Best Practice of Framing and Communicating School Goals by Principals of Cluster Secondary Schools Malaysia

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Abstract

The purpose of the study is to examine the practice of framing and communicating school goals by the principals of the Cluster Secondary Schools, Malaysia as perceived by 418 respondents. They comprised of 12 Principals, 120 Teacher-Administrators, and, 286 Teachers of selected cluster secondary schools in Malaysia. The study used questionnaire as a mean of data collection. The data was analyzed by SPSS version 17.0 and presented in frequency and mean. The findings of the study indicate that the 'use of data on student academic performance' were highly used when framing school goals with highest mean score 4.26 and its standard deviation standing at 0.808. The findings also show that the highest score on communicating schools goals was item 'discuss the school's academic goals with teachers at faculty meetings' with mean 4.21 and standard deviation 0.839. It is clear that the finding is very significant to the success implementation of cluster secondary schools in developing and producing excellent students who are nationally and internationally competence and accepted to pursue studies in the world prestigious universities.

Keywords: *Principals – Practice of School Mission – Cluster Secondary Schools Malaysia*

Introduction

The Ministry of Education Malaysia announced the implementation of cluster secondary schools aim to develop and produce excellent students in the curriculum and co-curriculum. The schools comprises of the excellent perfomance and the non-performance. In the cluster schools, the achievement of the students is in the full power and authority of the principal especially through the effective instructional leadership practices. This system managed to achieve the objectives in developing and producing excellent students who are internationally competence and accepted to pursue studies in the world prestigous universities.

Literature Review:

The following sections discuss the literature related to the dimension of defining the school mission comprises of two main functions namely 'framing school goal' and 'communicating school goal' of the instructional leadership formulated by Hallinger & Murphy (1985), Greenfield (1987), Doyke & Rice (2002), Latip (2006), and, Glikman, Gordon & Ross-Gordon (2007).

Defining the School Mission
Hallinger & Murphy (1985), Quinn. (2002), McEwan (2003), Latip (2006), and, Glikman, Gordon, & Ross-Gordon (2007) admitted that an important dimension of the principal's role as instructional leader is to define and communicate a mission or purpose for the school. Instructional leaders are often said to have a "vision" of what the school should be trying to accomplish. Defining a school mission involves communicating this vision to the staff and students in such a way that a sense of shared purpose exists, linking the various activities that take place in classrooms throughout the school. The principal's role in defining the mission involves framing schoolwide goals and communicating these goals in a persistent fashion to the entire school community (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). Greenfield (1987), Doyke & Rice. (2002), and, Southworth (2002) stated that operating without a clear mission is like beginning a journey without having a destination in mind. Chances are you will not know when you get there.

Framing School Goals
Greenfield (1987), Hallinger & Murphy (1987), and, Latip (2006) stated that framing school goals refers to a principal's role in determining the areas on which the school staff will focus their attention and resources during a given school year. Purkey & Smith (1983), Leithwood, Jantzi & Steincbach. (1999), McEwan (2003), and, Glikman, Gordon, & Ross-Gordon. (2007) admitted that instructionally effective schools often have clearly defined goals that focus on student achievement. The emphasis is on fewer goals around which staff energy and other school resources can be mobilized. A few coordinated objectives, each with manageable scope, appear to work best. The goals should incorporate data on past and current student performance and include staff responsibilities for achieving the goals. Staff and parent input during the development of the school's goals seem important. Performance goals should be expressed in measurable terms (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985).

Activities that define the school goals are the most important function where the schools need a vision to accomplish reform goals (Uchiyama & Wolf, 2002). Powel & Napoliello (2005) noted that visions are intended realities that reinforce the school's focus.

McEwan (2003) stated also that instructional leaders are responsible for giving guidance while defining school goals. Therefore, when framing school goals, it is better to involve staff and teachers because their experiences will be created as a foundation for determining school goals. Moreover, involving staff will also give other important information which refers to their experience in defining school goals.

Purkey & Smith (1983), Leithwood et al. (1999), and, Quinn (2002) noted that effective leaders will involve staff in determining and defining school goals and objectives to be implemented and evaluated at the end of the year. This condition will increase their commitment to cooperate in achieving the school's goals. Therefore, each school will be confident of being a success if it has a clear vision and mission as well as teacher commitment.

