

Instructional leadership practices among principals in rural areas of Sandakan district, Malaysia



 Haisa Osman¹
 Nurul Aisyah
Kamrozzaman²⁺

^{1,2}UNITAR International University, Malaysia.

¹Email: haisa.osman@gmail.com

²Email: Aisyah.kamrozzaman@unitar.my



(+ Corresponding author)

ABSTRACT

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Keywords

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This study aimed to examine the extent of instructional leadership exhibited by principals and to gauge the work commitment levels of teachers in four rural secondary schools within the Sandakan district. Additionally, the study explored the relationship between principals' instructional leadership and teachers' commitment to their work. Quantitative descriptive research was conducted, collecting data via a 21-item questionnaire administered to teachers. The data were analyzed using SPSS Version 29 software, employing descriptive statistics and inferential statistics. The results indicated that principals demonstrated high levels of instructional leadership, and teachers exhibited high levels of work commitment. However, the correlation between the instructional leadership of principals and the work commitment of teachers was found to be weak. The findings suggest opportunities to strengthen the connection between principals' leadership approaches and teachers' commitment to their roles. By focusing on introspection, professional development, effective communication, and recognition, principals can enhance academic outcomes in their schools by cultivating a culture of dedication and high-quality work among teachers.

Contribution/ Originality: This study is original as it uniquely focuses on the instructional leadership and work commitment relationship in the specific context of rural secondary schools in the Sandakan district, Sabah, an area previously under-researched in this scope.

1. INTRODUCTION

Societies' growth and advancement are greatly aided by education. Ensuring a high-quality education and the general performance of pupils depends heavily on effective leadership at the school level. According to Kamrozzaman, Taha, Rahim, and Tampiah (2023) leadership in education state that it is a key factor in the development of a school.

Global institutions like the World Bank and UNESCO (The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) have acknowledged the value of principle instructional leadership in rural schools. Rural schools, according to UNESCO, frequently encounter particular difficulties that call for capable and capable leadership. The challenges faced by rural schools include low student enrollment, a lack of technology and educational resources, a shortage of teachers, and insufficient funding. To address these issues, UNESCO and the World Bank suggest that school administrators should focus on improving the teaching and learning process,

fostering a supportive school environment, and building strong relationships with stakeholders (Akert & Martin, 2012).

In Malaysia, rural schools face similar obstacles, exacerbated by their limited resources. The lack of infrastructure, technology, and educational materials in these schools makes it difficult for principals to lead effectively and maintain educational quality. To counter the teacher shortage, principals need innovative strategies to attract and retain qualified staff, such as offering housing allowances, professional development opportunities, and mentorship programs.

Low student enrollment, exacerbated by urban migration and lower birth rates, challenges the sustainability of rural schools. Principals must consider innovative solutions like distance learning programs and forming partnerships with nearby schools to expand offerings (Mansor et al., 2022). Geographic dispersion also poses significant challenges, with students traveling long distances to school, affecting attendance and engagement. Principals need to be proactive, leveraging local partnerships and seeking external funding to maximize available resources (Mansor et al., 2022).

Experienced principals in rural areas employ various strategies to overcome these barriers. They build strong community ties, involve stakeholders in decision-making, collaborate with other institutions for more resources, and invest in professional development for teachers and themselves.

Additionally, principals should support tailored programs and policies for rural schools, engage with local government and educational authorities, and emphasize the unique challenges faced by rural education. This approach helps ensure that students in remote areas receive a quality education and have the opportunities they need to succeed.

Overall, effective instructional leadership in rural schools requires proactive and collaborative approaches that address the specific needs and challenges of rural education. By fostering strong community relationships, supporting enabling policies, and implementing creative solutions, principals can significantly enhance educational experience and outcomes for students in rural areas. Leading these initiatives and influencing the educational environment for children in remote areas is a critical responsibility of principals. Principals have a significant influence on the standard of instruction as well as the general well-being of the community and students when they adopt a proactive and cooperative approach.

1.1. Problem Statement

In the evolving field of educational management, school principals are central to molding the instructional setting of educational institutions. Both principals and teachers significantly contribute to cultivating a professional development culture within schools. Principals, who are essentially teachers with the added responsibility of the highest leadership within a school, are accountable for all aspects that ensure the smooth operation of the school towards achieving its objectives (Riawan, Darmada, & Chandrawati, 2023). As noted by Wicoksono, Yusrizal, and Usman (2022) principals play a critical role in spearheading educational programs and simultaneously evaluating teacher competencies to enhance their performance.

