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Instructional Leadership Practice Among Headmasters in the Southern Region of Malaysia

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Abstract

This study aims to identify the level of instructional leadership practice among headmasters in three states in the Southern Region of Malaysia which are Negeri Sembilan, Melaka and Johor. This quantitative research uses survey research design by using instructional leadership questionnaire (ILQ). The alpha Cronbach value of the pilot study for this questionnaire is .962. 390 teachers were involved in this study and they were chosen through cluster sampling from simple random samples. Statistical analysis for this research had used the software IBM SPSS Statistics version 22. This research found that the headmasters in the Southern Region of Malaysia are practicing instructional leadership at medium high level, in which all three dimensions recorded the mean score value between 3.796 to 3.965. To conclude, instructional leadership has been practiced in the Southern Region schools in driving the school towards achieving the targeted vision and mission.

Keywords: Headmaster; Instructional Leadership; Level of practice; Southern region of Malaysia.

1. Introduction

There is a consensus among scholars, education practitioners and policy makers which stated that the leadership of school leaders is the main contributors towards the enhancement in performance and success of system in schools (Fullan, 2007; Harris, 2013; Leithwood K. and Jantzi, 2005). They also concluded that the leadership of school leaders contributes to a better school performance and also enhances students' academic achievement (Day *et al.*, 2008; Hallinger and Heck, 1996; Leithwood K. *et al.*, 2008). The relationship between school leadership and students' academic achievement has also been stated particularly by Bogler (2005); Waters *et al.* (2003) which stated that the leadership style of a school leader can influence various elements in school environment including the attitude of teachers and staffs, the process of teaching and learning and also students' academic achievement.

Therefore, the Ministry of Education Malaysia (MOE) has underlined three approaches to enhance students' development through enhancing the performance of school leaders. The first approach is that school leaders should act as instructional leaders who are actively involved in teachers' development by planning, coordinating and evaluating the process of teaching and learning (T&L) in school; secondly, school leaders act as the main agent of change by ensuring the vision and mission can be translated in line with school's goal for students' success; and thirdly, school leaders should create a conducive school environment and support the T&L process in and outside of classroom (Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia, 2013).

The Preliminary Report of Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025 has clearly stated that students' success can be increased by 20 percent if school leaders practiced instructional leadership. This report also suggested that the responsibility of instructional leaders was not restricted to the headmaster only, but the assistant headmaster, head of department and head of committee should also be developed and given responsibility as instructional leaders (Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia, 2012). Based on this brief description, it is proven that instructional leadership is a leadership model that is still relevant and is trusted to drive the school under MOE to keep moving forward in enhancing students' academic achievement and personal development and also able to produce quality human capital.

There are various definitions of instructional leadership. Kis and Konan (2014) stated that instructional leadership is a type of leadership that can influence school's development. Meanwhile, according to Krug (1992), it refers to a leadership which utilizes knowledge in solving academic problems and making teachers aware of their roles in realizing the school goal. Instructional leadership is also very relevant in today's educational world (Robinson *et al.*, 2008). Robinson, Lloyd, and Rowe (2008) stated that the instructional leadership concept is still relevant and is becoming more important in the context of 21st century education with the main aim of enhancing students' academic achievement. The research findings also showed the effectiveness of instructional leadership in increasing students' academic achievement is four times more than transformational leadership Robinson, Lloyd, and Rowe (2008). This findings is supported by Shatzer *et al.* (2014) who found that instructional leadership

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contributes more towards the increase in students' academic achievement as compared to transformational leadership. Furthermore, a new leadership model has emerged in which it is called "leadership for learning", which combines three types of leadership which are instructional leadership, transformational leadership and shared leadership. This new model also impacted students' academic achievement (Hallinger, 2003; Hallinger *et al.*, 2014; MacBeath and Cheng, 2008; Marks and Printy, 2003).

According to Leech *et al.* (2005), since the main task of instructional leadership is to provide quality education by emphasizing teachers' professional and instructional skills, many researchers have agreed that instructional leadership is the main key towards a positive organization climate. The importance of instructional leadership is also acknowledged by several researchers who stated that a school's success cannot be separated from instructional leadership practiced by school leaders (Duke, 1987; Hallinger, 2003; Hassan *et al.*, 2012). In this context, Findley and Findley (1992) has clearly explained that when a school is effective, it is because of the instructional leadership characteristics portrayed by the school leaders. Moreover, Mortimore (1993) stated that schools lead by true instructional leaders usually depict a conducive and organized learning environment while the students portrayed a high level of self-disciplinary control. The content of T&L process also appears to be interesting and fun while the school facilities are well-maintained.

Based on the findings of the researchers above, it is clearly proven that although this instructional leadership model has existed since more than 30 years ago, it is still considered as the best leadership model in increasing school's effectiveness by enhancing the quality of teachers' teaching and students' academic achievement. The influence of this leadership towards students' academic achievement is quite significant and all school leaders should be exposed to this kind of leadership model for their school's development.

2. Background of Study

There are many researches that showed the weaknesses of school leaders and the challenges in practicing instructional leadership. Therefore, this subtopic will describe in detail the issues, weaknesses and also challenges faced by the school leaders in practicing instructional leadership. According to Heck and Hallinger (2010), there are many issues and weaknesses in practicing instructional leadership also this leadership model has been made as a reference by school leadership researchers. The first issue is that this leadership model is hierarchical, in which it the relationship between the school leaders and teachers is top-down. Based on the practice of instructional leadership, the school leaders act as the curriculum expert and supervisor for the teaching process and curriculum. The top-down relationship between the expert or supervisor and the teachers brings discomfort among teachers, especially when the school leaders are supervising the T&L process or while assessing their work (Goddard, 2003).

The second issue is the school leaders' difficulty in being experts in all fields of teaching and curriculum (Hallinger, 2003). In this situation, school leaders should implement learning culture among the members of school community, especially teachers, so that the teachers' expertise can be fully utilized by the school for the students' academic advancement. The third issue is that other than being instructional leaders in school, they also have other tasks and responsibilities such as school administration and management tasks, and this had caused them to not have sufficient time to fulfil their roles as instructional leaders (Cuban, 1983; Hallinger, 2003; Stronge, 1993).