Communicating School Goals
Hallinger & Murphy (1985) and Ubben, Hughes, & Norris (2007) stated that after defining school goals, principals need to communicate those school goals to the school community. Communicating and explaining school goals is one of the crucial roles of the principal as an instructional leader. Clear goals and high expectations commonly shared among the school community are one of characteristics of an effective school (Wildy & Dimmock, 1993). Common sense, if nothing else, indicates that a clearly defined purpose is necessary for any endeavour hoping for success. Within the limits imposed by the common public school philosophy,

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schools need to focus on those tasks they deem most important. This allows the school to direct its resources and shape its functioning towards the realization of those goals (Purkey & Smith, 1983).

Dwyer (1984) and Cotton (2003) stressed that this function is concerned with the ways in which the principal communicates the school's important goals to teachers, parents, and students. Principals can ensure that the importance of school goals is understood by discussing and reviewing them with staff periodically during the school year, especially in the context of instructional, curricular, and budgetary decisions. Both formal communication (e.g. goal statements, staff bulletins, articles in the principal or cite-council newsletter, curricular and staff meetings, parent and teacher conferences, school handbook, assemblies) and informal interaction (e.g. conversations with staff) can be used to communicate the school's mission (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Hoy & Hoy, 2006).

Therefore, all school communities, especially staff and teachers as well as students need to understand the school goals to enable them to contribute to developing school achievement and achieving the school mission.

Research Questions

The objectives of the study are to seek answers to the following research questions:

1.   What are the Practices of Framing School Goals by the Principals of Cluster Secondary Schools Malaysia as perceived by the Principals, Teacher-Administrators and Teachers?
2.   What are the Best Practices of Framing School Goals by the Principals of Cluster Secondary Schools Malaysia as perceived by the Principals, Teacher-Administrators and Teachers?
3.   What are the Practices of Communicating School Goals by the Principals of Cluster Secondary Schools Malaysia as perceived by the Principals, Teacher-Administrators and Teachers?
4.   What are the Best Practices of Communicating School Goals by the Principals of Cluster Secondary Schools Malaysia as perceived by the Principals, Teacher-Administrators and Teachers?
5.   What are the Best Practices of Framing and Communicating School Goals by the Principals of Cluster Secondary Schools Malaysia as perceived by the Principals, Teacher-Administrators and Teachers?

Research Methodology: Sample of the Study

The sample of the study consists of 418 respondents from twelve Cluster Secondary Schools identified by the Ministry of Education, Malaysia. There are 2.9% (12) principals, 28.7% (120) Senior Assistants, and, teachers at 68.4 % (286). Prior permission to conduct this study was obtained from the EPRD – Education, Planning, and, Research Division of the Ministry of Education Malaysia (Best & Kahn, 2003; Creswell, 2008).

The Implementation of Framing and Communicating School Goals by Principals of Cluster Secondary Schools Malaysia

In this study, the practice of Framing and Communicating School Goals by Principals of Cluster Secondary Schools Malaysia are categorized into five levels: Mean 0.00 – 0.99 is Very Low, Mean 1.00 – 1.99 is Low, Mean 2.00 – 2.99 is Simple High, Mean 3.00 – 3.99 is High, Mean 4.00 – 5.00 is Very High. This category is in accordance with the category of responses as Mean 0 – 0.99 is 'Never', Mean 1.00 – 1.99 is 'Seldom', Mean 2.00 – 2.99 is 'Sometime', Mean 3.00 – 3.99 is 'Frequent', Mean 4.00 – 5.00 is 'Always'.

Result of the Study

This section presents the results of the practice of Framing and Communicating School Goals among principals of cluster secondary schools in Malaysia. The researcher employed descriptive statistical procedures involving frequency count, percentage distribution, and, means to analyze the data collected from respondents of different genders, ethnics, type of schools, and, position of responsibilities at schools.

Research Question 1:

What are the Practices of Framing School Goals by the Principals of Cluster Secondary Schools Malaysia as perceived by the Principals, Teacher-Administrators and Teachers?

As a school leader, the principal has to frame, develop and provide the school goals through the function of framing the school goals.

Table 1 shows in detail the mean score on the practice of framing schools goals by the principals of cluster secondary schools in Malaysia through six tasks as perceived by principals, teacher-administrators, and teachers' perceptions.

The study shows that the principals' perceptions on item 1 'Develop goals that seek improvement over current levels of academic performance' was very high with mean 4.30. This was agreed by teacher-administrators with mean 4.08. Teachers' perception on this item was lower with mean 3.92.

The perceptions of principals, teacher-administrators and teachers on item 2 'Frame academic goals with target dates' were high with mean 4.20, 4.07, and, 4.20 respectively. This shows, all respondents agreed that the principals practice highly this item.

