

THE ROLE OF THAI SCHOOL DIRECTORS AS 21ST CENTURY
INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERS

บทบาทภาวะผู้นำทางการเรียนการสอนของผู้อำนวยการโรงเรียนไทย
สำหรับชั้นเรียนในศตวรรษที่ 21

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Abstract: This qualitative study was undertaken to determine whether, and to what extent, Thai school directors regarded their roles to be 21st century instructional leaders (ILs). The sample was selected using purposive sampling and comprised six primary school directors from a population of 37 schools in Bangkok metropolitan area. The participants were asked, by semi-structured interview questions, about their performance as ILs within eight dimensions. Content analysis was applied, and it was found that most of the key informants performed their roles as the 21st ILs at the low level. Only one dimension reached 50 %, namely, the dimension of curriculum. Performance in the remaining seven dimensions was less than 50%. These dimensions included assessment, instruction, educational use of technology, professional culture and climate, professional development, supervision, and school improvement. Interesting points are discussed why their performance in the role of IL for 21st century classrooms was quite low.

Keywords: Instructional leader; IL; 21st Century Instructional Leader Roles; Thai School Directors

บทคัดย่อ: วัตถุประสงค์ของงานวิจัยเชิงคุณภาพเรื่องนี้คือเพื่อศึกษาว่าผู้อำนวยการโรงเรียนในประเทศไทยได้ตระหนักถึงบทบาทของการเป็นผู้นำทางการเรียนการสอนสำหรับยุคศตวรรษที่ 21 นี้หรือไม่และผู้อำนวยการเหล่านี้ได้ปฏิบัติตามบทบาทดังกล่าวมากหรือน้อยอย่างไร กลุ่มผู้ให้ข้อมูลเป็นกลุ่มที่ถูกคัดเลือกแบบเฉพาะเจาะจงโดยประกอบด้วยผู้อำนวยการโรงเรียนประถมศึกษาชั้นต้น 6 คนซึ่งมาจากประชากรทั้งหมด 37 คนตามจำนวนโรงเรียนระดับประถมศึกษาในสังกัดกรุงเทพมหานคร เครื่องมือในการวิจัยคือแบบสัมภาษณ์แบบกึ่งโครงสร้างซึ่งจะมีเค้าโครงในการสัมภาษณ์ถึงบทบาทหน้าที่ในการเป็นผู้นำทางการเรียนการสอนทั้งหมด 8 ด้าน การวิเคราะห์ข้อมูลใช้วิธีการวิเคราะห์เนื้อหา ผลการวิจัยพบว่า ผู้อำนวยการโรงเรียนได้ตระหนักถึงบทบาทของการเป็นผู้นำทางการเรียนการสอนแต่มีการปฏิบัติในระดับต่ำ โดยมีเพียง 1 ด้านที่พบว่ามีการปฏิบัติตามหน้าที่ผู้นำทางการเรียนการสอน 50 % คือด้านหลักสูตร อย่างไรก็ตาม สำหรับด้านอื่นๆ อีก 7 ด้านพบว่ามีการปฏิบัติหน้าที่น้อยกว่า 50 % คือด้านการวัดและประเมินผล ด้านการจัดการเรียนการสอน ด้านการใช้สื่อเทคโนโลยีในการสอน ด้านวัฒนธรรมและบรรยากาศความเป็นครูแบบมืออาชีพ ด้านการพัฒนาตน ด้านการให้คำแนะนำและนิเทศการเรียนการสอน และสุดท้ายคือด้านการปรับปรุงโรงเรียนในทุกมิติ นอกจากนี้ ในการอภิปรายผล ได้นำประเด็นสำคัญที่ค้นพบในงานวิจัยที่น่าจะเป็นสาเหตุว่าทำไมผู้อำนวยการโรงเรียนจึงได้ตระหนักและปฏิบัติหน้าที่ในฐานะผู้นำทางการเรียนการสอนได้ในระดับที่ไม่ค่อยน่าพึงพอใจ

คำสำคัญ: ผู้นำทางการเรียนการสอน บทบาทของการเป็นผู้นำทางการเรียนการสอนในศตวรรษที่ 21
ผู้อำนวยการโรงเรียนในประเทศไทย

