

Best Practices of Instructional Leadership among Principals of Primary and Secondary Schools in Male', Maldives

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the best practices of instructional leadership among principals of primary and secondary schools in Male', Maldives, based on teachers' perceptions. The Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale (PIMRS), developed by Hallinger and Murphy (1985) and modified by Hallinger and Wang (2015), served as the instrument for data collection through a questionnaire. A total of 392 teachers from schools in Male', Maldives, were surveyed and data were analyzed using SPSS 26.0. The result of the study shows that all three dimensions of instructional leadership—"defining the school mission" (mean 4.05), "managing the instructional program" (mean 3.94), and "developing a positive school learning climate" (mean 3.72)—have reached a high level in practice. The study shows that the three best practices of principals in instructional leadership are to effectively communicate the school's mission to members of the school community (dimension 'Defining the School's Mission', mean 4.12), to clarify who is responsible for coordinating the curriculum across grade levels (dimension 'Managing the Instructional Program', mean 4.29), and to encourage teachers to use class time to teach and practice new skills and concepts (dimension 'Developing a Positive School Climate', mean 4.10). It is hoped that this study will provide useful insights that will be effective in improving the instructional leadership skills of principals to improve the academic performance of students and create a world-class human capital that is comparably excellent.

Keywords: Principals' best practices, instructional leadership, teachers' perceptions

Introduction

The Maldives is an island nation consisting of unique archipelagic atolls in the Indian Ocean. Public expenditure on education was estimated at 11.7% of GDP in 2016 (Maldives Ministry of Education, 2018). However, reviews have shown that many students are far below proficiency in literacy skills, and many students' performance in core subjects is at the basic education level (Ministry of Education, 2020). This is because the quality of the school depends on the professional skills of the principal (Sukarmin & Sin, 2021). The competent and skilled leadership role of the principal is important in raising student achievement and improving school performance. His leadership role leads to school success and creates an effective school climate. The positive engagement of principals would greatly contribute to the promotion of academic achievement.

Review Of Literature

Leadership has a critical impact on the effectiveness of schools, which are always striving for improvement and development. Schools need good leadership, and instructional leadership is a form of leadership that every school leader must practice to achieve excellence in a school (Hassan et al., 2018). The main goal of an instructional leader is to find ways and means to improve student learning (Ahmed, 2016). School leaders should act as instructional leaders and must know the ways and means to create the necessary conditions for organizational development. The following sections discuss the literature on instructional leadership developed by Hallinger and Murphy (1985), which is a very important topic in school leadership.

Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale (PIMRS) Framework

The conceptual framework of Hallinger and Murphy's (1985; see Figure 4), the Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale (PIMRS), is the most commonly used framework in educational research for the

principal's role in instructional management. It has been used and empirically tested by many researchers in the context of instructional management and has the broadest practice in measuring principals' levels of instructional management (Alig-Mielcarek, 2003). The Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale (PIMRS) is a research instrument developed based on this model that is strong and stable and has become one of the most widely used instruments in school leadership and management research (Robinson et al., 2008). According to Alig-Mielcarek (2003), this instrument has been used many times over the past 30 years in the study of school leaders' instructional leadership skills and is still relevant today.

Hallinger and Murphy (1985) developed the model of instructional management, which is divided into three general dimensions that focus on teaching and learning by defining the school's mission, managing the instructional program, and promoting a positive school learning climate using a combination of surveys and administrative data.

Further, these three dimensions were broken down into ten functions or job descriptions for educational leadership: (1) Frame the School Goals, (2) Communicate the School Goals, (3) Supervise & Evaluate Instruction, (4) Coordinate the Curriculum, (5) Monitor Student Progress, (6) Protect Instructional Time, (7) Promote Professional Development, (8) Maintain High Visibility, (9) Provide Incentives for Teachers, and (10) Provide Incentives for Learning.

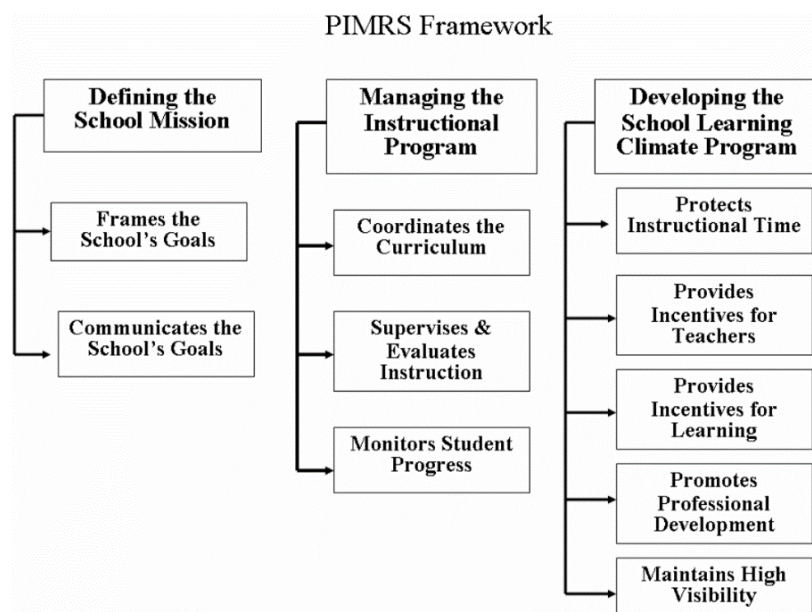


Figure 1 : PIMRS Conceptual Framework (Hallinger & Murphy 1985)

