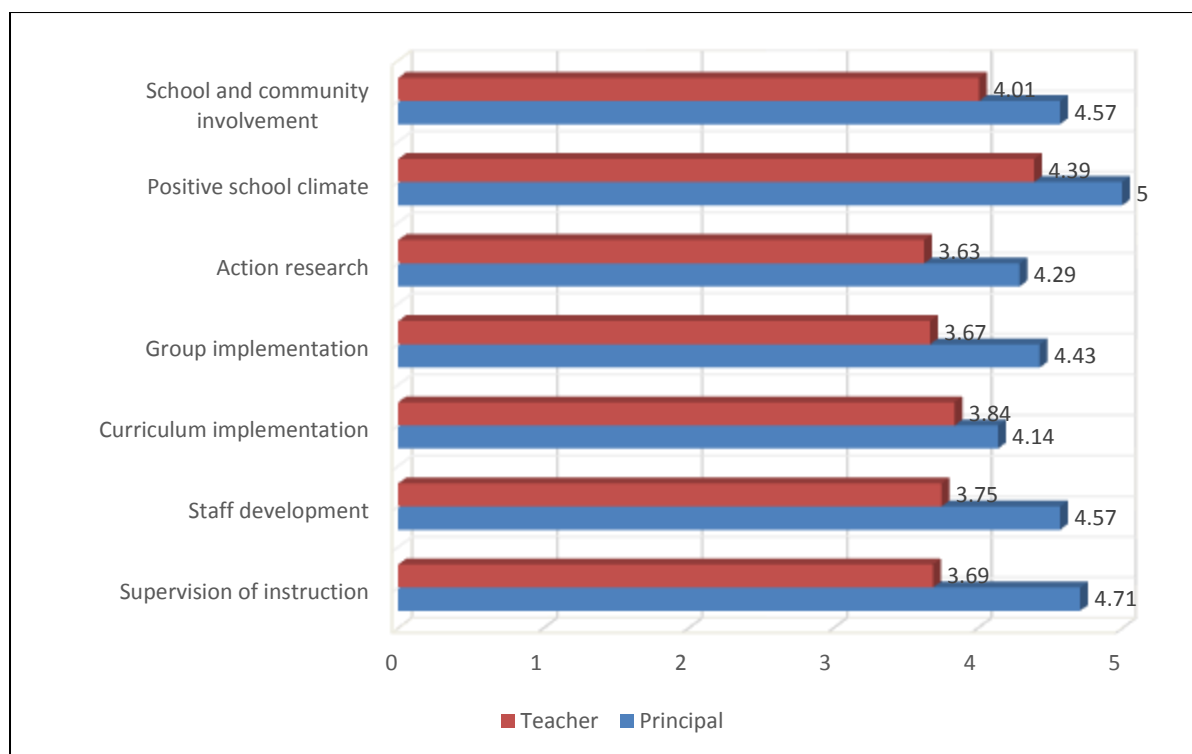
Figure 2: Mean Values of Instructional Leadership Practices rated by the principal and the teachers for School A

Figure 3 shows the perceptions of principal and teachers from School B about instructional leadership practices. According to the principal's perception, "curriculum implementation" and school and community involvement" were the most important instructional leadership practices. However, "positive school climate" was the most important instructional leadership practice of principal from the perceptions of teachers.