1. Introduction

Effective instructional leadership in schools has been paid high attention worldwide. In the US, the strong policy has been enacted for the roles and responsibilities of an efficient instructional leader (IL) [1]. The term of IL has been coined for decades as it refers to a role fully attained by school principals [2]. Hallinger [2] asserted that the role of IL of the school principal was vital to school effectiveness. He defined three dimensions of normative IL role including defining the school's mission; managing the instructional program and promoting a positive school learning climate [2]. Moreover, extensive empirical studies have shown that the IL term has been reinterpreted and clarified depending on which focus to be made [3], [4], [5], [6], [7]. Robinson, Lloyd, and Rowe [6] suggested that IL role of principals focused their efforts on building an instructional environment conducive to teaching and learning in which school improvement was accomplished. Other scholars [5],[6] proposed that effective role of instructional leadership acquired an experienced leader engaged with curriculum, instruction and learning environment as well as with the community of teachers.

However, since the beginning of the 21st century, much research on effective instructional leadership has been undertaken and changes have been implemented [3]. Darnell [3] moved beyond the concept of general IL in stating that 'The 21st Century Instructional Leader' focuses on eight dimensions in performing their significant role. Those dimensions include curriculum; assessment; instruction; technology; culture and climate; professional development; supervision; and school improvement [3]. Along with the comprehensive ideas from Darnell, the growth of studies of IL in Asian countries has increased continuously. Quite a number of works attempted to find out whether the IL roles influenced the success of schools in particular, student achievements [7],[8]. In Thailand, it is worth saying that the concepts and practices of IL are not novel as several scholars have studied in various settings especially after Thai education reform. Though, those works proposed that Thai directors were likely to remain unchanged from their own traditional styles, the awareness of importance and effects of instructional leadership has been highly concerned [9],[10]. Later works have pointed out that, in Thai institutions, instructional leaders have influenced student achievement and have had a certain level of direct effect on school management [11],[12]. Apparently, no work has been focused directly with all eight dimensions of Darnell's. Therefore, it is in our interests to find out whether Thai school leaders have extensively realized and exercised their roles within eight dimensions as 21st century instructional leaders in order to cope well with the changes in this era.

2. Theoretical Framework

Darnell's concept as the 21st century instructional leaders' practices

Darnell [3] draws conclusion that the 21st century ILs must perform delicate tasks with their knowledge, skills, methods and implementation tools for achieving goals of schools. He strongly suggests 8 components as follows. The first component, 'Curriculum', refers to the role of effective ILs in communicating their expectations in relation to curriculum in that they are in charge of the curriculum and unit design process, they act as monitors of the development process, they show respect to teachers' work in the curriculum process, and they encourage reflection about the development process and curriculum implementation. The second, 'Assessment' is what ILs have to take high responsibility on the intervention of a practical assessment system as well as the monitoring process. The third element, 'Instruction', as ILs must be full of up-to-date knowledge and resource about instructions to provide support needed [3]. The fourth aspect, 'Educational Use of Technology' is what ILs need to provide IT facilities for both teachers and students. Not only used for teaching and learning, technology must be used as a tool for ILs in a process of school improvement, especially for keeping data for planning, implementing, and monitoring [3]. The fifth component, 'Professional Culture and

Climate’ refers to how ILs build a positive culture and a culture of collegiality in schools including promoting cohesion and a sense of well-being among members, and developing an understanding of purpose and a shared vision of school prospectus. The sixth element ‘Professional Development’ is what Darnell [3] suggests that its characteristics must be data-based, results-driven and job-embedded. Professional development includes a variety of approaches and tools needed for teaching and learning. The seventh component, ‘Supervision’, Darnell [3] strongly affirms that instructional leaders’ supervision plays a key role in enabling teachers to work better in schools as ILs create a supportive culture, provide inspiration and tangible resources. The last element is ‘School Improvement’ as ILs involve such the processes of planning, implementing, and evaluating. Then, the data gathering becomes necessary for ILs for designing school improvement plans and setting goals. For detailed activities taken by effective ILs were described with the results found later.

3. Research Questions

The study addressed the following research questions.

- 1) Do Thai directors take their roles as the 21st century instructional leaders?
- 2) To what extent do they perform the tasks as the 21st instructional leaders?