Defining the School Mission

The first dimension of instructional leadership, defining the school mission, covers two functions of principal job descriptions: (1) the formulation of school goals and (2) the communication of school goals. This suggests that instructional leaders should have a clear picture of what the school's goals are. According to Krug (1992), doing something without a clear mission is like starting a journey without a destination in mind. You probably don't know when you'll arrive. The goals are related to the principal's ability to engage personnel in order to ensure that the school has a clear mission, which is the academic achievement of the students.

Defining a school mission is about communicating that vision to the staff and students in a way that creates a shared sense of purpose that connects the many activities in the school's classes (Salleh, 2014). The role of the principal in defining the mission is to frame school-wide goals and communicate those goals to the entire school community on a unified basis (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). In the formulation of school goals, principals should work with parents and staff to find areas of weakness that need improvement within the school and develop routine goals to address these areas (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). Hence, defining and communicating the school's mission or goal is part of the principal's job as an instructional leader. In

addition, it is important for school leaders to have a vision of what the school should strive to accomplish, and this is essential in setting broader goals for accountability and instructional development.

(1) Framing the School's Goals

Framing the school's goal function refers to the principal's involvement in determining the areas to focus the attention and resources of school staff during the school year. Goals should include data on past and current student performance and staff responsibilities for achieving the goals (Hallinger & Wang, 2015). Staff and parent input appear to be vital in setting school goals. A successful school should have a clearly defined mission or set of goals that focus on student achievement. It is common sense that a clearly defined mission is necessary for any venture that hopes to succeed

(2) Communicating School's Goals

This practice is about how the principal communicates the school's major goals to all school communities, especially staff, teachers, and students. Principals should ensure that staff understand the relevance of school goals by discussing and reviewing them frequently throughout the school year, especially in the context of decisions about instruction, curriculum, and budget (Hallinger & Wang, 2015). The school's mission should be well articulated, widely shared, and supported by all teachers and staff (Salleh & Kamaruddin, 2020). It is one of the most important duties of the principal as an instructional leader to communicate and clarify the school goals (Salleh, 2013). All teachers and staff must understand the school goals in order to contribute to the development of school performance and the achievement of the school mission. It is one of the hallmarks of a good school when the entire school community has clear goals and high expectations.

Managing Instructional Programs

The second dimension of this approach is managing instructional programs. This involves working directly with teachers on issues of curriculum and instruction (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). This dimension includes three functions: (1) supervising and evaluating instructions; (2) coordinating the curriculum; and (3) monitoring student progress. "This dimension focuses on the principal's role in 'managing the technical core' of the school" (Hallinger, 2011, p. 227). Supervision and evaluation of instruction, according to Hallinger and Murphy (1985), include such actions as providing instructional assistance to teachers, monitoring instruction, and aligning teaching and learning with school goals. Furthermore, they stressed that in coordinating the curriculum, the principal is charged with providing opportunities for staff collaboration in aligning the curriculum with standards and achievement tests. In addition, they specified that the function of monitoring student achievement specifies the principal's use of test data for goal setting, assessing curriculum, evaluating teaching and learning, and measuring growth towards school goals.

(1) supervising and evaluating instructions

Principals play an important role in monitoring and evaluating instruction to promote and improve the quality of teaching (Salleh & Kamaruddin, 2020). One of the principal's primary responsibilities is to ensure that the school's goals are put into practice by teachers and students (Hallinger & Wang, 2015). As an instructional leader, the principal should supervise teachers to make sure and assist them in quality instruction to facilitate effective learning for students. This includes matching the teachers' instructional goals with those of the school, assisting teachers with instructional design, and monitoring what is happening in the classroom. This observation can be done informally by walking through the classroom (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985) and formally by classroom visits over an extended period of time. And after this observation, it is very important for a school leader to offer constructive feedback or suggestions.

(2) coordinating the curriculum

A high degree of curricular coordination is a characteristic feature of instructionally effective institutions (Hallinger & Wang, 2015). Curriculum objectives are closely linked to the school's subject matter and performance tests. Furthermore, there appears to be a high degree of consistency in the curriculum series across grade levels.

