

The effect of instructional coaching on the school middle leaders

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Abstract

There is growing acceptance that large-scale educational reform is needed to meet the challenges of the 21st century. The contribution that coaching can make in these settings has been the focus of recent discussions and research. The instructional coaching has been carried out in schools by the professional school coaches and the school administrators to all school middle leaders who are the expert teachers and the head panels of the schools. It is part of the professional development for the school middle leaders to empower them in developing the schools. Instructional coaching done here for the middle leaders is a collaborative, on-site and evidence-based approach. It was carried out based on a close collaboration with the school principal. So, this study is to examine how the instructional coaching could lead and provide insights to the school middle leaders as part of their roles in helping the development of the school.

Keyword: Coaching, Instructional Coaching, Middle Leaders, School Coaches

Introduction

Malaysia has beginning to transform from a production-based country to knowledge-based economy country. So, in order to stay competence and relevant in the global marketplace, the country need to produce the workers who are able to perform the best in whatever role of production (Grapragasem, Krishnan & Mansor, 2014). This aspect also includes educational field, especially the administrators or the school leaders. The professional development in school is an ongoing process which are part of the school development. It should be carried out in many ways as needed by the schools and the teachers. Normally, courses and workshop sessions being carried out by the State Education Department or District Education Department for the teachers. During the workhops or courses, teachers normally will receive the knowledge and input and they will then spread it out to other teachers in their schools (Knight, 2007). Other than that, which is being widely implemented now is the coaching practices the school coaches. It has been said that, one of the effective ways to carry out the professional development activity is through coaching practices (Jones, Woods & Guillaume, 2016). The continuing professional development among teachers had become a critical need when the teachers in many ways have to develop and upgrading themselves to be in line with the development in education as a whole (Andersson & Köpsén, 2018). Sometimes, they just give it up and prefer to use their old methods of teaching because lack of support and knowledge in implementing it (Eren, 2014). So, this is where the

instructional coaching comes in, as to support and guide the teachers and not directly to them but to the person who represent the teachers. They are the head of panels for each subject in schools or they are also known as the schools' middle leaders. Thus, this study is carried out to demonstrate the effect of instructional coaching on the school middle leaders and how they develop themselves for them to be able to educate and train other teachers in schools.

So, the main purpose of this study is to explore how much instructional coaching done by the school coaches has impacted or influenced the middle leaders' instructional practices in school. It is so important to have an effective coaching process in school as to make sure every changes and development done by the Ministry of Education understood by the teachers. Based on that, the research objective for this study is;

1. To know the impact of instructional coaching to the roles of the school middle leaders.

This study is guided by the following research question;

1. What are the changes in middle leaders' roles in school after the sessions of instructional coaching?

Operational definition in this study is focusing on meaning of coaching, instructional coaching and the middle leaders. Coaching in the context of this study means a customized instructional training or facilitation done on a targeted individuals or a group of teachers in school. It can be considered as part of the training and guidance intervention which is designed by the Ministry of Education to improve and develop the performance of the teachers an individual or as part of an organization. Generally, it is a site-based coaching where the group of middle leaders in school will be attended and guided by the professional coaches.

Instructional coaching is a partnership or a collaboration between a coach and a teacher who performed a great understanding of the knowledge in instructional practices (Knight, 2009). Basically, instructional coaching here referring to the process which involving two people; the school middle leader and the coach. The coaches will work one-on-one and in small groups with them to provide guidance, facilitating, training, and other resources as needed. They will focus on specific strategies for developing the teachers' skills and professional development in order to equip them with what is needed for the school development. It is also a method of practicing professional development which demonstrating to educators on how to come out with strategies and innovations towards the classroom practices (Knight, 2006).

Middle leaders (ML) in schools are referring to a group of teachers who are empowered by the school administrators and working together with them in leading the schools (Hadfield, 2007). They are not the people who are in formal leadership roles but they are teachers as leaders. They will play a central role in school development. In terms of this study, the middle leaders here are the expert teachers or the head panels of the schools.

The school coaches in the context of this study is referring to the school improvement specialist coaches or known as SISC+. They are a group of people hired by the Ministry of Education through sessions of interviews and they are meant to advise a school especially the middle leaders of the schools and the teachers on how to improve their academic performances for the student development. The specific role and intension of school coaches are based on the school needs and their standard operation procedures is referring to the District Transformation Book (DTP 3.0) as a guidebook. They are committed to assist the schools in achieving a specific goal

depends on the schools need which may be vary from one another based on the data of achievement and other teachers need.