4. Scope of the Study

This study focused on the directors of all Bangkok metropolitan schools (37 schools) under Department of Education, Bangkok.

5. Research Design and Methodology

The study was a qualitative one but utilized simple descriptive statistics to make readers understand the findings easily. The sample was selected using purposive sampling technique since finding directors or acting directors to participate in the study was challenging due to a range of factors which included travel distance and difficulty, lack of time because of the heavy workload of school leaders, and strong perceptions of insecurity about giving the interview, etc. There were six primary school directors from the population of 37 schools in Bangkok metropolitan area who were willing to participate. The content analysis was done to acquire the findings of this study.

To collect the data, the participants were individually asked with semi-structured interview questions to disclose their performance as ILs within 8 dimensions of Darnell’s. Before the interview began, the participants were reassured that the objective of the research was not to judge or evaluate their leadership skills but to find out the level and the extent of their performance as the 21st instructional leaders. Therefore, their names were kept anonymous and referred to as numbers from #1 to # 6.

With the nature of qualitative research, trustworthiness was a main concern. This study applied Lincoln and Guba’s norms of trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Techniques of prolonged engagement, member checks and peer debriefing were used to ensure the confidence and correctness of the data in the process of interview [13]. Prior to each interview, the researchers made contact with each key informant to establish a relationship of trust between them. When collecting data in the interview, regular checks were done with the key informants to ensure data accuracy. Transcriptions of interviews were given to each key informant for verification. Consent was obtained from the Ethics Committee of Srinakarinwirot University and key informants. In order to obtain the director’s consent, the objectives and the goals were explained to them. They were made aware that they may withdraw from the research at any time, and that confidentiality and anonymity would be observed during and after the research was summarized.

6. Research Findings

Overall, the data analysis revealed that most of the key informants performed their roles as the 21st instructional leaders at the low level. Moreover, in each dimension, they practiced differently and unevenly as seen in the Table 1 – 8.

Table 1 Summary of Tasks in the Curriculum Dimension

Tasks	Director #1	Director #2	Director #3	Director #4	Director #5	Director #6
1. Map the intended curriculum.	√	√	√		√	√
2. Examine lesson pacing with course or grade-alike teams.		√				
3. Audit the intended and taught curriculum.	√	√				√
4. Analyze student performance with curriculum frameworks or maps and data present.	√	√	√	√		√
5. Discuss strengths and needs of students after units are taught.	√	√	√	√		√
6. Conduct walk-throughs and observations to monitor curriculum delivery in each classroom.	√				√	
7. Review curriculum to determine the extent to which 21st century themes and skills are integrated.						
8. Encourage professional use of portfolios illustrating curriculum materials.	√					
9. Lead or arrange professional development activities about curriculum alignment and delivery.	√	√		√		
10. Provide time for teachers to create and discuss unit designs.	√	√	√			
11. Assess the need for resources to support curriculum delivery.	√	√		√	√	√
12. Encourage teachers to discuss which aspects of the curriculum need more time and depth with students.	√	√	√	√		√
Total of tasks performed by individuals	10/12	9/12	5/12	5/12	3/12	6/12
Total tasks as percentage	83 %	75 %	46%	46%	25%	50%

From Table 1, the first key informant performed the highest number of tasks (10 out of 12) while the fifth key informant performed the lowest (3 out of 12). Only 2 of them outperformed others (75% up). In addition, there were 5 tasks performed by 5 directors, which are number 1, 4, 5, 11 and 12. **Table 2**

Table 2 Summary of Tasks in the Assessment Dimension

Tasks	Director #1	Director #2	Director #3	Director #4	Director #5	Director #6
1. Audit the curriculum and identify how and when knowledge and skills are assessed.		√	√	√	√	
2. Require and support teachers in implementing a variety of assessments in classrooms.	√	√	√		√	
3. Measure and increase teachers' assessment literacy.		√				
4. Use a variety of methods to find out about schoolwide classroom assessment practices.		√			√	
5. Lead or plan job-embedded professional development activities focused on assessment.	√	√				

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Table 2 (continued)