(3) monitoring student progress

Monitoring student progress is an important role of the principal in an instructionally effective school. Both standardized and criterion-referenced tests are extensively used to identify the programmatic weaknesses and vulnerabilities of students, assess the impact of changes to the school's instructional program, and assist

in classroom assignments (Hallinger & Wang, 2015). The principal should meet with teachers and head teachers to discuss relevant test data in a timely and helpful manner, interpret test results, and offer constructive suggestions for improving student academic performance.

Promoting a Positive School Learning Climate

The third dimension of Hallinger and Murphy's (1985) framework is developing or promoting a positive school learning climate, which encompasses five functions: (1) protecting instructional time; (2) promoting professional development activities in school; (3) maintaining high visibility or always being in sight; (4) providing incentives for teachers; and (5) providing incentives for learning.

The norms and attitudes of staff and students that influence learning in the school are referred to as the positive school learning climate (Salleh & Hatta, 2018). According to Alig-Mielcarek (2003), the tasks of the principal consist mainly of indirect activities that contribute to the creation of a positive learning environment. Based on Salleh and Hatta (2018), supportive principals towards teachers and students lead to a climate conducive to excellent academic performance. This dimension conforms to the notion that successful schools create an "academic press" through the development of high standards and expectations as well as a culture that fosters and rewards continuous learning and improvement (Hallinger, 2011).

Hallinger and Murphy (1985) stated that the principals can enhance students' and teachers' confidence by establishing a reward system that emphasizes academic performance and creative effort, over strong, obvious standards shaping what the school foresees from students, out of the precise use of instructional time, and via the selection and carrying out of high-quality staff development programs. Furthermore, Alig-Mielcarek (2003) asserts that the main function of instructional leadership is to promote a positive school learning climate through indirect activities.

(1) Protecting instructional time

Protecting instructional time means allocating learning time that provides teachers with blocks of uninterrupted work time. If teachers are regularly interrupted by announcements, tardy students, and demands from the office, improved classroom management and instructional abilities are not exploited to their full potential (Hallinger & Wang, 2015). Therefore, the protection of teaching time is an important task of the principals as instructional leaders in order to enable them to ensure that the teaching and learning process runs well and that both teaching and learning processes take place in each classroom at certain times (Salleh & Hatta, 2018). Principals who successfully adopt regulations that avoid disruptions to learning time in the classroom have the ability to enhance allocated learning time and thus student accomplishment.

(2) Promoting professional development activities in school

Robinson et al. (2008) discovered that the principal's support and involvement in staff professional development had the greatest impact on student learning outcomes. Principals can support and encourage teachers and staff in their efforts to improve teaching and learning in accordance with the school's goals. They can organize, provide, or inform teachers about appropriate staff development opportunities (Hallinger & Wang, 2015). According to Salleh et al. (2018), professional development for teachers assists them in connecting theory and practice and creating high-quality learning environments in their classrooms.

(3) Maintaining high visibility or always being in sight

The circumstances in which the principal is seen give an indication of his priorities for teachers and students. Even if the principal has too much to do and time is beyond his or her control, he or she should prioritize finding enough time to be there for students and teachers and to observe lessons and other extra activities. This has the potential to improve student behavior and learning. Visibility on school grounds and in classrooms improves the relationship between principals and students and between principals and teachers (Hallinger & Wang, 2015).

(4) Providing incentives for teachers

It is important for principals to build a system that rewards and recognizes teachers for their efforts in order to create a positive learning climate. According to Bear et al. (2015) and Hallinger and Wang (2015), principals have few reward options to use with teachers. Principals' ability to motivate teachers is severely limited by the uniform salary schedule and the tenure system (Salleh & Hatta, 2018). However, in schools, money is only marginally more successful as an incentive than praise and recognition (Hallinger & Wang,

2015). Meanwhile, an incentive does not mean that the principal should spend money on praise to encourage teachers to teach effectively and perform their duties. Principals, on the other hand, can use a range of formal and informal rewards to inspire teachers and develop a school culture based on trust, mutual respect, and success, such as personally expressed appreciation, public recognition, and formal honors and awards.

(5) Providing incentives for learning

A positive school learning environment can be created by shaping a climate in which students place a high priority on academic accomplishment. To create a successful climate, students must be provided with numerous, visible chances to be rewarded and recognized for academic achievement and improvement (Hallinger & Wang, 2015). The incentives do not have to be expensive, but students should have opportunities to be honored for their achievements both in and out of the classroom. According to Harris and Lowery (2002), the principal can be responsive to students, praise them, advocate for them, and create a safe and secure learning environment. Principals who are responsive to children contribute to a positive learning environment (Salleh & Hatta, 2018). According to Harris and Lowery (2002), principals who take the time to recognize students' accomplishments help to establish a healthy school climate.