This is in line with (Goodwin *et al.*, 2003) who stated that the local social and community authority always pressures the school leaders with various demands regarding education. The authority would cause the organization and leadership issues in school to be imbalanced, if not making things unclear and difficult in fulfilling tasks, and this would lead to a decline in the moral and enthusiasm of the school leaders. Moreover, the society's high expectation towards the school leaders will cause them to be burdened by the responsibilities towards various demands of the society and as a result, their tasks as instructional leaders could not be fulfilled perfectly (Catano and Stronge, 2007; Cuban, 1983).

The ability of the school leaders who practiced instructional leadership to enhance students' academic achievement is also doubtful. There is an empirical evidence which stated that school leaders still failed to enhance the quality of students' learning, although they had been practicing instructional leadership(Cuban, 1983; Hallinger, 2008). In a study by Leithwood K. (2012), it was found that the students considered the role of the school leaders in enhancing their learning quality was little, which was only around 12 to 25 percent, while the external surrounding and family factors contributed up to 50 percent in influencing students' academic achievement (Leithwood K. *et al.*, 2010).

Since several decades ago, there was an urge that demands the school leaders to reduce their management tasks and focus more on the tasks as instructional leaders. For a school leader who has left the teaching world, getting themselves involved in teaching with the goal of enhancing other teachers' teaching performance is surely a huge challenge for them (Hallinger, 2003; Stronge, 1993). Hallinger (2011a) also discovered that school leaders were always pressured to be fully responsible as instructional leadership because it is believed to enhance students' academic achievement although the leaders are also fulfilling other tasks such as in managing and administrating the school. The hustles and bustles in fulfilling these management and administrative tasks had limited the school leaders' capacity to fulfill the role as instructional leaders, especially in supervising and observing teachers' T&L sessions. In the end, these tasks were always fulfilled by assistant headmaster and heads of department (Hallinger, 2005).

Goodwin *et al.* (2003) stated that bureaucracy problem, social community pressure, negotiation with various parties and educational reform that always occurred had caused the role of the headmasters as instructional leaders to be eradicated, little by little, and at some point, they only considered themselves as educators and not leaders. Their role as school leaders had also undergone huge changes since several decades ago and this had increased the

difficulty level of their leadership tasks. The huge changes also urged school leaders to focus more on fulfilling leadership and administrative tasks for the school, compared to the previous school leaders (Goodwin et al., 2003; Lashway, 2003). As a result, today's school leaders had to fulfil their tasks in three conditions which are full of pressure, rigid reporting and insufficient of time (Tirozzi, 2001; Volante *et al.*, 2008).

In the context of education in Malaysia, there are also several issues and challenges in practicing instructional leadership. The findings from the Teaching Observation and Teachers' Movement Data Report, Pahang Education Department for the year 2009 showed that among the causes for the planned instructional programmes to not be aligned with the school goal was because of the role of the school leaders which was less effective in providing guidance and failure in sharing and articulating school information to the teachers. This problem had given negative effects on the quality of teachers' T&L process and students' academic achievement (Jabatan and Negeri, 2009).

Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia (2007) through the Report of Minister Congregation Year 2006 found that the main reason for the various problems in the T&L process of teachers was because of the school leaders' failure in portraying good instructional leadership. Many problems have emerged because of the weak practice of instructional leadership. Among the problems are teachers teaching by following the syllabus too rigidly, being exam-oriented without understanding students' needs and not fulfilling the concept of student-centred learning. Moreover, the report also stated that there were teachers who teach without set induction, the learning was teacher-centred, the strategic planning was not systematic, the quality of teaching was still at medium level, the teaching was delivered without considering the students' prior knowledge, less observation from school administrators and loose assessment system.

The issues on instructional leadership were also discussed in the 2014 Annual Report: Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025. The report has exposed low-achieving District Education Office and among the factors that contributed to this issue was the weaknesses in practicing instructional leadership among the school leaders in the district and the decline in T&L quality in classrooms (Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia, 2015). Both factors were perceived as related to one another in which it started from the weakness of the school leaders and it influenced the teachers under the leadership. This report had also succeeded to identify five key areas that have significant impacts in enhancing students' academic performance in school. The five key areas are students' attendance, students' discipline, teachers' attendance, teaching quality and school leadership. These five areas shall exist in a school because it is crucial to enhance students' academic achievement and school's effectiveness.

Johor Education Department (JED) had also highlighted issues related to instructional leadership in the Meeting of Johor State Curriculum Committee Number 3/2011. In the meeting, the Director of Johor State Department of Education had emphasized that the practice of instructional leadership should be taken seriously to solve the issue of students losing focus during the T&L sessions in classroom (Jabatan and Negeri, 2011). Therefore, School Management Sector (SMS) of JED and District Education Offices were given full responsibility in ensuring instructional leadership to be practiced in all schools in Johor. The meeting had also received a feedback from a District Education Office which stated that the issues related to T&L process in classroom are important and cannot be taken lightly. These issues were discussed during the Professional Assembly in a secondary school in the 31st of March, 2011 and the 12th of December, 2011, where principals and headmasters were given the responsibility to revise the curriculum management in their schools and prioritize school-level observation for the teachers' teaching to be more effective and interesting. The principals and headmasters were also reminded of the principles and practices of instructional leadership so that curriculum management in Johor State level will be on the right track.

Furthermore, in the Meeting of Curriculum Committee Number 3/2012 of Johor Education Department (JED), the Director of Johor Education Department had highlighted the basic responsibilities of all the officials in JED, District Education Offices, principals and headmasters, in the need to master the instructional leadership practice (Jabatan and Negeri, 2012). To ensure this to be fulfilled, the Academic Management Sector of JED and all District Education Offices were assigned to provide guidance to principals and headmasters, both veteran and novice, on instructional leadership. The Director of JED had also stressed that protecting instructional period is to be practiced fully in all schools and should be the basis in the process of improving instructional leadership among school leaders in Johor. Recently, Quality Assurance Sector of JED under the leadership of Tuan Haji Kamaruddin Bin Abu had underlined several steps to manage school consultation and leadership and among them is maintaining and enhancing the quality of instructional leadership among the school leaders in Johor.

Melaka Education Department (MED) had also taken the initiative parallel to that of JED. MED Strategic Planning 2015-2019 has responded to MOE's urge in empowering instructional leadership through the second main strategy which is empowering teachers and school leaders' competency Through this second main strategy, MED will focus on the practice of instructional leadership among school leaders while hoping that the school leaders would be excellent instructional leaders and act as the agent of change to realize the specified goal. School leaders should always welcome new work order, get local society to be involved in improving school performance and maximize students' development in all ringgits spent (Jabatan and Negeri, 2014).