Tasks	Director #1	Director #2	Director #3	Director #4	Director #5	Director #6
6. Put processes and schedules in place that require teachers to collaboratively analyze student performance and discuss strengths and needs of students after units are taught.	√	√				
7. Provide teachers with time to collaboratively create a variety of assessments and then use a tuning protocol to determine effectiveness.		√				
8. Explore how assessments can be differentiated to align with student learning profiles.		√			√	
9. Ensure that the use of technology by teachers and students is integrated into formative and summative assessment.						
Total of tasks performed by individuals	3/9	8/9	2/9	1/9	4/9	0/9
Total tasks as percentage	33%	88%	22%	11%	44%	0%

Table 2 represented 9 tasks in the assessment dimension. There were only 2 tasks performed by 4 directors which are activity 1 and 2. The second director performed the highest number of tasks (8 out of 9) while the sixth director performed none.

Table 3 Summary of Tasks in the Instruction Dimension

Tasks	Director #1	Director #2	Director #3	Director #4	Director #5	Director #6
1. Discuss best practices in learning teams.						
2. Review the variety of instructional strategies used by examining lesson-pacing guides.						
3. Use program evaluation criteria to evaluate programs of study.	√	√				
4. Encourage teacher self-assessment using an instructional practices inventory.						
5. Use protocols to discuss and improve instruction in grade-alike, cross-disciplinary, and cross-grade groups.		√				
6. Conduct walk-throughs to identify the prevalence of specific, research-supported practices.	√				√	
7. Lead or arrange professional development activities about instructional strategies and practices.		√	√	√		
8. Identify major changes of the 21st century student and provide capacity-building professional development to help teacher leaders gain expertise in infusing 21st century learning into instruction.						
9. Encourage collaborative teams to try an instructional strategy and bring artifacts back to team meetings to illustrate how students performed and responded to the strategy.	√	√				
10. Provide time for teachers to create lessons using different instructional strategies and then use a lesson-study approach to analyze the lessons.		√				
11. Explore how instruction is differentiated for students, and use capacity-building professional development to build a cadre of differentiated instruction teacher leader experts and demonstration classrooms in the school.		√				
Total of tasks performed by individuals	3/11	6/11	1/11	1/11	1/11	0/11
Total tasks as percentage	27 %	54%	9 %	9 %	9 %	0 %

Table 3 showed the lowest number of tasks performed by the six directors whereas the highest number was only 54 % followed by 27%, 9% and 0% respectively. Considering each activity, it showed that there was only one activity performed by 3 directors.

Table 4 Summary of Tasks in the Educational Use of Technology Dimension

Tasks	Director #1	Director #2	Director #3	Director #4	Director #5	Director #6
1. Observe teachers using technology in their classrooms.	√	√			√	
2. Use a technology plan inventory to determine the state of the school's technology plan.		√				
3. Examine technology standards and curriculum maps and frameworks to determine which standards are addressed in which courses and grades		√				
4. Encourage teachers to examine instructional activities used in classes to determine the variety of technology activities and tasks.		√	√		√	
5. Involve teachers in professional discussions about student achievement and engagement resulting from the use of technology.						
6. Create a school technology committee and determine the school's readiness for expanding its use of technology.	√	√				
7. Encourage teachers to keep student virtual portfolios and discuss the extent to which students are developing 21st century information literacy skills.						
8. Lead or arrange professional development activities focusing on the use of technology for personal productivity and for teaching and assessing students.		√				
9. Provide collaborative opportunities for teachers to create technology-supported lessons.	√	√				
10. Provide teachers with collaborative opportunities to locate and review web sites and applications that support the classroom curriculum.	√	√	√			
11. Explore how adaptive technology is used for students with disabilities.						
Total of tasks performed by individuals	4/11	8/11	2/11	0/11	2/11	0/11
Total tasks as percentage	36 %	72 %	18 %	0 %	18 %	0 %

From table 4, only 1 director outperformed others by practicing 72% while others practiced 36%, 18% and 0 %. Obviously, there were 2 directors did nothing in this dimension.

