INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP PRACTICES OF SELECTED PRINCIPALS IN MALDIVES: A CASE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Instructional leadership has taken central place as a successful model to be practised by principals in leading schools. There was no research yet to explore the extent to which school principals in Maldives are adopting this model. Hence this research attempts to investigate the instructional leadership practices of selected principals in Maldives.

Due to the exploratory requirement of the research, a qualitative methodology was employed using a multi-case study where data was collected through an in-depth semi-structured individual interviews utilising purposeful sampling method. Triangulation was adopted through multiple data sources such as observations, and written documents in order to support and enrich the findings. Participants of this study included three principals, three supervisors and three teachers from three selected schools. The study used a revised instructional leadership behaviour model of Hallinger and Murphy (1990) to analyze the data using within and across cases thematic approach.

The findings of this study revealed that principals practiced the six dimensions of the instructional leadership behaviors and patterns as highlighted in the conceptual framework. However, from the across analysis case study, the study revealed that a) although all schools have mission and vision to provide proper direction but they are not clear whether to promote learning or to prepare for examination and b) community is not involved in designing vision and mission c) there was also confusion in the role of principals as an instructional or administrative leadership, d) no professional standards formulated for instructional leaders, e) a policy is needed for effective integration of ICT in teaching and learning, f)

important behaviours of principals as instructional leaders include interaction with students and direct involvement in instruction and evaluation and g) provide holistic education for overall development and also an effective learning environment, As for barriers to be instructional leaders, the study showed lack of professional development, policies from Ministry of Education and high expectations from public. This study concluded that the revised model may be used as a guide to promote the instructional leadership behaviors and patterns among the principals in the Maldives. The revised model is considered as the contribution of this study.

APPROVAL PAGE

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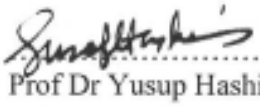

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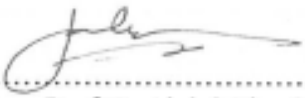

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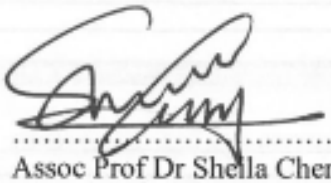

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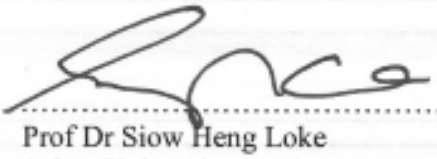

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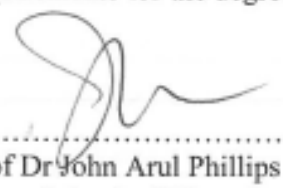

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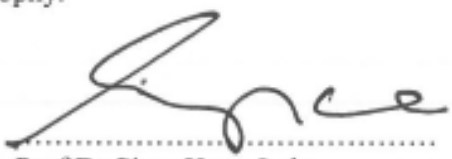

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the thesis submitted in fulfilment of the PhD degree is my own work and that all contributions from any other persons or sources are properly and duly cited. I further declare that the material has not been submitted either in whole or in part, for a degree at this or any other university. In making this declaration, I understand and acknowledge any breaches in this declaration constitute academic misconduct, which may result in my expulsion from the programme and/or exclusion from the award of the degree.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

NAESP	National Association of Elementary School Principals
GCE O' Level	General Certificate of Education Ordinary Level
CFS	Child-friendly School
NCF	National Curriculum Framework
EFA	Education For All
IEL	Institute for Educational Leadership
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
NAESP	National Association of Elementary Schools Principals
ISLLC	Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium, ISLLC
SMT	Senior Management Team
PTA	Parents and Teachers Association
HOD	Head of Department
ICT	Information and Communication Technology