In Negeri Sembilan, the importance of instructional leadership was also highlighted in Negeri Sembilan Education Department (NSED) Strategic Planning 2013-2025 through the second strategic core which is high quality international standard. NSED has put enculturing instructional leadership as the fifth strategy in improving the quality of school management and leadership. Instructional leadership is also needed to enhance the education quality at state level in producing human capital that masters the 21st century knowledge and skills (Jabatan and Negeri, 2012).

One scenario on the study regarding instructional leadership was identified, in which the findings of this study focused more on the context of education in western countries. Hence, there is a challenge in the instructional

leadership area to expand this leadership study in the context of Asian countries to see how school leaders in a different education context which are non-western in practicing instructional leadershipy1(Hallinger and Bryant, 2014). This study takes that challenge by investigating the practice of instructional leadership in Malaysia, a country where empirical study in school leadership has not yet expanded enough (Bajunid, 1996).

3. Statement of Problem

During the Southern Region Dialogue of Focused Performance for Negeri Sembilan, Melaka and Johor, the Head of Director of Education Malaysia at that time, Tan Sri Dr. Khair Bin Mohamad Yusof had mentioned on the issue of State Average Grade (*Gred Purata Negeri*, GPN) for Primary School Evaluation Examination (*Ujian Penilaian Sekolah Rendah*, UPSR) for two consecutive years from 2013 to 2015 in three states in the Southern Region of Malaysia which are Negeri Sembilan, Melaka and Johor (Lembaga Peperiksaan Malaysia, 2016). The increase in GPN indicates a decline in students' academic achievement. This big issue is personally felt by the researcher, who at that time worked as School Improvement Specialist Coach (SISC+) in a District Education Office in Johor and this issue had left a great impact on the officials and headmasters in the district.

Precisely, GPN for Negeri Sembilan Education Department (NSED) which started at 2.12 (2013) had .05 increase to become 2.17 (2014) and it increased again to 2.18 (2015), which is .06 increase for two years. GPN for Melaka Education Department (MED) started at 2.13 (2013), increased at 2.15 (2014) and consequently increased at 2.16 (2015) and this shows an increase of .03. Meanwhile, GPN for Johor Education Department (JED) 2.14 (2013), increased at 2.17 (2014) and it later reached 2.18 (2015) with a total of increment of .04 between 2013 and 2015 (Lembaga Peperiksaan Malaysia, 2016).

This situation is worrisome when only Negeri Sembilan, Melaka and Johor experienced decline in UPSR quality which is very critical, even though the three states had responsed to MOE's urgency to practice instructional leadership as practiced in other states in Malaysia. The GPN for all three states were above the National Average Grade while the GPN for other states were below the National Average Grade and this represented good UPSR result trend every year. This matter had troubled the director of state education department and district education officials in the three states considering that other states in Malaysia did not show a declining trend of students' academic achievement. Based on this issue, an important question emerged to be studied, which is the level of instructional leadership practiced by the headmasters in the three states.

4. Objectives of Study

This study aims to identify the level of instructional leadership practice of headmasters in three states in the Southern Region of Malaysia which are Negeri Sembilan, Melaka and Johor. Particularly, this study has three objectives which are as follow:

i. Identifying the practice level of defining school goal dimension among headmasters in the Southern Region of Malaysia.
ii. Identifying the practice level of coordinating instructional program dimension among headmasters in the Southern Region of Malaysia.
iii. Identifying the practice level of promoting school climate dimension among headmasters in the Southern Region of Malaysia.

5. Literature Review

Instructional leadership has been proven to be able to improve the quality of teachers' T&L processes and consequently enhancing students' academic achievement. This is acknowledged by previous researchers through their empirical studies. The Ministry of Education Malaysia and all State Education Departments had set this important practice in their strategic planning and making it a part of the key performance indicator (KPI) that they must achieve to ensure the practice to be implemented to the root. Therefore, in this section, the issues regarding instructional leadership is explained and discussed deeply based on the views and facts provided by the experts and researches so that this practice can be understood clearly.

5.1. The Definition of Instructional Leadership

The word instructional comes from the term "instruction" which means teaching. The term teaching is more commonly used in the context of school and daily usage, but due to the intensity and exclusivity of the word in education, the term "instructional leadership" is used more than "teaching leadership" although both convey the same meaning, which is, all actions and activities done by a school leader are aimed to improve T&L sessions (James A. J. E. and Balasandran, 2013). There are many definitions of instructional leadership that has been provided by researchers or scholars of educational leadership. Some of the definitions are a kind of leadership that is able to affect school development (Kis and Konan, 2014) and a leadership that uses knowledge in solving academic problems and get the teachers to be aware their roles in realizing school goal (Krug, 1992).

(Sisman, 2016) referred instructional leadership as a power or behaviour of the school leaders, teachers and school supervisor to influence an individual or situation in a school. The most important aspect that differentiates instructional leadership and other educational leadership is that it focuses on T&L processes in school. He added that there are five behaviours of instructional leadership that should be practiced by school leaders which are firstly, identifying and sharing school objectives; secondly, administrating curriculum and instructional processes; thirdly,

evaluating instructional processes and students' academic achievement; fourth, supporting and enhancing teachers' quality and fifth, creating positive learning environment and school climate.

Other than that, according to Hallinger and Murphy (1987); Hallinger (2000); (Hallinger, 2011a), instructional leadership is an effort by the school leaders to enhance T&L processes and learning that involves teachers, parents, students and also a combination of school planning, management, facilities and culture. School leaders need to ensure that each individual in school strives and helps each other to execute the best educational programme. From this definition, three main dimensions of instructional leadership was created which are defining goal, organizing instructional programme and promoting school climate, and these dimensions have become the crucial cores in this study.

5.2. The Development of Instructional Leadership Concept

The area of instructional leadership has triggered the curiosity of many researchers and policy makers in education since more than three decades ago and it has begun with the study of effective school (Bossert et al., 1982; Edmonds, 1979; Hallinger and Murphy, 1985a; Hallinger and Murphy, 1987; Smith and Piele, 2006; Southworth, 2002). Instructional leadership began to be explored at the end of 1970's and early 1980's with the emergence of researches that made comparison between effective and non-effective secondary schools for poor students in North America.