Table 5 Summary of Tasks in the Professional Culture and Climate Dimension

Tasks	Director #1	Director #2	Director #3	Director #4	Director #5	Director #6
1. Create opportunities for teachers to examine the criteria for developing and evaluating professional learning teams.	√	√			√	
2. Arrange a consistent time for professional learning teams to meet frequently throughout the school year with specific goals and activities focused on improving teacher practice and student learning.		√			√	

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Table 5 (continued)

Tasks	Director #1	Director #2	Director #3	Director #4	Director #5	Director #6
3. Take a part in professional learning teams and communities in the school improvement planning process.		√			√	
4. Seek input from school stakeholders about things that don't work, analyze school operations, and make needed or desired improvements.	√	√		√		
5. Use strategies to recognize individual and group progress as well as goal accomplishment.				√		
6. Be visible with specific, identified purposes in classrooms, halls, meetings, and activities.	√	√	√	√	√	
7. Review the mentor and induction program to determine the extent to which it helps new teachers feel welcome, connected to others, and supported.	√	√				
Total of tasks performed by individuals	4/7	6/7	1/7	3/7	4/7	0/7
Total tasks as percentage	57 %	85 %	14 %	42 %	57 %	0 %

From Table 5, the second director performed the highest number of tasks (6 out of 7) while the sixth director performed none. In addition, there was only 1 task performed by 5 directors, which was number 6.

Table 6 Summary of Tasks in the Professional Development Dimension

Tasks	Director #1	Director #2	Director #3	Director #4	Director #5	Director #6
1. Identify teacher knowledge and skills that are required for effective curriculum development, instruction, assessment, and classroom management.		√		√	√	
2. Engage teachers in self-assessment of their knowledge and skills, and determine areas of needed or desired professional learning.	√	√			√	
3. Encourage school teams to select professional development content related to their school improvement goals and provide differentiated professional learning for the teams.	√	√				
4. Encourage teachers to be involved in evaluating the effect of professional development on student and teacher learning.		√				
5. Lead or arrange professional development activities on a variety of topics aligned with school improvement goals.		√	√			
6. Encourage teachers to select improvement goals and create a personal learning plan.	√	√	√	√	√	
7. Encourage paraprofessional, clerical, and technical staff members to self-assess their learning needs, and make ongoing professional development available to them.						
8. Conduct walk-throughs and formal observations to become aware of the application of targeted professional development knowledge and skills.						
9. Select instructional practices that all members of a team or staff will use, and have them bring student artifacts and use protocols to discuss student performance demonstrated during the use of the new strategy.						
Total of tasks performed by individuals	3/9	6/9	2/9	2/9	3/9	0/9
Total tasks as percentage	33 %	66 %	22 %	22 %	33 %	0 %

Table 6 illustrated that only 1 director performed higher than 50% while the others lower than 35%. Still the sixth director performed nothing for this dimension.

Table 7 Summary of Tasks in the Supervision Dimension

Tasks	Director #1	Director #2	Director #3	Director #4	Director #5	Director #6
1. Communicate expectations about effective instruction.		√			√	
2. Monitor teachers during classroom instruction.	√	√	√		√	
3. Provide feedback, and use inspirational data to guide teachers through reflection and continuous improvement.		√			√	
4. Arrange formal observation.	√	√	√		√	
5. Arrange an organized visit (walk-through) through a school's learning areas to observe teaching, learning, and the school environment through the eyes of different school stakeholders.	√				√	
6. Monitor instruction and school improvement efforts through the use of online professional portfolios.						
Total of tasks performed by individuals	3/6	4/6	2/6	0/6	5/6	0/6
Total tasks as percentage	50 %	66 %	33 %	0 %	83 %	0 %

Table 7 showed that the fifth director performed the highest number of tasks (5 out of 6) while the fourth and sixth directors performed none. In addition, there were 2 tasks (2 and 4) performed by 4 directors.

Table 8 Summary of Tasks in the School Improvement Dimension

Tasks	Director #1	Director #2	Director #3	Director #4	Director #5	Director #6
1. Preparing the data and professional teams.	√					
2. Collecting relevant data.	√			√	√	√
3. Analyzing and interpreting data.	√			√	√	√
4. Creating improvement goals and plans.	√	√	√	√	√	√
5. Preparing for implementation by acquiring new knowledge and skills.						
6. Implementing the plan, monitoring progress, and making adjustments.	√				√	√
7. Evaluating progress and celebrating the accomplishment of goals.	√					
Total of tasks performed by individuals	6/7	1/7	1/7	3/7	4/7	4/7
Total tasks as percentage	85 %	15 %	15 %	45 %	60 %	60 %

From Table 8, the first director performed the highest number (85%) while two out of six performed the least only one activity. The rest performed a range from 45 to 60 %.