Materials And Methods

The Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale (PIMRS), developed by Hallinger and Murphy (1985) and modified by Hallinger and Wang (2015), was used as an instrument to collect data through a survey questionnaire. A total of 392 teachers from primary and secondary schools in Male', Maldives, were surveyed. The data were analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 26. The outcome of the study was determined using a 5-Likert scale: 1. almost never; 2. rarely; 3. sometimes; 4. frequently; and 5. almost always (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). Prior permission to conduct this study was obtained from the Ministry of Education, Maldives (Creswell, 2012). The Cronbach's alpha for the instruments showed an average value of 0.971, which is in the acceptable range (above 0.7) (Hair et al., 2019).

The purpose of this study was to investigate the best practices of instructional leadership among principals of schools in Male', Maldives according to teachers' perceptions. Specifically, the study will provide answers to the following questions:

1. What are the Best Practices of Defining the School Mission by the Principals of schools in Male', Maldives as perceived by Teachers?
2. What are the Best Practices of Managing the Instructional Program by the Principals of schools in Male', Maldives as perceived by Teachers?
3. What are the Best Practices of Developing a Positive School Learning Climate by the Principals of schools in Male', Maldives as perceived by Teachers?
4. What are the Best Practices of Instructional Leadership by the Principals of schools in Male', Maldives as perceived by Teachers?

Findings

This section presents the findings of teachers' perceived instructional leadership practices by principals of schools in Male', Maldives. The researcher used descriptive statistical techniques such as frequency count, percentage distribution and mean to analyses the data collected from the respondents.

Table 1 Interpretation of Mean Score

Mean Score	Level
1.00 – 2.33	Low
2.34 – 3.67	Average
3.68 – 5.00	High

Source: Landell (1997)

In this study, instructional leadership practices among school principals in Male', Maldives, were categorized into three levels (Table 1), adopted from Landell (1997) based on teachers' agreement with principals' practices in the instruments used in this study. The mean scores divide teachers' level of agreement into three groups: "low" for scores between 1.00 and 2.33, "average" for scores between 2.34 and 3.67, and "high" for scores of 3.68 and above.

Based on teachers' evaluations of the tasks posed in the study, the classification of responses is as follows: the responses "Almost never" and "Rarely" are classified as "disagreeing" with the assertions or believing that principals do not follow these practices. On the other hand, the responses "Sometimes," "Frequently," and "Almost Always" are categorized as teachers "agreeing" with the allegations or believing that principals follow these practices.

Research Question 1:

What are the Best Practices of Defining the School Mission by the Principals of schools in Male', Maldives as perceived by Teachers?

Within the "Defining the School Mission" dimension of instructional leadership practice, principals as school leaders have the responsibility to formulate and communicate school goals. Table 2 shows in detail the mean score, standard deviation, and level of implementation of each task involved in principals' practices on five tasks to define the school mission statement in primary and secondary schools in Male, Maldives, as perceived by teachers.

Table 2 Practices of Defining the School Mission by the Principals of Schools in Male', Maldives: Perception of Teachers (N=392)

No	Statements	Level of Agreement							Mean Std. Dev	Level	Rank
		Disagree		Agree							
		Almost Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Frequently	Almost Always	%				
1	Develop a focused set of annual school-wide goals	N	7	26	81	122	156	91.6	4.01	High	4
		%	1.8	6.6	20.7	31.1	39.8				
2	Use data on student performance when developing the school's academic goals	N	6	21	73	119	173	93.1	4.1	High	2
		%	1.5	5.4	18.6	30.4	44.1				
3	Develop goals that are easily understood and used by teachers in the school	N	6	21	80	141	144	93.1	4.01	High	4
		%	1.5	5.4	20.4	36	36.7				
4	Communicate the school's mission effectively to members of the school community	N	7	25	52	138	170	91.8	4.12	High	1
		%	1.8	6.4	13.3	35.2	43.4				
5	Refer to the school's academic goals when making curricular decisions with teachers	N	13	22	72	120	165	91.1	4.03	High	3
		%	3.3	5.6	18.4	30.6	42.1				
Average Mean &								92.1	4.05	High	
Average Standard Deviation									0.87		

The findings in Table 2 show that on average, 92.1% of the 392 respondents teachers agreed that the five tasks of defining the school mission were practiced by Maldivian school principals at a high level, with an average mean of 4.05 and a standard deviation of 0.87. Moreover, principals implemented all five tasks of this dimension with "high" performance, with mean scores ranging from 4.01 and a Standard deviation of 1.02 to a mean of 4.12 and a Standard deviation of 0.99.

The results of the study show that the best practice for defining the school mission according to the perceptions of respondents was the fourth task "communicate the school's mission effectively to members of the school community", with a mean of 4.12, a standard deviation of 0.99, and an agreement of 91.8% among the 392 respondents. The practice of "using data on student performance when developing the school's academic goals" had the second highest score with a mean of 4.12 and a standard deviation of 0.99, and 93.1% of the 392 faculty who responded agreed with this statement. "Refer to the school's academic goals when making curriculum decisions with teachers" ranked third with a mean of 4.03, a standard deviation of 1.06, and 91.1% agreement among the 392 respondents".