Before researches on school leaders were explored, school-related studies were only focusing on socioeconomic status, social background and race as the factors for a student's success. However, after studies on effective schools had been done, the focus shifted to identifying the characteristics and practices of school leaders in enhancing students' academic achievement (Brookover and Lezotte, 1979; Edmonds, 1979). Around 1980's, researches on school leaders who practice instructional leadership has grown rapidly (Bossert *et al.*, 1982; Hallinger and Murphy, 1985b; Leithwood K. A. and Montgomery, 1982). According to several education scholars, there are only two models of leadership that dominate most schools or educational institutions and they are instructional and transformational leadership (Hallinger and Heck, 1998; Leithwood K. *et al.*, 2010; Robinson *et al.*, 2008). This clearly shows that even the age of this leadership has reached more than three decades, it is still relevant to be practiced in schools until today.

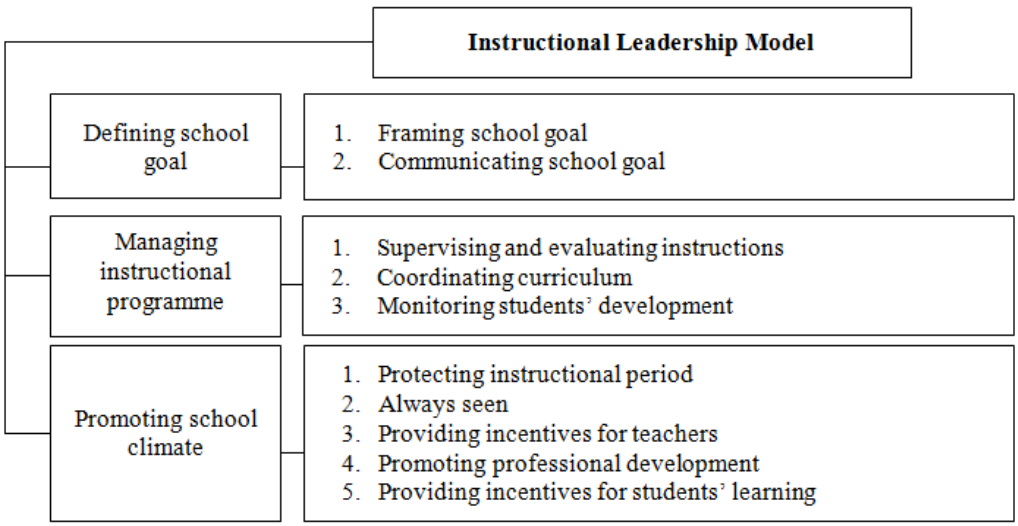
The development of instructional leadership among school leaders in Malaysia began since early 1980's. The Report of School Education Standard Revision Committee reports that school leaders should be responsible towards the students' academic achievement in their school and it suggested a shift in the main tasks of the principals and headmasters from the school administrator to instructional leaders (Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia, 1982). Since this report, instructional leadership penetrates in schools throughout Malaysia.

Until today, although this leadership is more than 30 years of age, it is still used and relevant in developing schools and enhancing students' academic achievement. The Ministry of Education Malaysia and all District Education officials have even made instructional leadership as a KPI that should be achieved successfully. Some education departments used the term "empowering instructional leadership" since this leadership has been long introduced, but there are still school leaders who are weak in practicing it. Some school leaders are still focusing on the administration and management affairs of the school. Therefore, with the empowering approach, it is hoped that school leaders can practice it again and make it as the school culture for the sake of the students' success.

5.3. Instructional Leadership Model by Hallinger (2011a)

Three dimensions and 10 functions of instructional leadership to evaluate the level of instructional leadership of school leaders has been introduced by Hallinger (2011a). The dimensions are defining school goal, organizing instructional programme, and promoting school climate. All three dimensions include the 10 functions which describe in detail the roles and tasks that should be fulfil by instructional leaders in school. The leadership model is as shown in Figure 1.

Figure-1. Instructional Leadership Model by Hallinger (2011a).



The first dimension is defining school goal which comprises two functions which are framing and communicating school goal. The second dimension is managing instructional programme. This dimension comprise three functions which are supervising and evaluating instructions, coordinating curriculum and monitoring students' development. The third dimension is promoting school climate which include five functions which are protecting instructional period, always seen, providing incentives for teachers, promoting professional development, providing incentives for students' learning. Further explanation regarding these dimensions and functions in this model will be shown in the next subtopic.

5.4. Dimensions and Functions in the Instructional Leadership Model by Hallinger (2011a)

The Instructional Leadership Model Developed By Hallinger (2011a) Consisted Of Three Dimensions Which Are Defining School Goal, Managing Instructional Programme And Promoting School Climate. The Detailed Explanation on the Dimensions Are As Provided Below.

5.5. Defining School Goal

The dimension 'defining school goal' has two functions as described previously, which are framing and communicating school goals Hallinger (2011a) Hallinger (2000) Hallinger and Murphy (1987). Through this dimension, the main role of school leaders is to identify school goal. School leaders should know what to be achieved by the school and the direction they are heading to. Schools who did not have a direction in educational process will not have any criteria to measure whether the school succeeded in undergoing the process or vice versa (Krug, 1992). This dimension focuses on the role of leaders in handling their responsibility together with their follower to ensure the school own a goal that is clear, measurable and has a timeline for students' academic advancement. Leaders are also responsible to communicate the drafted goals so that every parties would have the knowledge in that and this would ease the support and help from the school community to ensure the goal is achieved (Hallinger, 2005).

Based on this model, the process of creating information is seen to be less critical compared to the results obtained. The goal can be developed by the school leaders or collaboratively with other school staffs. Nevertheless, it raises a question whether the school has a clear goal that would enable the school community members to support and cooperate towards achieving the goal. This is because sometimes, there are goals which are unclear, blurry, confusing and even contradictory, in which in the end would make it difficult to obtain a desired result from the goal (Hallinger, 2011a); Hallinger (2000); Hallinger and Murphy (1987).

