

Review

Instructional leadership: the Role of Heads of Schools in Managing the Instructional Program

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In recent decades, much has been given to educational leadership. This increasing discourse stems from the popularized claim that effective leadership makes a significant difference to school performance and student outcomes. Thus, the present paper provides a narrative review of the article published under the title of “Instructional leadership: The role of heads of schools in managing the instructional program”. This review aimed at identifying the strengths and flaws of the article so that it becomes imputes for future studies. The reviewed study was conducted in Iringa urban six secondary schools of Tanzania. The study aimed at investigates the instructional leadership (IL) practices of heads of secondary schools in managing the instructional program to enhance classroom instruction and student learning. The appraised study was guided by the qualitative framework, mainly on a case study design. The study data were generated from interviews, focus group discussions, and observations from heads of secondary schools (HoSs), senior academic masters/mistresses (SAMs), teachers, and students. The study findings confirm that HoSs, SAMs, teachers, and students were not familiar with the concept of instructional leadership. Likewise, the instructional program was not effectively managed as heads of departments were not involved in curriculum coordination, syllabi were not covered on time, and HoSs did not undertake classroom observations or engage in a review of curriculum materials. Accordingly, in spite of the article was written in line with qualitative research protocols, it overlooked ethical issues which is an impetus of qualitative studies so that it absence lessens the empirical power of the study.

Key words: Qualitative review, Article review, Instructional leadership, Practices

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INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, much has been given to educational leadership. Moreover, the study of leadership in education continues to attract the attention of researchers. This increasing discourse stems from the popularized claim that effective leadership makes a significant difference to school performance and student outcomes (Robinson, Lloyd & Rowe, 2008; Marzano, Waters & McNulty, 2005). An increasing focus on

learning outcomes of students, overall interest in educational reform and school-level accountability might create new global attention in school leadership. Accordingly, school leadership has become an education policy priority around the world attributable to a strong conviction and empirical supports that school and students' success or failure is determined by the way a school is governed (Pont, Nusche & Moorman, 2008, Witziers, Bosker & Krüger, 2003).

Manaseh (2016), the author of the article critiqued,

made a good endeavor in investigating the instructional leadership practices engaged in by heads of secondary schools to ensure high-quality teaching and learning. He argued that devoid of effective management of the instructional program in favor of promoting teachers' classroom instruction and students' learning, efforts of improving learning are doomed to fail.

The article critiqued in this document focuses on the instructional leadership (IL) practices of heads of Iringa urban six secondary schools of Tanzania. The article was published in the *International Journal of Educational Leadership and Management*, on volume 4, number 1, in 2016. Therefore, the reviewer tried to see the problem and its conceptualization, the research approach based on theoretical lenses, sample techniques, data sources and tools, data analysis and major findings and forwards concluding remarks.

Problem Discussion and Conceptualization

This review aimed at identifying the strengths and flaws of the article published under the title of "Instructional leadership: The role of heads of schools in managing the instructional program" so that its findings could be the basis for future research.

Concerning the study title, it is concise, well-articulated and informative as a qualitative research study. Albeit the article has no clearly written study location written in the title, the place where the study was conducted found in the main text of the manuscript. Thus, the study was undertaken in Iringa urban six secondary schools of Tanzania.

In the background of the study, the researcher sought to address the roles expected from the instructional leader and its departure from traditional administrators. In other tokens, as the investigator emphasized, instructional leaders spend lots of their time focusing on promoting teachers' instructional practices and students' learning, whereas, traditional school administrators spend the majority of their time dealing with managerial duties.

The critiqued article highlighted the context of the study area; mainly Tanzanian education policy direction towards the responsibility of secondary school leaders and attempt to link it with instructional leadership dimensions. Clear and detailed information with regard to the context of the study is critical in the qualitative study. In this regard, Creswell (2012) affirmed that knowledge of the research context is imperative in qualitative research since the study findings cannot be alienated from the research context. Therefore, the researcher needs to be admired in this regard.

The investigator also highlighted that in spite of instructional leadership creates an effective teaching-learning environment, educational leaders in Africa in general in Tanzania in particular rarely engage in it.

Besides, he underscored little has been devoted to studies relating to instructional leadership, though, he was not supported his claim by empirical evidence.

Moreover, the study has explicitly written objectives and research questions. Formulating clear research objectives or questions can easily guide the study. It serves as points of reference for assessing the appropriateness of the decisions about the research design and methods of data collection, to conceptualize interview schedules and interpretation (Flick, 2009).