As shown in Table 2, the practices "Develop a targeted set of annual schoolwide goals" and "Develop goals that can be easily understood and used by teachers in the school" each received a "high" rating and ranked fourth, where both practices received a mean score of 4.01, a standard deviation of 1.02 and 0.96, and were supported by 91.6% and 93.1% of the 392 respondents, respectively.

Research Question 2:

What are the Best Practices of Managing the Instructional Program by the Principals of schools in Male’, Maldives as perceived by Teachers?

Under the "Managing the Instructional Program" dimension of instructional leadership practice, principals have the responsibility to monitor and evaluate instruction, coordinate the curriculum, and monitor student progress. Table 3 shows in detail the mean, standard deviation, and degree of implementation of each task performed in the practice of school principals in relation to seven tasks to manage the instructional program in primary and secondary schools in Male, Maldives, as perceived by teachers.

The data showed on average 89.7% of the 392 respondents teachers agreed that managing the instructional program tasks was practiced by Maldivian school principals at a high level with an average mean of 3.94 and a standard deviation of 0.84. Moreover, principals implemented six tasks out of the seven tasks with "high" performance, and only one achieved "average", with mean scores of 4.29 and a stretched variance of 0.95 to a mean of 3.53 and a stretched variance of 1.24.

The result shows that the best practice of managing the instructional program by the principals of schools in Male’, Maldives, according to the perceptions of respondents, was the eighth task "make clear who is responsible for coordinating the curriculum across grade levels (e.g., the principal, vice principal, or teacher-leaders)" of the instructional leadership, with a "high" rank and a mean score of 4.29 and a Standard deviation of 0.95 and support from 93.4% of respondents.

"Draw upon the results of school-wide testing when making curricular decisions" was the second most important practice, receiving a "high" ranking with a mean of 4.08, a standard deviation of 0.91, and support from 94.9% of the 392 respondents. "Use tests and other performance measures to assess progress towards school goals" was ranked third, receiving a "high" rank with a mean of 4.07, a standard deviation of 0.97, and support from 93.4% of the 392 respondents.

Table 3 Practices of Managing the Instructional Program by the Principals of Schools in Male’, Maldives: Perception of Teachers (N=392)

No	Statements		Level of Agreement						Mean	Level	Rank	
			Disagree		Agree							Std. Dev.
			Almost Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Frequently	Almost Always	%				
6	Ensure that the classroom priorities of teachers are consistent with the goals and direction of the school	N	14	19	67	160	132	91.6	3.96	High	4	
		%	3.6	4.8	17.1	40.8	33.7		1.01			
7	Review student work products when evaluating	N	16	27	82	140	127	89	3.85	High	5	

	classroom instruction	%	4.1	6.9	20.9	35.7	32.4		1.08		
8	Make clear who is responsible for coordinating the curriculum across grade levels (e.g., the principal, vice principal, or teacher-leaders)	N	7	19	35	122	209	93.4	4.29	High	1
		%	1.8	4.8	8.9	31.1	53.3		0.95		
9	Draw upon the results of school-wide testing when making curricular decisions	N	5	15	72	153	147	94.9	4.08	High	2
		%	1.3	3.8	18.4	39	37.5		0.91		
10	Participate actively in the review of curricular materials	N	23	28	76	132	133	87.0	3.83	High	6
		%	5.9	7.1	19.4	33.7	33.9		1.15		
11	Meet individually with teachers to discuss student progress	N	35	48	82	130	97	78.8	3.53	Average	7
		%	8.9	12.2	20.9	33.2	24.7		1.24		
12	Use tests and other performance measure to assess progress toward school goals	N	7	19	72	134	160	93.4	4.07	High	3
		%	1.8	4.8	18.4	34.2	40.8		0.97		
Average Mean &								89.7	3.94	High	
Average Standard Deviation									0.84		

Table 3 shows that with a mean of 3.96, a standard deviation of 1.01, and the support of 91.6% of the 392 respondents, the practice of "ensuring that the classroom priorities of teachers are consistent with the school's goals and direction of the school" practice of principals received the fourth highest score and a "high" rating. The fifth highest practice, "Reviewing student work products when evaluating classroom instruction," received a mean score of 3.85, a standard deviation of 1.08, and the support of 89.0% of the 392 respondents, resulting in a "high" rating.

The practice of "participating actively in the review of curriculum materials" was ranked sixth overall and rated "high" by respondents, with a mean of 3.83, a standard deviation of 1.15, and support from 87.0% of the 392 respondents. The practice of "meeting individually with teachers to discuss student progress" was rated the lowest, coming in seventh with an "average" rating and a mean of 3.53, as well as a standard deviation of 1.24 and the support of 78.8% of respondents.