The role of instructional leaders in defining school goal can be seen clearly in a study by Hallinger and Murphy (1986) in an effective primary school in California. From interviews with the school leaders and teachers, it can be concluded that there are six characteristics that instructional leaders should own in defining school goal. Firstly, the school's vision and mission should be clear and understandable for all school community members. The goal should be written or displayed around the school to ensure everyone can look at it easily and this will make them more aware and concerned on the school's direction. Secondly, the school goal should focus on academic development according to the school's needs and suitability. The third characteristic is that the school goal should be the priority of all teachers in performing their tasks. Fourth, the goal must be accepted and acknowledged legibly by all teachers. Fifth, the goal should be articulated well by the leaders and sixth, the goal should be supported by all members of the school community and the leaders themselves need to be the best example in realizing the goal.

5.6. Managing Instructional Program

The second dimension is managing instructional programme. This dimension focuses on controlling and coordinating matters related to curriculum and teaching. According to James A. J. E. and Balasandran (2013) this dimension is a huge task and challenge that should be faced by school leaders because curriculum and teaching is the core function of a school. Failure in fulfilling the task of managing instructional programme efficiently and effectively would hinder the desired output, which is the students' academic advancement, to be achieved. There are three functions in this dimension which are supervising and making instructional evaluation, coordinating the curriculum and monitoring students' development Hallinger (2011a); Hallinger (2000); Hallinger and Murphy (1987).

According to Hallinger (2011a); Hallinger (2000), the first function of this dimension, which is supervising and evaluating teaching refers to the efforts of school leaders to ensure the school goals to be translated and practiced fully in the T&L process. For the second function which is coordinating the curriculum, school leaders should ensure that the teaching objectives are aligned with classroom learning, assessment occurs and also coordinate instructional-related programs. School leaders should also appoint individuals who will be responsible to coordinate the curriculum, analyze the results of students' examinations and select curriculum materials as teaching aids. Meanwhile, for the third function which is monitoring students' development, school leaders need to have continuous discussions with teachers regarding the academic development of students, give specific insights and make improvements in the teaching and learning process to enhance students' achievement.

Based on the explanation above, this second dimension requires active involvement of school leaders in stimulating, supervising and monitoring the T&L processes in school. Therefore, school leaders should be equipped with the knowledge, experience and expertise in T&L and, at the same time, be committed to all school enhancement programmes. Through this dimension, the school leaders will become experts in all instructional programmes in schoole (Bossert *et al.*, 1982; Cuban, 1983; Dwyer, 1985; Edmonds, 1979; Marshall, 2003).

In a study done by Hallinger and Murphy (1986) on an effective school in California, it was found that the school teachers had observed some of the headmaster's behavior which was said to monitor students' development. They observed that the headmaster knew the level of literacy and progress of all 650 students in the school. This behavior is not a must in instructional leadership; however, it reflects the headmaster's sincerity and effort in monitoring the progress of the students as well as managing the teaching programmes in their school.

5.7. Promoting School Climate

The third dimension is promoting school climate. There are five functions in this dimension which are protecting instructional period, always seen, providing incentives for teachers, promoting professional development, and providing incentives for students' learning Hallinger (2011a); (Hallinger, 2000). Hallinger (2011a); Hallinger (2000) has made modifications in the instructional leadership model and concept that he had built with his colleague, namely Hallinger and Murphy Instructional Leadership Model (1987, 1985). After undergoing several validity and reliability tests, he has dropped one of the six functions in this third dimension which is enforcing academic standards. Hence, in this new leadership model, the functions of the dimension promoting the school climate only has five functions as stated above and it remains to this day.

According Hallinger (2011a); Hallinger (2000) this third dimension refers to the norms and behaviors of teachers and students that affect the learning process in school. School leaders should create a learning climate at school whether directly or indirectly through their ability to maintain visibility, so that it will be easier to communicate, discuss and provide rooms to reach out to teachers and students, create a reward system to enhance productive efforts of school community members towards enhancing students' academic achievement, create clear standards covering school's expectations of the students, protect teaching period and finally, select and participate in school development programmes which are in line with the school missions.

This dimension is also a dimension with the broadest scope and purpose, compared to the previous two dimensions. This is in line with the notion that effective schools usually create academic pressures through the development of high standards and expectations for students and teachers to excel in academic and teaching (Bossert *et al.*, 1982; Purkey and Smith, 1983). In the aspect of teaching, an effective school develops a "continuous development" culture, where each success in practicing good deeds that can contribute to the school's development shall be rewarded (Barth, 1990; Glasman, 1984; Hallinger and Murphy, 1986; Heck *et al.*, 1990; Leithwood K. A. and Montgomery, 1982; Mortimore, 1993; Purkey and Smith, 1983). Headmasters must also demonstrate good examples in terms of values and practices that can create a continuous climate development in aspects of T&L (Dwyer, 1985).

6. Research Design

This study uses quantitative methods using a survey approach to study the level of instructional leadership practices of the headmasters in the Southern Region of Malaysia. Quantitative design is chosen because quantitative study is best suited for research having numerical data, where these data are collected and analyzed to explain and predict a phenomenon (Chua, 2006; Gay *et al.*, 2012; Muijs, 2011).

Survey method using questionnaire is popular in many fields, especially social science studies (Chua, 2006) and education (James H. M., 2013). According to Gay *et al.* (2012), surveys are best used for studies involving the evaluation of perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, practices, interests or traits for a group of respondents. This survey method was selected based on its ability to provide explanations that can be measured numerically for the variables in instructional leadership and it is also a research method that saves time, is more economical and accurate in providing information regarding the population studied (Muijs, 2011).

6.1. Research Population and Samples

The population of study focused on the teachers who served in national schools in Negeri Sembilan, Melaka and Johor. Based on the figures obtained from the State Education Department for the three states on the 31st of December, 2016, the total number of teachers for the entire population is 30,830. To determine the size of the sample in this study, some basic considerations have been taken. According to Cohen *et al.* (2013), a study using random sampling techniques requires a large sample size to allow the sample to represent the population more accurately. In addition, the design of a study also influences the sample size. For quantitative methods, large quantities of samples are needed, especially if inferential statistics method is used in the study (Cohen *et al.*, 2013).

Based on the Table of Sample Size constructed by Krejcie and Morgan for a population of 30,830 people, the sample size is only 379 (Krejcie and Morgan, 1970; Sekaran, 2003). However, for the purpose of this study, the researcher increased the number of samples to 390 people. This value is obtained after rounding out the value. The addition of the sample number was found to coincide with what had been recommended by Babbie (2014); Cohen *et al.* (2013); Creswell (2014); Slavin (2007) who stated that a greater size of samples is better to avoid errors in sampling, increase reliability, predict the probability of the questionnaires not being returned and surveys involving the questionnaire are best with bigger samples.