The teacher-administrators perceived very high on item 3 'Frame the school's academic goals in terms of staff responsibilities for meeting them' with mean 4.11 and followed by principals' with mean 4.00. Teachers' perception on this item was mean 3.94.

However, respondents' perceptions on item 4 'Use needs assessment or other questionnaires to secure staff input on goal development' were below mean 4.00. The score of principals was mean 3.40, teacher-administrators mean 3.39, and, teachers mean 3.27.

The principals' perceptions were very high on item 5 'Use data on student academic performance when developing the school's academic goals' with mean 4.40. These were followed by teacher-administrators mean 4.31, and, teachers mean 4.08.

The teacher-administrators' perceptions on item 6 'Develop goals that are easily translated into classroom objectives by teachers' was very high with mean 4.13. However, perceptions of principals and teachers were rather low with mean 3.90 and 3.82 respectively.

Table 1:

Practice of Framing School Goals by the Principals of Cluster Secondary Schools Malaysia: Perceptions of Principals, Teacher-Administrators and Teachers

(N = 418: Principals = 12, Teacher-Administrators = 120; Teachers = 286)

Items	Respondents	Mean	Std. Dev.
1. Develop goals that seek improvement over current levels of academic performance	Principals	4.30	.823
	Teacher-Administrators	4.08	.885
	Teachers	3.92	.933
2. Frame academic goals with target dates	Principals	4.20	.919
	Teacher-Administrators	4.07	.976
	Teachers	4.20	.919
3. Frame the school's academic goals in terms of staff responsibilities for meeting them	Principals	4.00	.943
	Teacher-Administrators	4.11	.951
	Teachers	3.94	.923
4. Use needs assessment or other questionnaires to secure staff input on goal development	Principals	3.40	.966
	Teacher-Administrators	3.39	1.147
	Teachers	3.27	1.073
5. Use data on student academic performance when developing the school's academic goals	Principals	4.40	.699
	Teacher-Administrators	4.31	.858
	Teachers	4.08	.867
6. Develop goals that are easily translated into classroom objectives by teachers	Principals	3.90	.783
	Teacher-Administrators	4.13	.875
	Teachers	3.82	.899

Research Question 2:

What are the Best Practice of Framing the School Goals among Principal of Cluster Secondary Schools Malaysia according to the Perceptions of Principals, Teacher-Administrators and Teachers?

Table 2 shows in detail the mean score, standard deviation and the level of implementation of each task involved in the framing of the school goals according to the Perceptions of Principals, Teacher-Administrators and Teachers.

The results of the study indicate that four tasks of framing the school goals were implemented by the principals at a very high level with mean scores ranging from 4.01 to 4.26.

Specifically, the finding shows that the 'use of data on student academic performance were very highly used when framing school goals with highest mean score 4.26 and standard deviation standing 0.808. The second highest was item 'Frame academic goals with target dates' with means 4.16 and standard deviation 0.938. The third highest was item 'Develop goals that seek improvement over current levels of academic performance' with mean 4.10 and standard deviation 0.880.

Table 2:
Best Practice of Framing the School Goals among Principal of Cluster Secondary Schools Malaysia: Perceptions of Principals, Teacher-Administrators and Teachers (N = 418)

No.	Items	Mean	Std. Dev.	*Level of Implementation.
1.	Develop goals that seek improvement over current levels of academic performance	4.10	.880	Very High
2.	Frame academic goals with target dates	4.16	.938	Very High
3.	Frame the school's academic goals in terms of staff responsibilities for meeting them	4.01	.939	Very High
4.	Use needs assessment or other questionnaires to secure staff input on goal development	3.35	1.062	High
5.	Use data on student academic performance when developing the school's academic goals	4.26	.808	Very High
6.	Develop goals that are easily translated into classroom objectives by teachers	3.95	.852	High
	Average Mean	**3.972**	**0.913**	**High**

* Implementation:
Very Low = 0.00-0.99; Low = 1.00-1.99; Simple High 2.00–2.99; High = 3.00-3.99; Very High = 4.00- 5.00.

Meanwhile, according to principals, teacher-administrators, and, teachers perception, the average score of the principals' practices in the framing of the school goals was at a 'high' level with mean 3.972 and standard deviation 0.913.