In the continually evolving field of educational management, the role of school principals is crucial in fostering an environment conducive to teaching and learning. Principals, beyond their myriad responsibilities, are central to maintaining the continuity of education, especially under challenging circumstances. This includes not only overseeing the implementation of educational programs but also distributing resources, monitoring progress, and supervising instruction within classrooms to affirm their leadership in effective school management. Recent studies highlight these aspects, emphasizing the necessity for principals to balance administrative duties with direct involvement in educational activities to enhance teaching effectiveness and achieve school goals. For instance, Mestry, Moonsammy-Koopasammy, and Schmidt (2013) note that primary school principals in South Africa face

significant challenges in this balancing act, yet they find innovative ways to excel in their instructional leadership roles.

The problem emerging from the recent transformations in educational content and methodologies is that principals are increasingly detached from direct pedagogical leadership and teaching. The demands of their extensive administrative duties often prevent them from being up to date with these instructional shifts. This disconnection poses significant challenges to their capacity to effectively guide and support teachers in the classroom. For instance, in Melilla, Spain, school principals struggle with a lack of adequate training in educational leadership, which hampers their ability to engage deeply in pedagogical practices due to overwhelming administrative tasks (Chilah Abdelkader, García-Carmona, & Hinojo Lucena, 2023). Similarly, principals in rural high schools in South Africa find it difficult to perceive themselves as instructional leaders, grappling with inadequate training and support, which hinders their ability to manage curriculum changes and maintain a focus on teaching and learning (Taole, 2013). These scenarios underline the need for a restructured approach that prioritizes instructional leadership development to better equip principals to handle the evolving demands of educational leadership effectively.

In a similar vein, a study by Hochbein (2023) emphasizes the need for training programs that are realistically aligned with principals' work conditions to improve their operational effectiveness in schools. It suggests that better preparation in time management and administrative tasks could help principals focus more on instructional leadership.

Moreover, principals' capacity to provide effective instructional leadership is also affected by their ability to manage and delegate non-instructional tasks. This is crucial for maintaining focus on teaching and learning, as indicated in the research from the US, which underlines the importance of supportive supervision and professional development for principals to enhance their leadership skills (Rainey, 2020). As mandated by the Ministry of Education Malaysia, seventy percent of Federal Territory principals do not teach five hours a week, according to his research, which was reported by NUTP (National Union of the Teaching Profession).

The capacity of leaders to provide clear directions and enable teachers to adopt pedagogical innovations is a crucial component of instructional leadership. School administrators must be aware of the particular difficulties that local educators and children encounter, including social, cultural, and economic factors. Consequently, research on instructional leadership in high school is vital to comprehending practical approaches to this particular problem.

While research on the role of instructional leadership in raising academic achievement has been established (Hallinger & Murphy, 1987) little is known about the setting of rural education in Malaysia, particularly in Sandakan, Sabah. Further research is required to pinpoint the unique difficulties faced by principals in rural schools and the ways in which their instructional leadership strategies impact student and school progress.

The challenge that Principal in rural area are facing is Isolation of Leadership (Klocko & Justis, 2019). Principals in rural schools may feel alienated or disconnected from the professional support and idea-sharing networks commonly found among city principals. This can prevent the exchange of best practices and innovation in instructional leadership. Rural schools are often located far from the city or large educational centers (Shujau-Abdul-Raheem, 2023). This means that Principals at such schools may not have easy access to seminars, conferences, or education-related discussions that are often held in metropolitan areas. As a result, they may be cut off from discussion and sharing of ideas among the larger educational community.

Besides that, rural schools located in rural areas are often associated with educational setbacks due to various lack of facilities (Preston & Barnes, 2017). Principals in rural schools may not get sufficient opportunities for training and professional development in connection with instructional leadership. This can affect their skills in planning, implementing, and evaluating learning programs.

Additionally, the geographical isolation of rural schools can pose a challenge for principals in terms of professional development and networking opportunities. It's important for principals to actively seek out

opportunities for collaboration with other educational leaders and to stay updated on best practices in instructional leadership.