6.2. Research Instrument

This study uses Instructional Leadership Questionnaire (ILQ) which consists of 50 items to evaluate the level of instructional leadership practice of the headmasters in Negeri Sembilan, Malacca and Johor. ILQ was developed by researchers based on the dimensions found in the Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale questionnaire

(PIMRS) built by Hallinger (1990). This means that the researcher only uses the dimensions provided in the questionnaire while the items in it are built by the researcher according to the suitability of the education system in Malaysia. The internal consistency value (alpha Cronbach) for a pilot study for ILQ is .962.

6.3. Descriptive Statistical Analysis

For the purpose of this study, the mean score is used to evaluate the level of practice of instructional leadership of the headmasters. The Mean Score Interpretation Table constructed by Nunnally and Berstein (1994) was used in this study to measure the mean score. The Mean Score Interpretation Table is as shown in Table 1.

Table-1. Mean Score Interpretation Table Nunnally and Berstein (1994)

Mean Scale	Level
1.00 – 2.00	Low
2.01 – 3.00	Medium Low
3.01 – 4.00	Medium High
4.01 – 5.00	High

7. Findings

In order to determine the level of instructional leadership practice in the Southern Region of Malaysia, the researcher used descriptive statistics to analyze the data obtained from 390 respondents. The instructional leadership practice of the headmasters was measured using 50 items in the questionnaire. The analysis of the level of instructional leadership practice was divided into 10 functions representing three dimensions in instructional leadership. A mean score analysis with the level of practice for each item in instructional leadership is explained below.

7.1. The Practice Level of Defining School Goal Dimension

The dimension 'defining school goal' consist of two functions, namely, framing and communicating the goals of the school. For the first function which is framing school goals, the analysis of this function is as shown in Table 2. Based on the table, it is found that the overall mean of this first function is 3.9026, with the interpretation of the practice level is medium high. The item with the highest mean value is "using the examination result data in formulating academic achievement" (M = 4.1051). Whereas the item that recorded the lowest mean score was "getting feedback from teachers while planning school goals" (M = 3.7231). Overall, the teachers in the Southern Region of Malaysia agreed that their headmasters had done the task of framing school goal at medium high level.

Table-2. Analysis of Framing School Goal Function

Item No.	Items	Mean (M)	Practice Level
1	Developing a focused annual goal for the school.	4.0128	High
2	Planning school goals based on teacher's capability.	3.8103	Medium High
3	Getting feedback from teachers while planning school goals.	3.7231	Medium High
4	Using the examination results data in formulating academic achievement.	4.1051	High
5	Facilitating the method in achieving school goals.	3.8615	Medium High
	Total Mean	**3.9026**	**Medium High**

Table 3 described in details the items for the second function of communicating the school goal. The item that records the highest mean value is "informing school goal to all members of the school community" (M = 4.1487). Whereas the item with the lowest mean value is "delivering school goals in the school's formal assembly" (M = 3.8385). It was found that this second function was practiced at a high level with a mean value of 4.0267.

Table-3. Analysis of Communicating School Goal Function

Item No.	Items	Mean (M)	Practice Level
6	Informing school goal to all members of the school community.	4.1487	High
7	Discussing school goal with teachers during meetings.	4.0462	High
8	Referring to school goal when making decisions related to the curriculum.	4.0179	High
9	Clearly display the school goal.	4.0821	High
10	Delivering the goal during the school's formal assembly.	3.8385	Medium High
	Total Mean	**4.0267**	**High**

In comparison, in terms of the functions in the first dimension which is defining the school goal, it is found that the second function which is communicating the school goal is observed to be more practiced by the headmasters in

the Southern Region of Malaysia than the first function of framing school goals. This finding is based on the value of the mean score obtained through the evaluation of the teachers who are under the administration of the headmasters.

7.2. The Practice Level of Managing Instructional Programmes Dimension

The dimensions of managing instructional programmes have three functions, which are supervising and evaluating instructions, coordinating the curriculum and monitoring students' development. An analysis of the third function of supervising and evaluating instructions is as in Table 4. Based on the table, the item with the highest mean score is "prioritizing teaching aspects so that they are in line with the school goal" (M = 4.0154), while the item "state the results of the supervision after the session had been carried out"(M = 3.5821) got the lowest score. The total mean for this third function is 3.8621 and this indicates that the headmasters in the Southern Region of Malaysia are doing the task of supervising and evaluating instructions at medium high level.

Table-4. Analysis of Supervising and Evaluating Instructions Function

Item No.	Items	Mean (M)	Practice Level
	prioritizing teaching aspects so that they are in line with the school goal	4.0154	High
12	conducts informal observations in the classroom periodically.	3.9103	Medium High
13	state the results of the supervision after the session had been carried out.	3.5821	Medium High
14	evaluate teacher's teaching with integrity.	3.8667	Medium High
15	supervising of teachers' teaching based on the school's annual supervision calendar.	3.9359	Medium High
	Total Mean	**3.8621**	**Medium High**

Table 5 shows an analysis of the fourth function which is coordinating the curriculum. The item with the highest mean score is "appointing individuals who will be responsible for coordinating the curriculum aspects" (M = 4.1077) while item with the lowest mean score is "actively participating in reviewing teaching materials requirements" (M = 3.6308). The overall mean of this fourth function is 3.9041 and this proves that the performance level of the task of coordinating the curriculum by the headmasters is medium high.

Table-5. Analysis of Coordinating the Curriculum Function

Item No.	Items	Mean (M)	Practice Level
16	appointing individuals who will be responsible for coordinating the curriculum aspects	4.1077	High
17	making curriculum-related decisions based on school-level examination results.	4.0026	High
18	evaluating each school goal to ensure it contributes in enhancing academic achievement.	3.9513	Medium High
19	actively participating in reviewing teaching materials requirements.	3.6308	Medium High
20	monitoring teachers' teaching activities based on the Standard Curriculum and Assessment Document (*Dokumen Standard Kurikulum dan Pentaksiran*, DSKP).	3.8282	Medium High
	Total Mean	**3.9041**	**Medium High**

Table-6. Analysis of Monitoring Students' Development Function

Item No.	Items	Mean (M)	Practice Level
21	hold an individual meeting with teachers to discuss students' progress.	3.4154	Medium High
22	discuss with the subjects committee on the strengths and weaknesses of the teaching and learning (T&L) process.	3.7718	Medium High
23	using test results / performance to evaluate students' progress	4.0359	High
24	informing to teachers in written form on students' academic performance	3.3103	Medium High
25	informing overall academic performance in the school's formal assembly.	3.7000	Medium High
	Total Mean	**3.6467**	**Medium High**

The analysis of the fifth function which is monitoring students' development is as shown in Table 6. Based on the table, it is found that the item "using test results / performance to evaluate students' progress" (M = 4.0359) has recorded the highest mean value and the item with the lowest mean is "informing to teachers in written form on students' academic performance "(M = 3.3103). This analysis also found that overall, the fifth function was performed by the headmasters at medium high level with a mean of 3.6467.