Research Question 3:
What are the Practice of Communicating School Goals by the Principal of Cluster Secondary Schools Malaysia according to the perceptions of Principals, Teacher-Administrators and Teachers?
The school goals which have been developed need to be communicated and explained by the principals to the whole school community. The practice of communicating the school goals by the principal at cluster secondary schools in Malaysia through six tasks is exhibited in Table 3.

The study indicates that item 7 'Communicate the school's academic goals to people at school' was very highly perceived by all respondents with principals achieved mean 4.40, teacher-administrators mean 4.33 and Teachers mean 4.14.

The teacher-administrators perceived very high on item 8 'Refer to the school's academic goals in informal settings with teachers' with mean 4.20 and followed by principals' with mean 4.00. Teachers' perception on this item was mean 3.83.

Table 3:
The Practice of Communicating School Goals by the Principal of Cluster Secondary Schools Malaysia:
Perceptions of Principals, Teacher-Administrators and Teachers
(N = 418: Principals = 12, Teacher-Administrators = 120; Teachers = 286)

Items	Respondents	Mean	Std. Dev.
7. Communicate the school's academic goals to people at school	Principals	4.40	.699
	Teacher-Administrators	4.33	.882
	Teachers	4.14	.915
8. Refer to the school's academic goals in informal settings with teachers	Principals	4.00	.667
	Teacher-Administrators	4.20	.885
	Teachers	3.83	.998
9. Discuss the school's academic goals with teachers at faculty meetings	Principals	4.40	.699
	Teacher-Administrators	4.29	.864
	Teachers	4.16	.832
10. Refer to the school's academic goals when making curricular decisions with teachers	Principals	4.20	.789
	Teacher-Administrators	4.17	.873
	Teachers	3.98	.856
11. Ensure that the school's goals are reflected in highly visible displays in the school	Principals	4.30	.675
	Teacher-Administrators	4.11	.915
	Teachers	3.91	.909
12. Refer to the school's goals in student assemblies	Principals	4.40	.699
	Teacher-Administrators	4.29	.824
	Teachers	4.11	.902

The perceptions of principals, teacher-administrators and teachers on item 9 'Discuss the school's academic goals with teachers' were very high with mean 4.40, 4.29, and, 4.16 respectively. This shows, all respondents agreed that the principals practice very highly this item.

The principals perceptions were very high on item 10 'Refer to the school's academic goals when making curricular decisions with teachers' with mean 4.20, which closely agreed by the teacher-administrators was mean 4.17. However, perceptions of teachers were rather low with mean 3.98.

Similarly, the perceptions of principals were high on item 11 'Ensure that the school's goals are reflected in highly visible displays in the school' mean 4.30, which also closely agreed by the teacher-administrators with mean 4.11. Teachers' perceptions were mean 3.91.

Interestingly, all respondents perceived very highly on item 12 'Refer to the school's goals in student assemblies' with achievement of the principals mean 4.40, teacher-administrators mean 4.29 and teachers mean 4.11.

Research Question 4:

What are the Best Practice of Communicating the School Goals among Principal of Cluster Secondary Schools Malaysia according to Principals and Teachers Perceptions?

Table 4 shows the level of implementation of each task involved in the communicating of the school goals according to the principals', teacher-administrators', and, teachers' perceptions.

Table 4:
Best Practice of Communicating the School Goals
among Principal of Cluster Secondary Schools Malaysia (N = 418)

No.	Items	Mean	Std. Dev.	*Level of Implementation
7.	Communicate the school's academic goals to people at school	4.20	.903	Very High
8.	Refer to the school's academic goals in informal settings with teachers	3.94	.972	High
9.	Discuss the school's academic goals with teachers at faculty meetings	4.21	.839	Very High
10.	Refer to the school's academic goals when making curricular decisions with teachers	4.04	.861	Very High
11.	Ensure that the school's goals are reflected in highly visible displays in the school (e.g. posters or bulletin boards indicating the importance of read or math) (	3.98	.909	High
12.	Refer to the school's goals in student assemblies	4.17	.878	Very High
Total		**4.087**	**0.894**	**Very High**

* Implementation:
Very Low = 0.00-0.99; Low = 1.00-1.99; Simple High 2.00–2.99; High = 3.00-3.99; Very High = 4.00- 5.00.

The result shows that four tasks of framing the school goals were implemented by the principals at a very 'high level' with mean scores ranging from 4.04 to 4.21. The findings indicate that the three highest score was item 9 'Discuss the school's academic goals with teachers at faculty meetings' with mean 4.21. There were followed by item 7 'Communicate the school's academic goals to people at school' mean 4.20, and, item 12 'Refer to the school's goals in student assemblies' mean 4.17.