Understanding the particular difficulties faced by principals and how they affect student achievement and school performance is crucial in the context of the study on the principal's instructional leadership techniques in the rural school of Sandakan, Sabah.

Principals in rural schools of Malaysia often face unique challenges in their instructional leadership roles. One of the main difficulties is the limited resources available in these areas. Rural schools often face a shortage of resources such as teachers, textbooks, teaching equipment, and infrastructure facilities (Mitchell, 2018). This may make it difficult for the principal to implement effective instructional leadership practices.

Limited resources are one of the biggest issues facing principals in rural schools. Many times, inland schools struggle with a lack of resources and infrastructure, such as science supplies, computers, and textbooks. Many rural schools are experiencing a severe teacher shortage, necessitating the provision of additional training and support to educators with limited numbers and skill sets (United Nations Children's Fund, 2016). For principals and teachers in remote schools, geographic isolation can also make it more difficult for them to acquire professional development and support services (Lunenberg, Korthagen, & Swennen, 2007).

Student socioeconomic inequality and cultural diversity present another difficulty. Students from diverse ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds are frequently taught in inland schools, and in order to guarantee every student's success, extra teaching and support methods may be needed.

In addition to cultural elements that affect learning, students in rural schools may encounter socioeconomic difficulties such as poverty, lack of access to health care and further education, and lack of resources (Shujau-Abdul-Raheem, 2023). Since children in rural locations may come from a variety of socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds, principals must use inclusive teaching practices that meet the requirements of every student. In order to create and carry out pertinent and effective learning programs, the principal must also exercise sensitivity and initiative. In addition to being aware of these particular needs, principals must be able to handle the different demands and difficulties brought on by the socioeconomic divide and cultural diversity.

Principals at remote schools do, however, confront difficulties, but there are also chances for them to advance their instructional leadership techniques. Principals may find the right plans of action and interventions to address issues by conducting in-depth study and working with pertinent parties. For instance, working together with nearby communities and other relevant parties can assist in giving rural schools more resources and assistance (Muijs & Harris, 2003). Additionally, there are chances to enhance administrators' and teachers' professional development, which can bolster instructional leadership and raise student success and school performance in remote schools.

In terms of leadership, a sizable portion of head teachers and administrators still support the traditional management model as the best approach to administer a school (Nabitula, Eryenyu, & Olema, 2023). As a result, they frequently employ formal regulations to adopt an autocratic leadership style, ignoring the psychological needs of educators and even prioritizing academic success over leadership positions that can generate highly qualified human capital for the advancement of education. Nonetheless, a number of principals and head teachers also frequently bring up bureaucratic models that prescribe how schools need to be administered. The focus of principal leadership, on the other hand, should be on human capital, which includes cultivating creativity and innovation, attaining peak performance, increasing productivity, and building a devoted workforce.

According to an early report of the Malaysia Educational Blueprint 2013–2025, school administrators that engage in instructional leadership practices can see a 20 percent boost in student accomplishment. This paper also advises that school leaders are not the only ones who have a role as instructional leaders; assistant principals, department heads, and committee heads should also receive training and be trusted to lead as instructional leaders (Sharif, 2020).

The district of Sandakan features a varied rural education environment, made up of several villages and remote communities, when it comes to education. Sandakan's inland schools frequently deal with issues like socioeconomic disparities, a lack of teachers, and restricted access to resources (Muijs & Harris, 2003). It is crucial to comprehend these particular contextual elements in order to create focused interventions that will aid in attempts to improve schools.

In general, it is critical to fully comprehend the opportunities and problems influencing the instructional leadership practises of the principal at the rural Sandakan, Sabah school. By examining this issue in greater detail, it is anticipated that this research will enhance our understanding of the stakeholders in education, aid in the development of sensible policies and initiatives, and significantly raise the standard of instruction in the region.

To answer these questions, this research would like to conduct one survey on the level of instructional procedures of the principal and the level of commitment of teachers' work in secondary schools in the rural district of Sandakan. The researchers will also look at the extent of the influence of the practice level of the principal's instructional leadership functions on the level of work commitment of the teacher.

A deeper understanding of these dynamics will provide important insights for policymakers, education practitioners, and researchers in developing more effective strategies to improve the quality of education in rural schools in Malaysia.