Figure 3: Mean Values of Instructional Leadership Practices rated by the principal and the teachers for School B
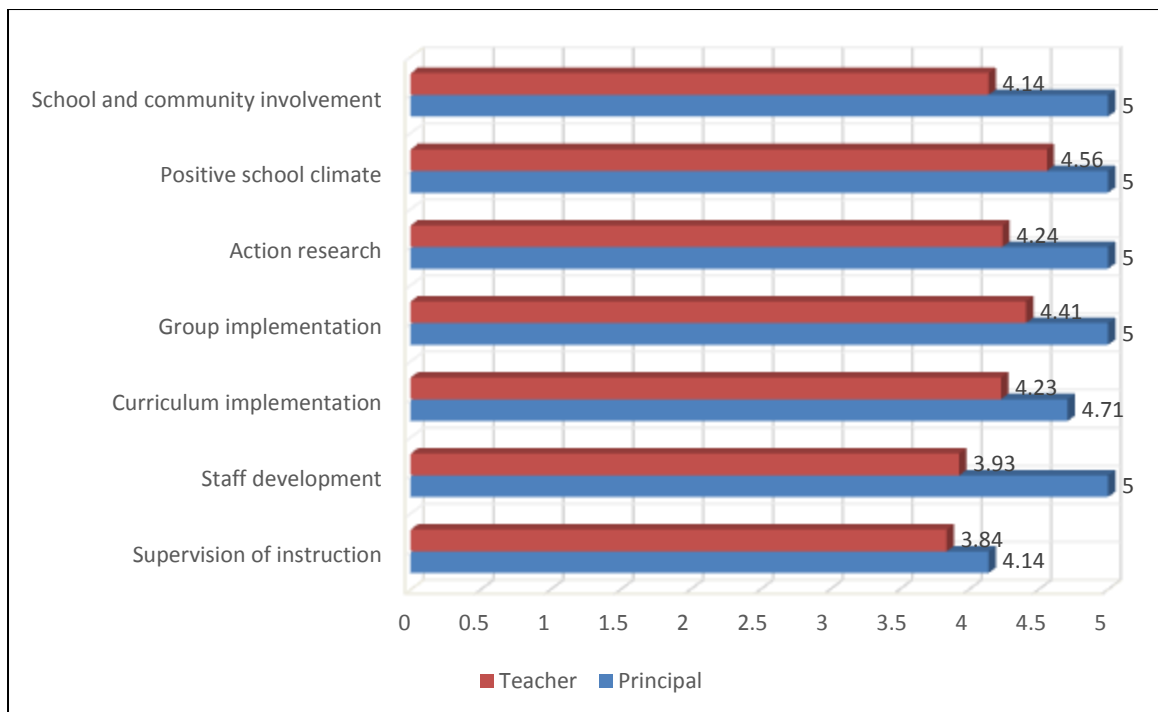
Figure 4 demonstrates the perceptions of principal and teachers from School C about instructional leadership practices. The principal's perception showed that "positive school climate" was the most important instructional leadership practice. Similarly, "positive school climate" was the most important instructional leadership practice of principal from the perceptions of teachers.

Figure 4: Mean Values of Instructional Leadership Practices rated by the principal and the teachers for School C

Figure 5 shows the perceptions of principal and teachers from School D about instructional leadership practices. According to the principal's self-perception, "group development", "action research", positive school climate", and "school and community involvement" were the most important instructional leadership practices. But "positive school climate" was the most important instructional leadership practice of principal from the perceptions of teachers.

Figure 5: Mean Values of Instructional Leadership Practices rated by the principal and the teachers for School D