Meanwhile, according to principals, teacher-administrators, and, teachers perception, the average score of the principals' practices in the communicating of the school goals was at a 'very high' level with mean 4.087 and standard deviation 0.894.

Research Question 5:

What are the Best Practices of Framing and Communicating School Goals by the Principals of Cluster Secondary Schools Malaysia as perceived by the Principals, Teacher-Administrators and Teachers?
Table 5 presents the best practice of Framing the School Goals among Principal of Cluster Secondary Schools Malaysia according to the perceptions of Principals, Teacher-Administrators and Teachers.

Table 5:
Best Practice of Framing the School Goals among Principal of Cluster Secondary Schools Malaysia: Perceptions of Principals, Teacher-Administrators and Teachers (N = 418)

No.	Items	Mean	Std. Dev.	*Level of Practice.	Rank
1.	Develop goals that seek improvement over current levels of academic performance	4.10	.880	Very High	3
2.	Frame academic goals with target dates	4.16	.938	Very High	2
3.	Frame the school's academic goals in terms of staff responsibilities for meeting them	4.01	.939	Very High	4
4.	Use needs assessment or other questionnaires to secure staff input on goal development	3.35	1.062	High	6
5.	Use data on student academic performance when developing the school's academic goals	4.26	.808	Very High	1
6.	Develop goals that are easily translated into classroom objectives by teachers	3.95	.852	High	5

The result of the study shows that the best practice of Framing the School Goals according to the perceptions' of all respondents were, first, item 'Use data on student academic performance when developing the school's academic goals', second, item 'Frame academic goals with target dates', third, item Develop goals that seek improvement over current levels of academic performance', fourth, item 'Frame the school's academic goals in terms of staff responsibilities for meeting them', fifth, item 'Develop goals that are easily translated into classroom objectives by teachers', and, sixth, item 'Use needs assessment or other questionnaires to secure

staff input on goal development'. The result also indicates that four out of six tasks were practice at the very high level.

Table 6 presents the best practice of communicating the School Goals among Principal of Cluster Secondary Schools Malaysia according to the perceptions of Principals, Teacher-Administrators and Teachers.

Table 6:
Best Practice of Communicating the School Goals among Principal of Cluster Secondary Schools Malaysia: Perceptions of Principals, Teacher-Administrators and Teachers
(N = 418)

No.	Items	Mean	Std. Dev.	*Level of Practices	Rank
7.	Communicate the school's academic goals to people at school	4.20	.903	Very High	2
8.	Refer to the school's academic goals in informal settings with teachers	3.94	.972	High	6
9.	Discuss the school's academic goals with teachers at faculty meetings	4.21	.839	Very High	1
10.	Refer to the school's academic goals when making curricular decisions with teachers	4.04	.861	Very High	4
11.	Ensure that the school's goals are reflected in highly visible displays in the school (e.g. posters or bulletin boards indicating the importance of read or math)	3.98	.909	High	5
12.	Refer to the school's goals in student assemblies	4.17	.878	Very High	3

The finding of the study shows that the Best Practice of Communicating the School Goals among Principal of Cluster Secondary Schools Malaysia as perceived by all respondents were, first, item 'Discuss the school's academic goals with teachers at faculty meetings', second, item 'Communicate the school's academic goals to people at school', third, item 'Refer to the school's goals in student assemblies', fourth, item 'Refer to the school's academic goals when making curricular decisions with teachers', fifth, item 'Ensure that the school's goals are reflected in highly visible displays in the school', sixth, item 'Refer to the school's academic goals in informal settings with teachers'. The result of the study also indicates that four out of six tasks were practice at the very high level.

Conclusion
As a conclusion, the study shows that the principals of cluster secondary schools Malaysia had practiced very highly 'framing school goal' and 'communicating school goal' of the instructional leadership. The findings of this study are important especially that every school, such as a cluster school, has a principal as an instructional

leader who is a key figure in making the school excellent in terms of its academic programs and services as well as quality and standard for producing useful and productive graduates for the locality, for the country, and even for the global community. They would also realize how much time, both quality and quantity, is needed by one principal to be an effective instructional leader. Moreover, the principals will come to relate what are the good traits and positive behaviors a instructional must possess to effect better teaching and learning in their schools. The finding is very significant to the success implementation of cluster secondary schools in developing and producing excellent students who are nationally and internationally competence and accepted to pursue studies in the world prestigious universities.

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Acknowledgement

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