CHAPTER 1

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. The Maldives

A tiny country in the Indian Ocean, sparsely populated by inhabitants spread over 1190 diminutive islands; the Republic of Maldives presents a topography that is barely visible on the world map. These 1190 islands formed naturally into 26 atolls and situated vertically across the equator in the Indian Ocean, 670km south west of Sri Lanka. While enjoying a beautiful tropical climate, the country covers a total area of 90,000 square kilo meters, which includes the sea within territorial water. The length of the archipelago is 750km with the widest point measuring 120km. The islands are low-lying and small with an average size of 1 square kilometer (Educational Development Centre, 2011). The vast ocean enveloping the landmass permits little scope for diverse occupations. Therefore, the sea and the marine life form the only natural resources. Also, the poor quality of soil renders agriculture unsuitable in most islands. The capital of the Maldives is Male' and its population makes up approximately one third of the country's population. The following information from the latest census gives more details about the population:

> The resident population of Maldives in Census 2014 is 402,071. Out of this, the resident Maldivian population accounts for 338,434 and resident foreigners account for 63,637. Over a third of the population (38 percent) is enumerated in the capital Male', 53% in 187 administrative islands, 7% in 109 resort islands and 2% in industrial and other non-administrative islands.
>
> (National Bureau of Statistics, 2014, p.11)

1.2. History, Economy and Education

Historically, the Maldives has been an independent nation, although the Portuguese occupied the Maldives for 15 years in the 16th century. In 1887, the Maldives became a British protectorate and gained independence on 26th July 1965 from British. Following that the Maldives became a republic in 1968 and Ibrahim Nasir was elected on 11th November 1968 as the first president. Maumoon Abdul Gayoom succeeded President Ibrahim Nasir on 11th November 1978. He was the president of the Maldives from 1978 to 2008. In August 2008, the new constitution was ratified by President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, paving the way for the country's first ever multi-party presidential elections in October 2008. Mohamed Nasheed, the leader of Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) won the election in the second round of voting after defeating the incumbent president Maumoon Abdul Gayoom who contested as the leader of Dhivehi Rayyithunge Party (DRP). The official language of the Maldives is Dhivehi Bas (language) and Islam is the official religion of the Maldives. Tourism and fisheries are the major industries in the Maldives (Educational Development Centre, 2011).

Structural changes has taken place in the economy where the country has undergone from primary industries like fisheries and agriculture to mainly tertiary sectors such as tourism industry, where knowledge and technology are intensively used today to provide services to the global customers. With modern technology, fishing became the second major economic activity in the country (Education Development Centre, 2011).

With the arrival of the era of knowledge-based economy, education becomes more important than before. Education plays a crucial role in human capital

development which is the driving force in modern tertiary sectors. With an urgent need to build human capital capacity in the Maldives, the country gives high priority to education and Principals as the heart of the leadership, their educational philosophy and leadership styles impact the development of schools and their future. Hence, education concerns the future of a country (Yan, 2015). At this juncture, it is important to consider whether Maldivian education system recognizes the changes that have taken place in the society to suit the new demands. A robust education system that caters to the demands of the new globalized world, with its complex demands is vital to achieve the economic growth and national development. The best forecast of a nation's future is what currently happening in the schools. A country's development depends basically on the competencies of its people (Yasin, Pihie, Fooi, Basri & Baki, 2015).

1.3. Education System

The Maldives is a developing country struggling to provide quality education to its people by spending a lot of money from the annual budget. Although, the country spends a lot of money on education, the outcome is always unsatisfactory. Normally in an average, more than 6500 students sit in the 'Cambridge International Ordinary level Examination' each year, and always the results are unsatisfactory. In 2009 only 32% of the students passed (A-C) in 5 subjects with C grade and above. In order to improve the quality of education, Ministry of Education targeted to increase the pass percentage of students sitting in 5 subjects or more (A-C) in the GCE O level/IGSE/SSC exams to 60% or more by 2013 (Educational Supervision and Quality Improvement Division, 2010).