1.2. Research Objective

The main objective of this study was to understand in depth about the instructional leadership practices carried out by principals in rural secondary schools in Sandakan district. Specifically, this study aims to:

1. To determine the level of practice of instructional leadership functions among principals in rural secondary schools in Sandakan district.
2. To determine the level of job commitments of teachers in rural secondary schools of Sandakan.
2. To identify the relation between principal's instructional leadership with the job commitments of teachers in rural secondary schools of Sandakan.

2. METHODOLOGY

This quantitative descriptive study was carried out to evaluate the instructional leadership practices of principals and the commitment levels of teachers at four rural secondary schools in the Sandakan district. The main goal was to investigate the correlation between the instructional leadership of principals and the commitment of teachers.

2.1. Participants

The study involved a total sample from four different rural secondary schools in the district of Sandakan. All participants were current school members, including principals and teachers, actively engaged in the educational processes at their respective schools.

2.2. Data Collection

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire, designed specifically for this study. The questionnaire comprised 21 items, focusing on various aspects of instructional leadership and teacher commitment. It was distributed in a paper format and required participants to rate various statements about their perceptions and experiences.

2.3. Instruments

The questionnaire utilized in this study included multiple sections designed to capture detailed insights into both the leadership practices of the principals and the commitment levels of the teachers. Responses were gathered on a Likert scale, ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree, allowing for a nuanced analysis of the data.

2.4. Data Analysis

After gathering the responses, the questionnaire data was coded and entered into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 29 for analysis. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies and mean scores, were computed to summarize the data. To investigate the connections between the principals' leadership practices and the commitment levels of teachers, Pearson's r correlation test was utilized. This test was used to determine the strength and direction of the relationship between these variables.

3. RESULT AND FINDINGS

Table 1 presents the data collection; female teacher respondents were 73.2% while male teachers were 26.8%. The age of the respondents was mostly 31- 45 years old followed by 41 – 60 years old, compared to teachers aged under 30 years old only 23.6%. This shows a lack of young teachers and more in senior teachers in the schools studied. Duration of service showed that teachers who served more than 10 years were 32.3% followed by 6-10 years 27.6%, 3-5 years 9.4% and less than 3 years 26%. This is in line with the age of respondents who are preceded by senior teachers followed by young teachers.

The period of service under the current principal shows that the most duration is 3-5 years by 63.8%. followed by 1-2 years by 25.2%. While the period of service under the current principal for 6-10 years is only 11%. This shows that the duration of a principal's service in a school is rarely more than 5 years and above.

Table 1. Respondent demographics.

Demographic	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1. Sex		
(a) Men	93	73.2
(b) Women	34	26.8
2. Age		
(a) Below 30	30	23.6
(b) 31 – 45 years old	56	44.1
(c) 41 – 60 years old	41	32.3
3. Duration of service as a teacher		
(a) Less than 3 years	33	26
(b) 3-5 years	6	9.4
(c) 6-10 years	35	27.6
(d) More than 10 years	41	32.3
4. Highest academic qualifications		
(a) Bachelor		
(b) Master	120	94.5
(c) PhD	7	5.5
5. Period of service under the current principal		
(a) 1-2 years	32	25.2
(b) 3 – 5 years	81	63.8
(c) 6 – 10 years	14	11.0
6. The school is on duty now		
(a) SMK Elopura	56	44.1
(b) SMK Libaran	21	16.5
(c) SMK Gum Gum	23	18.1
(d) SMK Segaliud	27	21.25

Data for the highest academic qualifications also shows that all teachers have a Bachelor's with 7 of the respondents having a Master's diploma. None of the teachers had PhDs of all respondents.

The breakdown of the number of respondents by school is based on 60% of the total population. The percentage of respondents for Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan/ National Secondary School (SMK) Elopura was 44.1%, SMK Libaran 16.5%, SMK Gum Gum 18.1% and SMK Segaliud 21.25%.

3.1. Principal's Instructional Leadership Practice Level

Table 2 presents 11 items were tested to determine the level of leadership practice of the instruction tips. The items show mean values ranging from 4.11 to 4.30. The question of the first study What is the level of practice of instructional leadership functions among principals in rural secondary schools in Sandakan district?

The question of this study was tested using Descriptive Analysis and through the determination of mean values. The table below shows the results of the analysis.