Table 9 Percentage of Tasks performed by the six key informants

	Item	Percentage	Ranking
1	Curriculum	52.77	1
2	Assessment	33.33	5
3	Instruction	18.18	8
4	Educational Use of Technology	24.24	7
5	Professional Culture and Climate	42.85	3
6	Professional Development	29.62	6
7	Supervision	38.88	4
8	School Improvement	46.66	2

Overall, as shown in Table 9, the findings of how much the Thai directors performed the tasks of each dimension as the 21st instructional leaders were described. The dimension performed the most was Curriculum (52.77%) whereas Instruction (18.18%) the least. For the rest of the tasks, they practiced lower than 50%. The list of the tasks in descending order included School improvement (46.66%), Professional culture and Climate (42.85%), Supervision (38.88%), Assessment (33.33%), Professional Development (29.62%), and Educational Use of Technology (24.24%).

7. Discussion and Conclusion

It was found that the directors performed all dimensions at quite low level. The reasons for these unsatisfied results were caused by misperception of the proper concepts and practices of Instructional Leadership, the unclear picture of standards of IL roles and responsibilities of school leaders, and the influence of typical top-down educational management approach in Thailand.

The first misperception of IL concept occurred when they replied about the school improvement as most tasks were done on improvement of infrastructure such as school buildings, toilets, school yard, etc. School improvement plan, therefore, were for how to get those things done. The data of students' performance and instructional problems were simply collected for the records but merely mentioned in the school improvement plan as Director #3 said "I spent millions to improve our school playground for the student safety, reshaping the landscape of school and focusing of redecorating school building."

Another misinterpretation was the role of school leaders in the instruction and supervision dimensions. Although both dimensions are significant, most of the tasks were done by others such as the vice director and the head of academic affairs. As the director #6 mentioned "My vice director together with the head of academic affairs were doing their jobs on supervising teaching and learning in the school. They had monthly meeting with the teachers discussing about problems of instruction in the classrooms." When asked if these tasks should be done by the director, director#6 replied, "I don't think so. But I have confidence in delegating the right people to do". He further mentioned that the concern for these two components was the provision of an effective system to take care since he/she himself/herself was not a permanent director as he/she said, "I was not a director forever so I thought it would be better if we had a great system and everyone could do it with a guideline in the system".

With regard to educational technology usage, all directors confirmed that they supported all teachers and students to use for teaching and learning. However, they did not point out its usage in terms of student assessment or school improvement. This was then a case of misperception about the use of technology. Accordingly, the tasks were practiced at very low level (24.24%) and 2 directors did nothing. For example, director #4 said, "I strongly supported my teachers to use technology in classrooms as I gave budget to this quite a lot. I know it's a must for this modern age."

According to OECD report on Thailand Education 2016, one weakness mentioned was unclear picture of the role and responsibilities of school leader in Thai Education Standard. In fact, this role of leader was vaguely described in standards as school leaders as OECD stated that both school leaders and teachers roles are based closely each other despite the differences in their roles [14], the findings can proof that without the concrete reinforcement of the standards, all directors were likely to perform at low level for all dimensions.

Another aspect as the obstacle is the influence of the top-down management model. Though those new strategic plans from the top line have attempted to focus on student achievement of the 21st century skills, they have contributed so called “one size fits all” policies for whole-schools nationwide. This resulted in no choices for ILs but to follow even those policies did not align with local school plans or needs. When all directors were asked about the dimension of Curriculum, they replied that they did not need to create as the central policy would tell them to do like director #2 said, “I just waited for the new policies from the central because if I did something new, I was afraid it would waste of time, better wait and see.”

To conclude, the study revealed the low level of Thai directors’ performance resulted from misinterpretation of the proper concepts and practices of ILs and unclear information of the standard for the role and responsibilities of the effective ILs. It is hoped that the results of this study could raise educational administrators’ awareness about the importance of being effective instructional leaders who have impact on student achievements in all areas. This could lead to the real quality of education at the end.

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