Only 32% of students passed (A-C) in O level exam, the rest of the students complete 10 years of schooling without getting a reasonable result and without acquiring enough useful skills. Hence, some of these students are ill-equipped for any job. As a result, the country is heavily depending on the expatriate employees. In 2009, there were 70,259 registered migrant workers in the Maldives (Department of National Planning, 2010). Some of the Maldivian are unemployed (11.7%) and are just loitering aimlessly on the roads and some are using drugs (National Bureau of Statistics, 2015). The estimated number of drug users in the Maldives is 7500. Most of these drug users are having problems and conflicts with their family and friends. Besides, some of them are involved in gang related violence (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2013). Therefore, the crying need is to reform the schools in order to educate the children, build their confidence and to shape their personalities. Ironically, the students who get noteworthy results too find themselves unfit to apply their knowledge practically. Hence, schools need instructional leaders for educating, training and molding the children to fit into different sectors of the country.

Although the researcher worked in the educational sector for 30 years in various posts including the principal's post, the researcher rarely heard people talking about the concept of instructional leadership. However, the principals across the country are struggling to enhance students' performance to minimize the achievement gap. Instructional leadership of the principals contributes tremendously to create effective schools, and achieving the academic quality is considered as one of the foundations of the successful schools (Kruger, 2003, p.209). Sim (2011) further emphasized this view by saying that the principal's leadership is usually believed to be the major factor for achieving excellence in education.

James (1999) also states that leadership is an important ingredient for a good school. Leadership is one of the essential contributors that will make a school succeed or fail (Simkins, 2004). Five decades of leadership research provide high level of perception that principals' leadership behaviors influence the quality of education, school improvement and student attainment (Hallinger and Heck, 2010). In 2001, the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) argued that an excellent school cannot exist without outstanding leadership.

The government has targeted to achieve 60% of students pass from GCE O' Level by the year 2013. Nevertheless, after five years, in 2014 the pass percentage was still 53% (Policy Planning and Research Division, 2015). Therefore, the principals in the Maldives are in great need to find ways to improve students' performance. According to Kelley, Thornton and Daugherty (2005) principal's leadership is the most important factor that creates an effective learning environment. To create a positive learning climate, principal must know the ways and means that create the conditions necessary for organizational development or improvement. Existing literature revealed that a crucial factor of an effective school is an effective principal who performs instructional leadership in the school (Beth, 1997). The main aim of an instructional leader is to find ways and means to improve student learning.

Enhancing the quality of education and achievement should be the cornerstone of school improvement efforts; hence it is important schools pay high attention to any improvements needed to enhance the quality of instructional programs (MacGilchrist, Myers and Reed, 1997). The principals who are motivated to improve student learning, inspire teachers, and develop a set of strategies for

improvements of academic standards (Hallinger and Heck, 2009, p.662). McCann (2011) states that school leaders of the 21st century should use instructional leadership practices and behaviors for the school improvement. They should have certain leadership behaviors to fulfill the demands of a local society and global community. Although, teachers are finally responsible for enhancing student learning, creating a favorable climate for learning is the core task of school principals (Halverson, Grigg, Prichett and Thomas, 2005).

Many transformations on the role of principal in the education sector have shifted with the intention of policy makers towards instructional leadership of the principals (Hallinger, 2005). With the rapid economic, technological and social changes of the 21st century, school leaders face great challenges to improve the performance of schools (Pont, Nusche and Hopkins, 2008; Packard, 2011; Okendu 2012). After starting the school reform movement in the 1980s, school leaders were expected to consider student learning as the core task of their job. Hence, pressure for instructional improvement presents principals with complex challenges to enhance student learning (Lashway, 2002). Buluc (2015) also states that principals as instructional leaders give emphasis on teaching and learning process with the intention of improving classroom activities.