Table 2. Principal's instructional leadership practice.

No	Principal instructional leadership	Mean	Std. deviation
F1	Creating school goals	4.30	0.760
F2	Clarifying school goals	4.15	0.858
F3	Absorbing/Supervising and evaluating teacher teaching	4.17	0.880
F4	Coordinate the curriculum	4.26	0.740
F5	Monitor students' academic progress	4.21	0.711
F6	Control and protect teaching hours	4.21	0.814
F7	Provide support in teaching/Always visible activities	4.24	0.830
F8	Providing incentives for teachers' work	4.19	0.884
F9	Cultivating staff development	4.17	0.873
F10	Achieve and uphold academic standards	4.11	0.714
F11	Provide rewards for students	4.25	0.736
Total		4.21	0.81

Descriptive statistics offer a quantitative overview of the data in both situations, making it possible for interested parties to comprehend the traits and trends found in the variables of interest.

For analytical purposes, the maximum and minimum value ranges are divided to three as in Table 3:

Table 3. Min analysis level and interpretation scale used in outcome analysis questionnaire.

Score mean	Level of responds
1.00-2.33	Low
2.34-3.66	Medium
3.66- 5.00	High

Source: Mohd Majid (2004).

The overall mean value for this research is 4.21 with Standard Diviation of 0.810. According to Mohd Majid (2004) the mean value of 3.66 – 5.00 indicates a high value. Thus, the findings found that the principal's instructional leadership practices for the schools studied were high level.

Item F1 *Creating school goals* shows the highest level (mean = 4.30, SD = 760). This is followed by item of F4 which is *Coordinate the curriculum* (Mean = 4.26, SD = 0.740) and F11 *Provide rewards for students* (Mean = 4.25, SD= 0.736). This principal of the school under study is creationg school goals, known for organizing the curriculum and recognizing students who perform well on academic evaluations.

Meanwhile, item F10 *Achieve and uphold academic standards* shows the lowest level (mean = 4.11, SD = 714). This is followed by F2 *Clarifying school goals* (Mean = 4.15, SD = 0.858). Next shows the third lowest mean is 2 items which is F3 *Absorbing/supervising and evaluating teacher teaching* dan F9 *Cultivating staff development* with mean of 4.17.

There are two items where 6 teachers choose score *Occasionally* which is *Provide support in teaching/always visible activities* and *Control and protect teaching hours*.

These findings show that the level of instructional leadership practices is high but there is room for improvement that principals can make to further invigorate their level of instructional leadership practices.

3.2. Level of Teacher Job Commitment

Table 4 presents 10 items have been tested to determine the level of commitment of the teacher's work. The items show mean values between 4.34 to 4.56. The question of the second study is What is the level of job commitment of teachers in rural secondary school of Sandakan?

The question of this study was tested using Descriptive Analysis and through the determination of mean values. The table below shows the results of the analysis.

Table 4. Teacher job commitment.

No	Teacher job commitment	Mean	Std. deviation
F1	I talk up this career to my friends as a great career to work in."	4.50	0.802
F2	I am willing to put in great deal of effort beyond that normally expected in order to be successful in this career.	4.35	0.780
F3	What I am doing now is helping develop competence in the career I am interested in.	4.53	0.701
F4	I would accept almost any type of job assignment in order to keep working this career.	4.56	0.798
F5	I have good chance to use important skills and abilities of mine in this career.	4.51	0.802
F6	I am proud to tell others I am working this career.	4.50	0.802
F7	For me this is the best of all possible careers in which to work	4.35	0.780
F8	My present occupational situation leads in the career direction that I want.	4.52	0.802
F9	This career really inspires the very best in me in the way job performance.	4.39	0.791
F10	I find that my values and those associated with my career are very similar.	4.34	0.807
Total		4.46	0.797

Source: Mohd Majid (2004).

According to Mohd Majid (2004) the mean value of 3.66 – 5.00 indicates a high value. The mean value is 4.46. Thus, the findings of the study found that the commitment of teachers to the schools studied was high.

Item F4 I would accept almost any type of job assignment in order to keep working this career shows the highest mean score for this section (mean = 4.56, SD=0.798). This is followed by oleh F3 What I am doing now is helping develop competence in the career I am interested (Mean 4.53, SD = 0.701). Next is item F8 My present occupational situation leads in the career direction that I want shows the third highest score (Mean = 4.52, SD = 0.802).