Figure 6 demonstrates the perceptions of principal and teachers from School E about instructional leadership practices. The principal's perception showed that "group development", "action research", positive school climate" and "school and community involvement" were the most important instructional leadership practices. Likewise, "positive school climate" was the most important instructional leadership practice of principal from the perceptions of teachers.
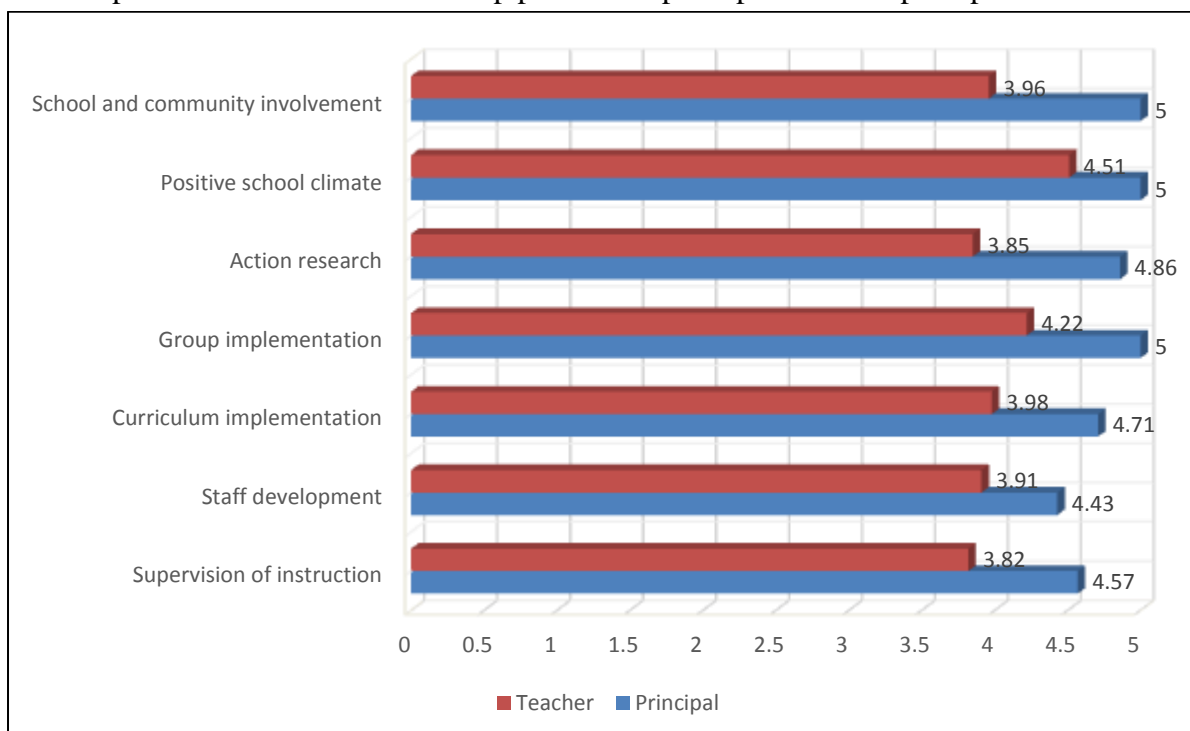
Figure 6: Mean Values of Instructional Leadership Practices rated by the principal and the teachers for School E

Table 3: **Comparison of Mean Values for Dimensions of Principals' Instructional Leadership Practices Rated by Principals themselves and Teachers in Selected Basic Education High Schools**

Instructional Leadership Practices	Principal (n=5)	Teacher (n=126)	Mean Difference
Supervision of instruction	4.54	4.03	0.51
Staff Development	4.54	4.10	0.44
Curriculum Implementation	4.66	4.29	0.37
Group Development	4.77	4.37	0.40
Action Research	4.74	4.15	0.59
Positive School Climate	4.94	4.57	0.37
School and Community Involvement	4.77	4.16	0.61
Overall	4.71	4.33	0.38

Scoring Direction: 1.00-1.49= low   2.50-3.49=satisfactory   4.50-5.00= high
                   1.5-2.49=moderately low   3.50-4.49= moderately high

Table 3 describes the comparison of mean values for dimensions of principals' instructional leadership practices rated by principals themselves and teachers in selected basic education high schools. When studying the mean values of "Overall instructional leadership practices", it was found that principals' ratings were higher than teachers' ratings.

Next, a one-way ANOVA was conducted to test the differences among schools on instructional leadership practices. The results showed that there was a significant difference among the schools ($p<.001$) (See Table 4).

Table 4: ANOVA Table on Instructional Leadership Practices in the Schools

Instructional Leadership Practices	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	6.885	4	1.721	6.891	.000***
Within Groups	31.469	126	.250		
Total	38.354	130			

In order to find out which particular schools had the greatest differences, Post Hoc Multiple Comparisons Test (Turkey HSD) was conducted. The following Table 5 points out the results of multiple comparisons of instructional leadership practices among the selected schools.

In Table 5, there were statistically significant differences in instructional leadership practices between School A and School C and between School A and School E. Moreover, there were statistically significant differences in instructional leadership practices between School B and School C and between School B and School E.

Table 5: The Results of Multiple Comparison for Principals' Instructional Leadership
          Practices in the Schools

(I) selected high schools	(J) selected high schools	Mean Difference (I-J)	*p*
A	B	.094	.961
A	C	.702	**.000***
A	D	.364	.290
A	E	.519	**.002***
B	C	.609	**.001***
B	D	.271	.131
B	E	.416	**.009**
C	D	.338	.200
C	E	.183	.751
D	E	.155	.757

Note: ***p<.001, **p<.01, *p<.05

Qualitative research findings

Positive School Climate

      Data from interviews revealed that creating "positive school climate" and "group development" were the most important instructional leadership practices performed by principals. One of the teachers reported that the principal occasionally manages the improvement of teaching and learning process. To obtain high student achievement, the principal encourages teachers to use modern teaching methods and good teaching aids. On the other side, another teacher reported the financial difficulties in preparing teaching aids at schools.