Research Question 3:

What are the Best Practices of Developing a Positive School Learning Climate by the Principals of schools in Male', Maldives as perceived by Teachers?

Protecting instructional time, maintaining high visibility, providing incentives for teachers, promoting professional development, and providing incentives for learning are principal responsibilities in the dimension of developing a positive school learning climate through instructional leadership practice. Table 4 shows the mean, standard deviation, and level of implementation of each task carried out in the practice of principals in relation to the ten tasks to develop a positive school learning climate in primary and secondary schools in Male, Maldives, as perceived by teachers.

The results in Table 4 show that on average, 84.5% of the 392 teachers surveyed felt that the ten tasks in the dimension of 'developing a positive school learning climate' were implemented in average to a high standard by Maldivian school principals, with an average mean of 3.72 and a standard deviation of 0.92. In addition, principals implemented five out of ten tasks with "high" performance, ranging from a mean of 4.10 and a standard deviation of 0.99 to a mean of 3.75 and a standard deviation of 1.13. In addition, principals implemented the remaining five out of ten tasks with "average" performance from the respondents' perspective, with scores ranging from a mean of 3.66 and a Standard deviation of 1.09 to a mean of 3.27 and a Standard deviation of 1.25.

The best practice of developing a positive school learning climate by the principals of schools in Male', Maldives, according to the perceptions of respondents, was the thirteenth task, "encourage teachers to use instructional time for teaching and practicing new skills and concepts," which was practiced by principals at a 'high' level with a mean score of 4.10 and a Standard deviation of 0.99, and it was supported by 92.6% of the 392 respondents.

With a 'high' rank, a mean of 4.04, a standard deviation of 1.04, and 89.8% of respondents' agreement, the principals' practice of "attending and participating in extra- and co-curricular activities" was the second-highest practice in this dimension. With a 'high' rank, a mean score of 3.83, a standard deviation of 1.10, and an agreement level of 87.5% among the respondents, "recognizing superior student achievement or improvement by seeing in the office the students with their work" was the third highest practice of the principals in this dimension.

In addition, the results in Table 4 show that the practice of principals "contacting parents to communicate improved or exemplary student performance or contributions" received the fourth highest score and was rated "high" with a mean of 3.81, a standard deviation of 1.11, and support from 87.0% of the 392 respondents. With a mean score of 3.75, a standard deviation of 1.13, and support from 85.5% of the 392 respondents, the principals' implementation of the task of "Schedule time to share ideas or information from in-service activities" ranked fifth and received a "high" rating.

Table 4 Practices of Developing a Positive School Learning Climate by the Principals of Schools in Male', Maldives: Perception of Teachers (N=392)

No	Statements		Level of Agreement						Mean Std. Dev.	Level	Rank
			Disagree		Agree						
			Almost Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Frequently	Almost Always	%			
13	Encourage teachers to use instructional time for teaching and practicing new skills and concepts	N	10	19	57	140	166	92.6	4.1	High	1
		%	2.6	4.8	14.5	35.7	42.3				
14	Take time to talk informally with students and teachers during recess and breaks	N	33	42	81	121	115	80.9	3.62	Average	7
		%	8.4	10.7	20.7	30.9	29.3				
15	Attend, participate in extra- and co-curricular activities	N	8	32	61	128	163	89.8	4.04	High	2
		%	2	8.2	15.6	32.7	41.6				
16	Compliment teachers privately for their efforts or performance	N	28	54	98	100	112	79.1	3.55	Average	9
		%	7.1	13.8	25	25.5	28.6				
17	Acknowledge teachers' exceptional performance by writing memos for their personnel files	N	47	53	114	105	73	74.5	3.27	Average	10
		%	12	13.5	29.1	26.8	18.6				
18	Create professional growth opportunities for teachers as a reward for special contributions to the school	N	27	38	92	144	91	83.4	3.6	Average	8
		%	6.9	9.7	23.5	36.7	23.2				
19	Lead or attend teacher in-service activities concerned with instruction	N	17	41	94	145	95	85.2	3.66	Average	6
		%	4.3	10.5	24	37	24.2				
20	Set aside time at faculty meetings for teachers to share ideas or information from in-service activities	N	22	35	75	147	113	85.5	3.75	High	5
		%	5.6	8.9	19.1	37.5	28.8				

21	Recognize superior student achievement or improvement by seeing in the office the students with their work	N	20	29	70	152	121	87.5	3.83	High	3
		%	5.1	7.4	17.9	38.8	30.9		1.1		
22	Contact parents to communicate improved or exemplary student performance or contributions	N	19	32	75	146	120	87	3.81	High	4
		%	4.8	8.2	19.1	37.2	30.6		1.11		
Average Mean &								84.5	3.72	High	
Average Standard Deviation									0.92		

The implementation of the task "leading or participating in in-service training for teachers involved in teaching" was rated as "average" and received the sixth highest mean score of 3.66, a standard deviation of 1.09, and the support of 85.2% of the 392 respondents. With a mean score of 3.62, a standard deviation of 1.24, and support from 80.9% of respondents, the seventh school leadership practice, "Making time for informal conversations with students and teachers during playtime and breaks," was rated "average."