While item I find that my values and those associated with mt career are very similar anyway. indicates the lowest level (mean of 4.34, SD = 0.807). Followed by item F7 For me this is the best of all possible careers in which to work and F2 I am willing to put in great deal of effort beyond that normally expected in order to be successful in this career each with Mean 4.35.

The findings of this study show that teachers have a high work commitment. However, there is still room for improvement to be made in the future to ensure that teachers practice a high and comprehensive work commitment.

3.3. The Relationship between Principal's Instructional Leadership Practices and Teacher's Work Commitment

The Pearson r correlation test is used to test the correlation between principal leadership practices and teacher work commitments as on third research question which is *What is the relation between the principal's instructional leadership with the job commitments of teachers in rural secondary schools of Sandakan?*

Nevertheless, in this study, Correlation Pearson r is used to see the association or relationship between the level of leadership practice of the principal and the level of teachers work commitment. This test measures the association that shows the strength as well as the direction of the association between the two variables on the scale (-1) to (+1). Table 5 shows that the type of association studied in this research is among the dependent variables i.e., the level of commitment of the teacher's work with the non-dependent variable i.e. the level of leadership practice of the principal.

Table 5. Shows the level of correlation strength between variables.

Correlation	Description
0.00-0.20	Relationships at very low levels and negligible
0.20-0.40	Relationships at low level
0.41-0.60	Relationships at moderate stage
0.61-0.80	Relationships at a high level
0.80-1.00	Relationship at very high level

Source: Alias (1997).

The following is a Table 6 of correlations between the two variables which are the practice of instructional leadership and the commitment of the teacher's work.

Table 6. Correlation between instructional leadership among principal and teacher job commitment.

		Instructional leadership among principal	Teachers job commitment
Instructional leadership among principal	Pearson correlation	1	0.431**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		<0.001
	N	127	127
Teachers job commitment	Pearson correlation	0.331**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<0.001	
	N	127	127

Note: **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The correlation value is at 0.331. According to Alias (1997) the correlation value of 0.20 – 0.40 is to explain that there is a relationship at the low level. Therefore, the level of instructional principal leadership practice is low in relation to the teacher's work commitment.

Overall, the findings found that principals in rural schools of Sandakan practice high instructional leadership. In addition, the commitment of teachers' job in rural schools of Sandakan shows a high level of commitment.

However, it was found that the correlation between the principal's instructional leadership practices and the teacher's work commitments was connected at a low level.

4. DISCUSSION

4.1. Instructional Leadership Practice Level of the Principal of Rural Area in Sandakan

Numerous studies have indicated that a school's leadership has a significant impact on its success and accomplishments. The mean score for the 11 elements and leadership roles examined in this study varied from 4.11 to 4.30, with a total mean of 4.21. These results demonstrate the high level in practices of instructional leadership by the principals of Sandakan's rural school district. The same study was conducted in other rural districts in Beluran Sabah by Poobalan and Mohd Izham (2021) in Beluran Sabah. Their findings also found that the level of

instructional leadership practices of principals in rural secondary schools they surveyed was high. This indicates a notable level of efficacy in directing and assisting the teaching and learning processes inside their individual institutions.

The findings of this study where the principal practiced high level of instructional leadership are equivalent to studies conducted in Sabah for primary schools. Based on research by Sultan, Karuppannan, and Rumpod (2022) where the study wanted to determine the level of leadership practice instructional headmaster in primary school in Sabah found that the level of instructional headmaster leadership practices in Sabah was at a high level.

Research that tested the level of instructional leadership in full government aid schools in the state of Sabah was conducted in 2021 by Duman, Taat, and Abdullah (2021). Their findings found that the level of instructional leadership practices of male and female principals in 200 government-assisted secondary schools in the state of Sabah is also at a high level. The results of this study, which examines the rural areas in the Sandakan district of Sabah, are consistent with the findings of the study conducted for the state of Sabah.

Meanwhile in peninsular of Malaysia, according to a 2017 study by Ismail and Nor (2017) the level of instructional leadership practices among principals, principals in Pendang, Kedah's rural district also exhibit high levels of instructional leadership practices.