Literature Review

There is a large literature on coaching and instructional coaching. Coaching, nowadays had become an important element in the development of the schools. It is also part of continuing professional development (CPD) for the teachers. Professional development in many ways actually will improve the quality of the teachers (Kennedy, 2016). Coaching in this contest, is a process learning in with a professional coach who supports or facilitate a learner in achieving a specific professional goal by providing required input and guidance (Bresser & Wilson, 2010). Fundamentally, through coaching the coach is helping the individual to improve their own performance or in other words, helping them to learn and to apply the knowledge (Kelly, 2012). However, the instructional coaching involves a trained expert working. As stated earlier, for the context of this study, those expert are the school improvement specialist coaches (SISC+). In instructional coaching they will coach the teachers individually, to enable them learn and master any new teaching practices and at the same time, they also will provide feedback on the teachers' performances (Knight, & Nieuwerburgh, 2002). This is being carried out in order to contribute in supporting accurate and continued implementation of new teaching approaches. At the same time, it also will reduce the sense of isolation teachers who always see everything in negative ways of thinking. Through coaching they can see the benefits when implementing new ideas and practices (Kelly, 2012).

The theories selected to the practice of instructional coaching here is known as social interaction/ collaborative learning theories. Coaching literature commonly refers to collaboration to accomplish goals but seldom references widely accepted social interaction theory works such as Vygotsky (1978). The Vygotsky Space represents learning in terms of relationships between collective and individual actions and between public and private settings. Social interaction is a significant factor in cognitive development. He referred to the distance between a person's actual level of development and potential level of development as the Zone of Proximal Development. Two adults engaging in collaborative conversations move each other to deeper levels of thinking or through their respective zones. Bandura's (1986) social learning theory explains human behavior in terms of continuous reciprocal interaction between cognitive, behavioral, and environmental influences.

Table 1: The Interaction /Collaborative Learning Theory

Theory	Social Interaction/ Collaborative Learning Theory
Summary	Learning process is the result of collaboration between collective and individual practices and between the public and individual isolation settings. Two persons engaging in collaborative conversations as to move each other to deep thinking.
Relation to the coaching process	The coach and teacher engage in a corresponding coaching relationship in which both adults move each other to deeper levels of thinking. The coach and teacher should both gaining knowledge from the coaching process.

The GROW coaching model is used in the coaching process related to this study. This model is designed by Sir Whitmore in 1991. The acronym GROW stands for Goal, Reality, Options and Will or Way forward. It provides a relatively simple framework for structuring a coaching session.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative methods and the design was a single-site case study using purposive sampling. Five participants were chosen from a selected school. They are all the middle leaders of the same school. Pseudonyms were used in the study to identify the participants as Baiti, Riana, Sharir, Azmi and Hanizan.

Instrumentation used in this study is the semi-structured interviews. Each of the participants was asked the prescribed questions based on the appropriate interview protocol. The participants also were allowing to ask any follow up questions for them to suggest or to be specific on the matter discussed.

The data Collection Procedure is done within the same period of time during the school days. The data was gathered as evidence in the forms of semi structured face-to-face interviews. After receiving the approval from the school and consent from the participants, the study began with the data collection. All the collected data were put together into a case study database used as to enable the data to be retrieved for the analysis process (Yin, 2014).

Data Analysis is done right after the sessions of interviews when all the recorded data being processed into transcripts. Those transcripts then being sent to the participants for member checking and clarification. After that the data had been transferred into the application of Atlas.ti. By using Altal.ti, the data being processed and analyzed by identifying the themes to develop meaningful conclusion.

Trustworthiness of the study established in this qualitative research by considering the four criteria which are the credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The credibility in this study addresses the issue of authenticity of the findings and were used by applying the three procedures identified by Lincoln and Guba (1985). They are the prolonged engagement, triangulation and member checks. The prolonged engagement is long where five meaningful interviews were carried out with the participants. The triangulation was done via interviews and researcher notes, and researcher reflexivity. As stated earlier, through the member checks, the interview transcript and profiles were sent to the participants for their review and confirmation.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) advised that transferability is best achieved from thick descriptions from which others can judge whether the findings are valuable. The researcher provided rich descriptions from participant interviews for others to determine for themselves the transferability of the research findings for other contexts. Dependability is derived from the inquiry process to ensure consistency over time and across methods (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Dependability for this study was ensured by the researcher's note taking during the data collection phase and by listening to the recorded audio interviews. Peer and advisor transcript review and code checking was also used to ensure dependability. Confirmability was used to address the internal logic and coherence of the study by grounding the study findings in the data, ensuring the data interfaces,

and minimizing researcher bias (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To ensure confirmability for this study, the researcher maintained an activity log to document the flow of events.

Finding, Discussion and Recommendation

This qualitative case study recorded and analyzed the action and understanding among the middle leaders (ML) on their role and responsibility after they had gone through the process of instructional coaching. By discovering the participants' perception on instructional coaching, the purpose of this study is to develop greater understanding on the positive impact of instructional coaching as part of professional development to participants and other teachers in the school.