The eighth practice, "Create professional development opportunities for teachers as a reward for special contributions to the school," was rated "average" by respondents with a mean of 3.60, a standard deviation of 1.15, and the support of 83.4% of the 392 respondents.

The ninth principal's practice for developing a positive school learning climate of instructional leadership, "Compliment teachers privately for their efforts or performance," was rated "average" by respondents with a mean of 3.55, a standard deviation of 1.24, and the support of 79.1% of the 392 respondents. The last and lowest rated item was "acknowledging teachers' exceptional performance by writing memos for their personnel files," which was supported by 74.5% of the 392 respondents and ranked tenth with an "average" rating, a mean of 3.27, and a standard deviation of 1.25.

Research Question 4:

What are the Best Practices of Instructional Leadership by the Principals of schools in Male', Maldives as perceived by Teachers?

Based on the perceptions of 392 teachers, Table 5 shows how principals generally practice three dimensions of instructional leadership in Maldivian schools. It's important to note that 88.77% of the respondents to this study felt that principals had "high" levels of practice in all three dimensions of instructional leadership. The average mean across the board was 3.9063, while the standard deviation was 0.82102 on average.

Table 5 Practices of Instructional Leadership by the Principals of Schools in Male', Maldives: Perception of Teachers (N=392)

No	Dimensions	Av. Ag%	Std. Dev.	Mean	Level	Rank
1	Defining the school mission	92.1	0.87	4.05	High	1
2	Managing the instructional program	89.7	0.84	3.94	High	2
3	Developing a positive school learning climate	84.5	0.92	3.72	High	3
Average Mean & Average Standard Deviation		88.77	0.82102	3.9063	High	

The results of the study show that the best practiced and implemented dimension out of the three dimensions of instructional leadership among principals in Male', Maldives, as perceived by the respondents, was the first one, defining the school mission dimension, which achieved the highest mean score of 4.05 and a

standard deviation of 0.87 compared to the other two dimensions of instructional leadership practice of principals. Furthermore, 92.1% of the 392 teachers surveyed agreed with this result and received a high rating for this practice.

The second-best dimension was the dimension of managing the instructional program, with a mean of 3.94 and a standard deviation of 0.84 at the "high" level and agreement from 392 teachers surveyed. The lowest and third-best dimension was the dimension of developing a positive school learning climate, with a mean of 3.72, a standard deviation of 0.92, and an agreement of 84.5% among the 392 teachers surveyed.

Discussions

According to the teachers, all three characteristics reached a high level of practiced instructional leadership among principals in Male', Maldives, with a mean of 3.9063 and a standard deviation of 0.82102. In the teachers' view, the best practice of instructional leadership among principals in Male', Maldives, was achieved in the dimension of "defining the school mission", the second dimension was "managing the instructional program", and the third dimension was "developing a positive school learning climate."

The study shows that the top three best practices of primary and secondary school principals in Male', Maldives, in defining the school's mission in terms of instructional leadership were "communicate the school's mission effectively to members of the school community," and this finding was in line with Salleh and Mitul (2021), followed by "use data on student performance when developing the school's academic goals," and in third place, "refer to the school's academic goals when making curriculum decisions with teachers." Nevertheless, Salleh (2013) found the "use data on student performance when developing the school's academic goals" task to be the highest with a mean of 4.26, and fourth in Salleh (2014) and Tshering (2022). Moreover, the "communicate the school's mission effectively to members of the school community" task was the second highest in Salleh (2013, 2014); Salleh and Kamaruddin (2020); and Tshering (2022). Furthermore, Salleh and Mitul (2021); Tshering (2022) found the third practice to be "referring to the school's academic goals when making curriculum decisions with teachers" and as the fourth practice in Salleh (2013); Salleh and Kamaruddin (2020); Salleh and Mitul (2021); and the fifth practice in Salleh (2014).

According to the results, the three best practices of primary and secondary school principals in Male', Maldives, in managing the instructional program dimension of instructional leadership were "make clear who is responsible for coordinating the curriculum across grade levels (e.g., the principal, vice principal, or teacher-leaders)," followed by "draw upon the results of school-wide testing when making curricular decisions," and these two findings were in line with Tshering (2022), and in third place, "use tests and other performance measures to assess progress towards school goals", where Tshering (2022) found this practice as fifth.