In comparison, in terms of the functions in this dimension of managing instructional programmes, it was found that the fourth function of coordinating the curriculum (M = 3.9041) earned the highest mean, followed by the third function of supervising and evaluating instructions (M = 3.8621), and the item with the lowest mean value is the fifth function, which is monitoring students' development (M = 3.6467). Based on these mean values, it can be concluded that the headmasters in the Southern Region of Malaysia have practiced the functions that represent the managing instructional programmes dimension at medium high level.

7.3. The Practice Level of Promoting School Climate Dimension

The third dimension of instructional leadership is promoting school climate. This dimension consists of five functions which are protecting instructional period, always seen, providing incentives for teachers, promoting professional development and providing incentives for learning. The analysis of protecting instructional period functions is as shown in Table 7. Based on the table, it is found that the overall mean of the sixth function of the instructional leadership is 3.7282, with the interpretation of the practice level is at medium high. The item with the highest mean value is "encouraging teachers to utilize the teaching period as planned in the Lesson Plan (LP)" (M = 4.1692). Whereas the item that recorded the lowest mean value was "instructing students who are late or skip classes to study the missed lessons" (M = 3.3692). Based on these findings, the teachers in the Southern Region of Malaysia agreed that the headmasters had been fulfil the task of protecting instructional period in leading their schools.

Table-7. Analysis of Protecting Instructional Period Function

Item No.	Items	Mean (M)	Practice Level
26	restricting any form of distraction while T&L is ongoing.	3.7564	Medium High
27	take appropriate action for students who come late to class or skip classes.	3.4308	Medium High
28	encouraging teachers to utilize the teaching period as planned in the Lesson Plan (LP).	4.1692	High
29	instructing students who are late or skip classes to study the missed lessons.	3.3692	Medium High
30	enforcing the practice of protecting instructional period to ensure that the teaching period is fully utilized.	3.9154	Medium High
	Total Mean	**3.7282**	**Medium High**

Table 8 describes in details the items for the seventh function which is always seen. Based on the table, it was found that the item that recorded the highest mean value was "participating in the activities / programmes organized by the school" (M = 4.0949) while the item with the lowest mean value was "interacting with students' on academic matters individually" (M = 3.3256). Based on this finding, it is clear that the headmasters in the Southern Region of Malaysia are easy to be seen (togetherness) and approached by the teachers and students, with the interpretation of this practice level is medium high (M = 3.6892).

Table-8. Analysis of Always Seen Function

Item No.	Items	Mean (M)	Practice Level
31	spending time interacting with the teachers at the right time	3.6897	Medium High
32	taking the opportunity to interact with students at the appropriate time	3.7231	Medium High
33	discussing with teachers on academic issues outside their teaching hours.	3.6128	Medium High
34	interacting with students' on academic matters individually"	3.3256	Medium High
35	participating in the activities / programmes organized by the school	4.0949	High
	Total Mean	**3.6892**	**Medium High**

The analysis the eighth function, which is providing incentives for teachers is as shown in Table 9. Based on the table, the item that has the highest mean score is "giving personal verbal praise to the teachers for their efforts / performance" (M = 3.8385) and the item "recognizing teachers' performance excellent in written form to be kept in personal files" (M = 3.2769) has the lowest mean score. The overall mean for this eighth function is 3.6328 and this indicates that the headmasters have provided incentives for teachers at medium high levels.

Table-9. Analysis of Providing Incentives for Teachers

Item No.	Items	Mean (M)	Practice Level
36	giving written appreciation for teachers who shows excellent performance.	3.4282	Medium High
37	giving personal verbal praise to the teachers for their efforts / performance	3.8385	Medium High
38	recognizing teachers' performance excellent in written form to be kept in personal files	3.2769	Medium High
39	supporting professional development opportunities for teachers as a reward for their contributions.	3.8000	Medium High
40	recommending excellent-performing teachers to be given promotion.	3.8205	Medium High
	Total Mean	**3.6328**	**Medium High**

Table 10 explains in details the analysis of the ninth function, which is promoting professional development. The item which recorded the highest mean value is "instructing the teachers to participate in all In-service Training (LDP) organized" (M = 4.2282) while the item with the lowest mean score is "planning In-service Training (*Latihan Dalam Perkhidmatan*, LDP) for teachers in line with the school needs" (M = 3.9205) . The overall mean for this ninth function is 4.0451 and this proves that the headmasters are very supportive of the teachers' professional development based on the high level of practice.

Table-10. Analysis of Promoting Professional Development

Item No.	Items	Mean (M)	Practice Level
41	planning In-service Training (*Latihan Dalam Perkhidmatan*, LDP) for teachers in line with the school needs	3.9205	Medium High
42	encouraging the adoption of new knowledge / skills acquired from LDP in the classroom.	3.9821	Medium High
43	instructing the teachers to participate in all In-service Training (LDP) organized.	4.2282	High
44	attend LDP activities related to teaching as a support.	4.1487	High
45	allocating time in meetings for teachers to share ideas / information obtained from LDP activities.	3.9462	Medium High
	Total Mean	**4.0451**	**High**

An analysis of the last function of the instructional leadership practice which is providing incentives for student learning is given in Table 11. Based on the table, it is found that the item "recognizing outstanding students in academic with formal rewards (certificate of appreciation or prizes)" (M = 4.1744) has recorded the highest mean value and the item with the lowest mean is "contacting parents / guardians to inform them on the improvement / achievement / contribution of the students at school" (M = 3.5385). This analysis has also found that in overall, the tenth function was done by the headmasters at a medium high level with the mean of 3.8851 and this proved that the headmasters had provided special incentives to students who performed well in both learning and personality.