Six participants as purposeful sampling as stated earlier, had been selected for this study. They are all the school middle leaders from SMK Sri Aman, Pasir Puteh, Kelantan. Their position were all as the Head of Panels for the school. Baiti is a 42 years old teacher, graduated from Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) and after that furthered her study at Master's level in University Utara Malaysia (UUM) as part time student. She had been teaching in this school for ten years now and her position is as Head of Panel for English (HOP) subject. Riana is 45 years old and was graduated from International Islamic University of Malaysia (IIUM). Her position now is as HOP for Mathermathics. Sharir, is 40 years old with 15 years of experience as a teacher after his graduation from University of Malaya (UM) and was posting in this school for 15 years now. His position is as the HOP for Islamic Education subject. The next one is Azmi who is 46 years old, had been teaching in the same school for 12 years now. He is the HOP for Science subject. Hanizan is 42 yaers old and had been teaching there for 10 years now. Graduated from Universiti Utara Malasysia (UUM) and now is the HOP for History subject.

Table 2: Demographic Data of the Participants

Participant's code	Experience as a Teacher	Experience as Middle Leaders (Year/s)	Position	Qualification /Degree	Gender
Baiti	20	5	Head of Panel	Master's	0
Riana	25	5	Head of Panel	Degree	0
Sharir	15	2	Head of Panel	Degree	1
Azmi	17	3	Head of Panel	Degree	1
Hanizan	15	3	Head of Panel	Degree	0

Based on the triangulation methods via interviews and researcher notes, and researcher reflexivity and the analysis of the data, three main themes had been identified. Those themes are the (1) MLs' awareness to the need of coaching, (2) The culture of coaching in school, and (3) Individualize professional development. The next discussion on these themes are to answer the research question for this study; What are the changes in middle leaders' roles in school after the sessions of instructional coaching?

The MLs' awareness to the need of coaching is about the teacher realize and aware that coaching is important for them. The sub-themes identified here are; a) the need for support and guidance, and; b) the readiness of the ML for coaching. The analysis from the interview data showing that the ML are showing their concern towards having coaching sessions as part of activities for teachers. Baiti and Sharir both stated about the important of having coaching sessions in school.

Azmi in his statement during the interview stated about the need for them to learn from others who can be considered as knowledgeable others. Baiti and Hanizan said that, hey cannot just accept everything new introduced by the Ministry of Education without getting full information about it through coaching.

The culture of coaching in school is about the routines of doing coaching of the practices of coaching in school which need to be done all the time as to upgrade the ML and teachers' knowledge. The sub-themes identified here are; a) The professional learning community, and; b) The collaboration of work between coaches and teachers. All of them, Baiti, Riana, Sharir, Azmi and Hanizan agreed that the culture of working together as a team are very important for them to develop. They also agreed to the power of working together between coaches and teachers because those practices will give them chance to overcome any issues or problem regarding any education and teaching practices.

Individualize professional development is referring to the need of each individual in school to always lean and develop from time to time. So, the sub-themes identified are; a) Rapid change in education, and b) The use of social media for coaching. These themes are all about what and how everyone in school do as to develop themselves due to the need of changes in education. Riana, Hanizan and Azmi stated about the rapid changes in education which required them to search for help or guide from some experts, somebody like the master trainers as to help them understand and develop. Sharir and Azmi also stated about the learning platform they used like the social media and some sources from the internet. All those are all about the individualize professional development.

Table 3: The emerging of themes

Themes	Sub-themes
MLs' awareness to the need of coaching	The need for support and guidance The readiness of the ML for coaching
The culture of coaching in school	Professional learning community Collaboration work between coaches and teachers
Individualize professional development	Rapid change in education The use of social media for coaching

From the findings of this study, it shows that, the ML of the school are seeking for help and support in order for them to be well equipped. It is so important for them to be skillful and confident to deliver any new content of changes in education. They are all aware of their responsibilities to guide other teachers in their panels as for the teachers to be knowledgeable enough to teach the students in the classrooms. So, the need for coaching practices is very demanding for them. One of the best way is through instructional coaching by the school coaches. The coaching had given them chances to develop and learn many educational concepts which are all up to date. Working together with together with coaches as guidance and support for them. It is more to the concept of sharing, collaboration and teamwork in working. At the same time, through instructional coaching, the ML will be capable enough to cater the need of the teachers and students. They also know how to develop themselves in order to develop others in the school. So, based on the Interaction/collaborative learning theory and the use of GROW coaching model in the practices of instructional coaching, had lead the ML of the school towards the better leaders

and to the knowledgeable others in their school. Their roles as the ML become more meaningful and functional. So, the recommendation from this study for the future research is to see how pedagogical coaching will help in developing the classroom teaching and learning.

Conclusion

Now, the finding shows that there is a need to practice the instructional coaching to the middle leaders in school as they could give the great impact to the development and to the school administrating. The participant had shown their understanding and know the importance of instructional coaching. Through the coaching process, they were able to work toward building the teacher capacity in the school and at the same time they know the positive impact on teachers' performances. They also able to create the professional learning community culture in the school which promoting the teachers to work collaboratively and sharing ideas in problem solving regarding the teaching and learning. According to Griffiths (2005), there is already a great shift in the teacher role in school and in educational settings from instructor to facilitator. The process of coaching also aims to support the development of everyone in school such as the students, teachers, school leaders and also the other educational institutions of which they are part of educational development as a whole.

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