School leadership has come to faces major challenges in recent years (Day, Sammons, Hopkins, Leithwood and Kington 2008). During the past few years, waves of educational reforms hit the education system of Maldives. A Few years back the concept of ‘Child-friendly School’ (CFS) was introduced. After that in 2010 the Ministry of Education launched the ‘Quality indicators for Child-friendly Baraabaru

(perfect) School'. This document serves as a guideline to evaluate the education system of the country. Another major change was newly introduced curriculum by the National Institute of Education. All these changes had added up to make the principals' job more challenging and complex. Newly introduced curriculum demands the principals to be more active and practice instructional leadership behaviors like coordinating the subjects, and conducting effective monitoring and evaluation (Tedla, 2012).

The purpose of this study is to investigate the instructional leadership patterns practiced among principals in the Maldives. Hence, this study adds new knowledge and framework to guide the Maldivian principals on the ways to improve student learning. This study would also benefit educational practitioners and researchers.

1.4. Background of the Study

1.4.1. A Historical Overview of Education

The earliest form of education was inaugurated in the Maldives by the initiations of religious scholars and mainly the teaching and learning was based on one-to-one basis. Edhuruge, Makhtab and Madharusa were the local names of earliest educational institutions. These traditional institutions were administered and owned by different individuals from the island communities. These early forms of schools mainly focused on teaching reading and writing of the local language, Dhivehi, and Arabic script with basic numeracy. The teachers who worked in these schools helped the students to recite and memorize the Holy Qur'an. Besides, they

taught the students the basic principles of Islam, literacy and numeracy (Ministry of Planning and National Development, 2006 and Ministry of Education 2008).

The first government school was established in 1927 in Male' by Sultun Mohammad Shamsuddhee III under the name of Madharusathul Salahiyya with 69 boys. However, in 1944 an extra section was established for girls. The first principal of the school was Sheikh Husain Salaahuddheen. The then President of the Maldives, Mohamed Ameen Didi, was the principal from 1946 to 1953, and during this time the school was renamed as Madhrasathul Majeediyya. Until 2010, the school was catering to only boys. The researcher was fortunate to be the principal of this historical school from January 2015 to February 2016 (Ministry of Planning and National Development, 2006 and Ministry of Education 2008).

By 1945, education extended and each inhabited island had a school with the name of Makthab providing education at primary level students. In the 1950s, the education system was transformed to meet the needs of educated people in a growing economy. In 1960, the Maldivian government established two English medium schools in Male', and started following British school system in terms of organization of curriculum and methods of instruction (Ministry of Education 2008).

> The most recent historic development in education in the Maldives occurred in 1978, with the decision to move to a unified national system of education and to promote a more equitable distribution of facilities and resources. The policy focus was on providing Universal Primary Education for All and thus the strategies involved the formulation of a unified curriculum for Grades 1-7, improvement of teacher training and the establishment and upgrading of new schools in the atolls.
>
> (Ministry of Education, 2008, p.19)

Initially, the government, the community and the private sector collaboratively provided education in the Maldives. The government assisted community and private schools by providing certain percentage of teachers depending on the enrollment of the schools. In addition, the government supported these schools with infrastructure facilities, furniture and financial aids. Secondary education was available only in Male' until 1990, but it has been expanded gradually to the atoll schools on set criteria. However, in 2005, the criterion for introducing grade 8 in existing primary schools was revised. As a result, more students got easy access to 10 years of formal education. In 2001, two atoll schools were given opportunity to start higher secondary schooling and followed by another school in 2002. Additional extension of the higher secondary education in the atolls was continued by establishing grade 11 in eligible existing secondary schools in 2004. After that schools were given opportunity as they were eligible. In 2005, the government transformed the educational policy and converted all the community schools as government schools with the purpose to minimize the differences in giving access to schools (Ministry of Education, 2008).

1.4.2. An Overview of Education

At present, in the Maldives there are 212 government English medium schools which cater 64, 882 students. The total number of students in the Maldives including the private and community schools is 88,341. There are 212 principals, 46 deputy principals and 871 supervisors to manage the government schools. In the government schools, there are 7026 teachers and 5360 administrative staff (Policy Planning and Educational Research Division, 2015). Principals are responsible to manage the schools according to the government educational policies to meet the demands of the