Regardless of the above strengths, the researcher consulted very limited local and international empirical studies regarding the issue under study in highlighting the triggering factors of conducting the study. Moreover, the researcher falls short in convincing the readers about the decisiveness of the problem studied and the triggering gap in existing knowledge of the problem by supporting empirical evidence. Pertaining to this, Flick (2009) noted that the research in which replica to the existing knowledge cannot be good research rather it resulted in duplication of efforts.

The Methodological Approach

The reviewer selected the article from the Thomson journal list (using keywords such as leadership, school leadership, educational leadership, instructional leadership) for review and analysis. Hence, the reviewed study employed a qualitative inquiry with a case study design. As the researcher described in the article, the selected design was vital for the in-depth investigation of the issue under study. Relating to this, employing qualitative research endorses a detailed understanding of the issue under investigation (Gay, Mills & Airasian, 2012). Moreover, Creswell (2009) conceptualized that the case study assists to explore in-depth about the problem under consideration.

Concerning the study tools, the study employed interviews, focus group discussion and participant observation. Thus, the research design and instruments of data collection used in the study were complementary with each other. In this regard, Yin (2016) contended that employing proper and valid method leads to credible conclusions. Yin further asserted that case study inquiry relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion and bases on the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis. Therefore, the design the researcher employed was appropriate for the thick description of the problem under scrutiny.

Besides, the deployment of multiple instruments (interview, focus group discussion, and observation) assisted the study to capture the diverse perspectives of the study participants and cross-validate the data obtained from each method. This maximizes its

credibility, and validity. In line with this, Gay, et al., (2012) affirmed that the inclusion of different data collection tools assists to triangulate and verifying the accuracy of the finding. In sum, triangulation contributes to promoting quality in research (Flick, 2008).

With regards to sampling, 36 informants from the diversified sample of respondents (head of schools, senior academic staff, teachers and students) participated. This helps the researcher to assure the trustworthiness of data collected from multiple perspectives and reduces bias.

On the other hand, the researcher hardly explains ethical issues while conducting the study. Ethical issues should be taken into account while carrying out any scientific inquiry. The researcher said nothing in the article about how ethical issues were addressed while conducting and writing the report on his study. In this regard, Creswell (2009) asserted that researchers need to protect their research participants in minimizing if there will be any harm and maximize their benefits and obtaining informed consent by protecting the anonymity and confidentiality of the data collected from them.

Data Analysis and Major Findings

The researcher analyzed the collected data thematically. As reported in the study, the researcher began data transcription at the outset of the fieldwork and data reduction and transcription were followed. Two main themes were formulated in line with the study objectives; informant understanding of IL and the roles played by HoSs in managing the instructional program. As well, the researcher cautioned to protect the anonymity of his interviewees while reporting his findings by using folk names (school teacher, student, school head, and senior academic master). Therefore, based on the analysis done, discussion of findings was also undertaken. Finally, consistent with the findings attained, conclusions and recommendations were drawn. Accordingly, the study concluded that HoSs, SAMs, teachers, and students were not familiar with the concept of instructional leadership and HoSs did not play their role in managing instructional programs due to lack of awareness and interest in their duty and IL.

Regardless of the strengths, the reviewer felt that the study has inadequacies. At the outset, the researcher concluded that the ineffective engagement of HoSs in managing instructional programs was due to their limited knowledge of IL. However, the findings in the discussion part of the manuscript revealed that not only their limited knowledge of IL but also their lack of knowledge of the guidelines of their duties stipulated by the Tanzanian ministry of education, lack of interest and due to their belief not to discourage teachers through close

monitoring.

With regard to recommendations, the majority of them are feasible and analogous with the study findings. In so far, the study recommended a merit-based appointment of HoSs. Based on the reviewer's point of view unless the researcher had prior knowledge about the practice of HoSs appointment, the presented data did not support it and this suggestion was not pertinent to the study findings.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The article is incredibly valuable in being evidenced for the informant's understanding of IL and the HoSs' roles in managing the instructional program. Moreover, it addressed the roles expected from the instructional leader and its practical departure from the actual practices of HoSs. The study spotlighted the context in which it was conducted, which is a critical element of a qualitative study. It was also employed multiple tools and informants to endorse diversified views. Generally, the study report was written in plain language that audiences easily capture the study findings. However, the study failed to address its limitations and implications of future research and how ethical issues were determined. Besides, as qualitative research, the article lacks a thick description of the issue under study. Therefore, future studies need to consider these limitations into account.

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