One big problem of our school is lack of teaching and learning materials. Although the principal encourages to conduct practical exercises, teachers are always complaining about insufficient teaching and learning materials. (T 2)

      Regarding the evaluation of teacher's performance, one teacher explained that the principal allocates subjects according to teachers' specialization and visits the classroom to evaluate the teaching and learning process.

The leadership of this school is doing well in terms of instructional leadership. The small problem some teachers are not comfortable with someone being in class or outside while teaching is in progress. My principal introduces the reward and punishment system in spite of using authority. I like my principal's administration for curriculum implementation and co-curricular activities. He tries to organize people and encourage them to participate in school improvement activities. (T 8)

Principals also have a duty to check schemes of work, records of work and other professional documents. When principals interact with teachers through these activities, teaching and learning is improved because problems and weaknesses are identified and addressed. (T 5)

Group Development

      According to the interview results, the principal emphasizes group development for school effectiveness. The principal utilizes a more nondirective leadership approach. In the view

of the experienced teacher, the principal allows teachers to participate in the decision-making process for the improvement of the school. In case of resolving conflict, the principal tries to gather a greater pool of information from the members.

The right decision can only be made from all points of view. To prevent adversarial, my principal tries to guide many individuals in a school toward a collective accomplishment (e.g., intensive in-service programs, in setting formal school standards for student behavior, and in determining a safe school environment, etc.).

Discussion and Conclusion

In the instructional leadership practices of selected high school principals, there were consistencies as well as discrepancies in what principals and teachers perceived to be important in terms of instructional leadership practices among selected high schools. According to the results of principals' self-reported practices, principals from Basic Education High Schools in Monywa Township practiced "positive school climate", "group development" and "school and community involvement" mostly as their important instructional leadership practices. On the other hand, from the perceptions of teachers, principals practiced "positive school climate", "group development", and "curriculum implementation" mostly.

When studying instructional leadership practices of selected school principals, it was found that the leadership practices of School A principal were higher than those of other selected schools in six practices: staff development, curriculum implementation, group development, action research, positive school climate, school and community involvement according to the perceptions of teachers. Moreover, supervision of instruction is the least practised by the principals. By supervising teachers' instruction, improvement will occur of excellence in teachers' knowledge, attitude, and skills. Similar result was highlighted in a previous study by Sekhu (2011).

According to the qualitative findings, the principal needs to offer extra help for instructional effectiveness and evaluate teachers' performance on instruction. Liu et al. (2016) noted that principals should provide more support for academic content areas about which they are more knowledgeable. Moreover, they should give innovative ideas and suggestions related to teaching strategies and instructional materials to be effective teaching-learning process. In practice, the principal should observe and evaluate lessons in a classroom and share ideas for improvement.

This study found that principals in selected schools promote positive school climate focusing on specific leadership functions such as protecting instructional time, incentive for teachers, opportunities for professional development and incentives for learning are essential. Moreover, the principal can create opportunities for teachers to learn and grow individually or professionally to improve student outcomes. This is in line with the findings of Leech, Smith, and Green (2005), the importance of creating positive school climate in fostering student achievement. In this sense, future principals should be instructional leaders who possess the requisite skills, capacities, and commitment to lead. Furthermore, school principal should be the individual who raises academic standards, improves academic achievement for all students and provides support and assistance to teachers.

This will be of great assistance to newly appointed principals in adopting the most suitable and effective styles in administering their respective schools towards excellence and to produce citizens who are well-rounded and skillful. It will be useful for principals seeking to implement educational strategies designed to increase academic achievement in low and non-performing schools.

Further research in the area of principal leadership practices needs to be extended to the schools in other states, regions and the country as a whole. In addition, it is also necessary to conduct research focusing on the role of instructional leadership at private schools.

Acknowledgments

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