Table-11. Analysis of Providing Incentives for Students' Learning Function

Item No.	Items	Mean (M)	Practice Level
46	recognizing outstanding students in academic with formal rewards (certificate of appreciation or prizes).	4.1744	High
47	allocating a time in the formal assembly for an appreciation session of students who excel in academic / personality.	3.9615	Medium High
48	holding a special ceremony to give recognition for outstanding students in academic	4.0231	High
49	contacting parents / guardians to inform them on the improvement / achievement / contribution of the students at school	3.5385	Medium High
50	providing supports for teachers who give appreciation / reward their excellent students	3.7282	Medium High
	Total Mean	**3.8851**	**Medium High**

In comparison, in terms of the functions in the promoting the school climate dimension, it was found that the ninth function which is promoting professional development (M = 4.0451) earned the highest mean, followed by the tenth function of providing incentives for students' learning (M = 3.8851) followed by the sixth function which is protect the instructional time (M = 3.7282), and the seventh function which is always visible (M = 3.6892) and the eighth function which providing incentives to teachers has the lowest mean score value (M = 3.6328). Based on

these mean values, it can be concluded that the headmasters in the Southern Region of Malaysia have practiced the functions that represent the managing the instructional programmes dimension at high and medium high levels according to the opinion of the teachers.

After examining the analysis for each item in the instructional leadership functions, a complete analysis based on the three dimensions and 10 functions is summarized in Table 4.12. This analysis is described in the form of mean and standard deviation as well as interpretation for the practice level. Based on the table, it was found that the level of instructional leadership practice as a whole is at medium high (M=3.8850, SD=.59626). In terms of dimensions comparison, it is found that the practice of defining school goal dimension shows a mean score value (M=3.9646, SD=.6976) that is higher than the overall mean value (M=3.8550), while the dimension of organizing instructional programmes (M=3.8043, SD=6105) and promoting school climate (M=3.7961, SD=.6005) showed lower mean score values.

Table-4.12. Analysis for The Level of Practice of Instructional Leadership by the Headmasters

Dimension and functions	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Practice Level
Defining school goal	3.9646	.6976	Medium high
1. Framing school goal	3.9026	.7275	Medium high
2. Communicating school goal	4.0267	.7330	High
Managing instructional programmes	3.8043	.6105	Medium high
1. Supervising and evaluating instructions	3.8621	.6554	Medium high
2. Coordinating curriculum	3.9041	.6588	Medium high
3. Monitoring students' development	3.6467	.6665	Medium high
Promoting school climate	3.7961	.6005	Medium high
1. Protecting instructional period	3.7282	.6447	Medium high
2. Always seen	3.6892	.7107	Medium high
3. Providing incentives for teachers	3.6328	.7656	Medium high
4. Promoting professional development	4.0451	.6356	High
5. Providing incentives for students' learning	3.8851	.7146	Medium high
Total Mean	**3.8550**	**.5963**	**Medium high**

An analysis is also carried out for each function to determine the practice level of the functions that represent the three dimensions in instructional leadership. The dimension defining school goal which consists of two functions indicates that the headmasters practiced defining school goal (M=3.9026, SD= .7275) and communicating school goal (M=4.0267, SD= .7330) at medium high and high levels respectively. For the dimension managing instructional programmes which has three functions, the headmasters were able to carry out all the functions at a medium high level, which are supervising and evaluating instructions (M = 3.8621, SD = .6554), coordinating the curriculum (M = 3.9041, SD=.6588) and monitoring students' development (M = 3.6467, SD = .6665).

The third dimension is promoting the school climate and it was found that only one function was practiced by school teachers at high level, which is promoting professional development (M=4.0451, SD = .6356) among teachers. Meanwhile, the other four functions showed that the headmasters performed functions such as protecting instructional period (M = 3.7282, SD = .6447), always seen (M = 3.6892, SD = .7107), providing incentives for teachers (M = 3.6328, SD =. 7656) and incentives for students' learning (M = 3.8851, SD = .7146) at medium high levels.

Overall, the headmasters in the Southern Region of Malaysia demonstrated a medium high moderate level of instructional leadership practices based on the three dimensions and the 10 functions in the leadership model. The dimension with the highest practice level is defining school goal, followed by managing instructional programmes and promoting school climate. Therefore, it can be concluded that the headmasters in the Southern Region of Malaysia have practiced instructional leadership in leading the teachers to enhance the students' academic and personal excellence.

7.4. Recommendation

The findings from this research show that instructional leadership are practiced in all national schools in the Southern Region of Malaysia. However, the researcher is aware that there are several aspects in terms of the implementation of the practice that needs improvement. The recommendation for the improvements are as follows:

i. Instructional leadership practices among the headmasters can be further reinforced through leadership courses that have been enhanced based on the current needs and demands. The course should also be implemented consistently and designed carefully so that leadership skills can be improved and they can continue to be competent in overcoming the challenges in today's education setting.

ii. School leaders whether principals or headmasters need to fully understand the three-dimensional Instructional Leadership Model by Hallinger (2011b) and the 10 functions in them so that they are able to perform their duties as genuine and firm instructional leaders. This in-depth understanding is important for them to exhibit excellent leadership behaviors and consequently, driving the school towards excellence.

iii. Headmasters are also encouraged to further strengthen the practice of the third dimension of instructional leadership which is promoting the school climate. This dimension is found to be at the lowest level of its implementation compared to the other two dimensions. This is due to the fact that the headmasters performed the eighth function, which providing incentives for teachers, at the lowest level compared to the four other functions contained in this dimension. This low output is due to two reasons: firstly, the headmasters lack giving recognition in written form, and secondly, the attitude of the teachers themselves who failed to properly keep the written recognition received from the headmasters. Therefore, the headmaster needs to make more written recognitions such as certificates and letters of appreciation, while at the same time, constantly remind the teachers to safely keep all kinds of written appreciations for future use.

8. Conclusion

This research was conducted with the purpose of examining the instructional leadership practices among headmasters in the Southern Region of Malaysia. It is therefore hoped that the findings of this study will be part of the treasury of leadership-related knowledge as well as benefiting the national education policy makers, school leaders, middle leaders and teachers who are keen to explore the practices of instructional leadership. In conclusion, instructional leadership practices are important to ensure that the efforts to improve the quality of teachers' teaching and students' learning can be realized together for the excellence of the school.

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