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Review of conceptual models and methodologies in research on principal instructional leadership in Malaysia: A case of knowledge construction in a developing society
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Abstract

Purpose – Over the past several decades, instructional leadership has gradually gained increasing currency as a key role of school principals throughout much of the world. This is also the case in Malaysia where educational research, policy and practice have brought the instructional leadership role of the principal front and center. The purpose of this paper is to assess the conceptual models, research methods, and foci of scholars in the study of principal instructional leadership in Malaysia over the past 30 years.

Design/methodology/approach – Systematic methods were used to identify all studies conducted in Malaysia that had used the Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale (PIMRS) (Hallinger, 1982/1990/2015) as the data collection instrument. This search yielded a database of 120 studies completed between 1989 and 2016 written in both English and Bahasa Malay. Common data were extracted from the 120 research reports, coded and entered into a MS Excel spreadsheet for analysis. Quantitative methods were employed to analyze modal trends and synthesize patterns in the data across the studies.

Findings – The search identified 120 PIMRS studies, 90 percent of which had been conducted since 2005. This represented a surprisingly large corpus of studies. Over 75 percent of the Malaysian studies of principal instructional leadership had been conducted as graduate (master and doctoral) theses, relatively few of which had achieved publication in journals. The authors’ analysis found that most studies had used lower order (i.e. bivariate, direct effects) conceptual models and relied heavily on descriptive and simple correlational statistical tests. The lack of consistent results within the database of studies was attributed largely to limitations in research design and quality.

Research limitations/implications – The 120 PIMRS studies conducted in Malaysia comprise a surprisingly large corpus of research on principal instructional leadership. Indeed, the Malaysian corpus is second only to the USA in terms of the number of PIMRS studies of principal instructional leadership. Nonetheless, limitations in the research models and methods employed in these studies suggest a need for stronger methodological training before Malaysian scholars can achieve the goal of contributing useful knowledge to the local and global knowledge base. Specific recommendations are offered for strengthening the quality of research.

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