In addition, the same study assessing the level of instructional leadership of the principal was also conducted in urban areas. The results of a study conducted by Zaliza and Mohd Izham (2018) in the Seremban district of the state capital of Negeri Sembilan found that the level of instructional leadership practices of the school principal was also high.

To sum up, the findings of this investigation align with numerous other findings. This demonstrates that principals who reported high levels of instructional leadership practices in Sandakan's rural areas did not decline to the same level as principals in other places.

4.2. Teacher Commitment Level in Rural Area of Sandakan

With a mean score of 4.46, this research findings indicate that teachers in Sandakan district's rural schools have a high level of job commitment. The high level of job commitment of this study is consistent with the research finding in rural schools in Ranau, Sabah, which the research was carried out by Gunasegaran and Jalani (2021).

Teacher's work commitment is very important because it is in relation to the satisfaction of the teacher's work. The findings of a study by Mohamad, Kasim, Zakaria, and Mohd Nasir (2017) conducted on secondary school teachers in Kota Bharu showed that the level of commitment and job satisfaction of teachers is at a high level. Pearson's correlation test also showed there was a significant positive relationship between teacher job commitment and teacher job satisfaction.

Teachers' commitment to their profession is a major consideration for determining the spelling used in the school. This is because it will have an impact on how well pupils perform and achieve academically. Billy and Taat (2020) found that teacher commitment and school culture had a beneficial impact on students' academic achievement, which lends credence to this.

The findings of the study by Munian and Hasan (2020) conducted on primary school teachers in Kulim district, Kedah also showed the same results that the level of commitment of teachers' work is at a high level. The same findings was also obtained by Subramaniam (2022) who conducted a study determining the level of job commitment among teachers in school in Kinta, Perak with the result of teachers' commitment was at a high level.

4.3. The relationship between the Principal's Instructional Leadership Practice Level and the Teacher's Commitment Level in the Rural Area of Sandakan

The results of this study found that the mean level of high score was demonstrated by both variable which is the principal's instructional leadership practice and the teacher's work commitment.

According to Yalçın and Çoban (2023) instructional leadership critically influences school performance by shaping academic achievement pathways at the school level. Furthermore, Rodrigues and Lima (2024) emphasize that school leaders' perspectives reveal a direct correlation between instructional leadership practices and student achievement enhancements (Rodrigues & Lima, 2024).

Additionally, research by Lamçja (2022) highlights that leadership quality affects the quality of teaching and the ability to retain skilled teachers, which are crucial for sustaining high academic outcomes post-pandemic. Khan et al. (2020) also found that principals' instructional leadership indirectly boosts students' academic performance by fostering organizational commitment among teachers, which then translates into better student outcomes.

Nevertheless, in the Pearson r test, the level of instructional principal leadership practice is moderate in relation to the teacher's work commitment in which the correlation value is at 0.331. According to Alias (1997) the correlation value of is to explain that the relationship at low level. This study's findings nearly match those of a study carried out in Subis, Sarawak by Anita and Mohamed (2017) who found that instructional leadership practices had a weak but statistically significant positive relationship with teacher job commitments.

Research conducted by Ail, Bin Taib, bt Jaafar, and bin Omar (2015) used quantitative methods to examine the relationship between the instructional leadership of principals and teacher commitment at three Mara Junior Science Colleges (MJSCs) in Pahang. The findings indicated a strong and significant correlation between instructional leadership and teacher commitment in these schools. The results differed somewhat from those in public schools, highlighting the importance of enhancing principal leadership in public education settings. Improving leadership could increase teacher commitment and job satisfaction, which in turn could positively impact the overall performance of both schools and students.

5. CONCLUSION

This study effectively underscored the adeptness of instructional leadership among school principals in the rural regions of Sandakan, while also shedding light on the significant commitment levels of teachers in these settings. However, the research identified a modest correlation between the instructional leadership practices of principals and the commitment levels of teachers.

The findings emphasize the critical role of robust instructional leadership in fostering a school environment conducive to professional growth, positive interpersonal relations, and constructive school culture. These results suggest that enhancing instructional leadership and boosting teacher commitment are essential strategies for elevating educational outcomes and solidifying the school's reputation as a competitive academic institution. This research offers valuable insights into the dynamics of educational leadership and teacher engagement in rural schools, with implications for policy and practice aimed at school improvement.

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