The results show that the three most effective practices of primary and secondary school principals in Male', Maldives, in developing a positive school learning climate were "encourage teachers to use instructional time for teaching and practicing new skills and concepts," "attend and participate in extra- and co-curricular activities," and "recognize superior student achievement or improvement by seeing in the office the students with their work."

This study shows that teachers feel that principals in Male', Maldives, schools are practicing instructional leadership at a high level. According to the study, the best practice of the principal in the dimension of defining the school's mission is to communicate the school's mission statement to the members of the school community effectively. Sarok and Jihet (2012) show that the principal communicating the school's vision and goals has a significant relationship with teacher engagement. It is very important for the development of a school or any other organization that all stakeholders know its goal, objective, or mission. Because there is no doubt that if you know the goal to be achieved, it can be achieved. A clearly defined vision, mission, and goals are important to improve the academic performance of the school (Ahmed, 2016). Hence, the most important goal of a school is to improve student outcomes. It is encouraging that Maldivian principals demonstrate the important characteristic of using data on student performance when developing the school's academic goals. This is because knowing how students have performed in previous exams, analyzing student results, and formulating school-based educational goals that focus on areas where students are struggling can

improve their performance. And principals' third most common practice on this dimension, considering the school's educational goals when making curriculum decisions in meetings with teachers, can make teachers feel more comfortable with their teaching. Teachers consider these goals when preparing lessons and teaching, which increases and improves student achievement. Moffitt (2007) also noted that creating a vision and setting high expectations help teachers deliver good instruction that leads to better student achievement. Hence, a clearly defined vision, mission, and goals are important to improve the school's academic performance.

In the second dimension, instructional program management, the study found that the most important practice of principals was to clarify who was responsible for coordinating the curriculum across grade levels. This indicates the extent to which principals are aware of the importance of everyone knowing their responsibilities. If everyone knows their responsibilities and carries out their roles and responsibilities, it will not be difficult to achieve success. When teachers understand their principal's vision, they are likely to be committed to achieving it (Dupont, 2009). The second practice of this dimension, using test scores for the entire school when making decisions about curriculum, is critical. This makes it easier for all stakeholders to focus, set goals, and work towards improving outcomes. The third best practice in this dimension, using tests and other performance measures to assess progress towards school goals, is a task that is very relevant to past practice and can be practiced simultaneously. This is because tests and other performance measures are used to measure progress, speed, and achievement of school goals. Therefore, the work to achieve these goals will be further strengthened and accelerated. Student achievement will continue to improve.

This study shows that in the third dimension of instructional leadership, making the school a good learning environment, the most important practice of school leaders is to encourage and pave the way for teachers to use class time to teach and practice new skills and concepts. There is no doubt that teachers' motivation, commitment, and performance will improve if they are encouraged to do these things. Consequently, the educational level of the students will also improve.

The second-best practice of principals in this dimension is participation in extracurricular and co-curricular activities. The participation of school leaders in such initiatives will lead to the whole school community, i.e., students, parents, teachers, and staff, working together with more courage and determination to achieve the common goals. In addition, Dupont (2009) concludes that the principals should create a team-oriented and encouraging school climate in order to improve student achievement.

The third practice of principals is to meet with students in the office to celebrate their achievements or progress. The principals do this very well because it encourages the students and increases their motivation to do better. Recognizing student achievements lets them know that school leadership recognizes their efforts and is proud of their accomplishments. This fosters pride in students and motivates them to continue to work hard. Satisfied students are more likely to be engaged in class and have a positive attitude towards learning. Walker (2016) also pointed out the importance of school leaders working with their teachers and other stakeholders and sharing accountability to improve school culture and student success. As a leader, a principal has the responsibility to ensure that his or her staff or students know how much he or she cares for them. When the principal celebrates even small successes, they help those they lead to see their outstanding achievements. This recognition makes them feel valued and shows them that their contributions are welcome and desired.

Conclusion

The findings show that, as school leaders, the principals of primary and secondary schools in Male', Maldives, have exercised a high level of instructional leadership functions. The instructional leadership practices demonstrated by the school leaders in this study are considered very important in promoting a positive learning environment in the schools. This will have a positive impact on teacher performance, improving teaching and learning practices, improving school culture, and enhancing students' academic achievement.

The study's findings are significant, particularly because every school has a principal who serves as an instructional leader and is a key figure in ensuring that the school is excellent in terms of academics and services, as well as quality and standards for producing useful and productive graduates for the country and

the global community. They would also understand how much time it takes for a principal to perform the tasks required to be an excellent instructional leader. In addition, school leaders learn about the qualities and behaviors a teacher must possess to improve teaching and learning in their schools. It is hoped that this study will provide useful insights that will effectively support the process of developing the instructional leadership skills of principals in primary and secondary schools in the Maldives, which in turn will assist in improving the academic performance of students and produce excellent students who are considered first-class human capital nationally and internationally.

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