

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TEACHERS' PERCEPTION TOWARD PRINCIPAL'S LEADERSHIP BEHAVIOR AND SCHOOL CLIMATE AMONG NUSERY & KINDERGARTEN SECTIONS IN AN INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL OF THAILAND

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Abstract: This study was conducted mainly to determine if there was significant relationship between teachers' perception towards principal's leadership behavior and school climate among Nursery & Kindergarten sections in an International school of Thailand in academic year 2016 – 2017. Questionnaires composed of Leader Behavior Description and the Organization Climate Description items were given to 53 of full-time teachers in this study. The study found that teachers in Nursery & Kindergarten sections were perceived their principal as task behavior leader, and the school climate were positive. Moreover, there was a significant relationship between teachers' perception towards principal's leadership behavior and school climate among Nursery & Kindergarten sections in an International school of Thailand.

Keywords: Perception, Principal's Leadership, School Climate, Nursery & Kindergarten Sections.

Introduction

As Wisconsin Council on Children & families (2007) report that 85% of brain development occurs before the age of six. Research has proven that early education can virtually eliminate education disparities related to income, raise graduation rates and increase wages. Thus, more and more parents are willing to put their children in a formal school to get a better early childhood education.

Similarly, Shonkoff (2000) presented that from pregnancy until early childhood, all of the environments or places in which children live and learn. All have a significant impact on their cognitive, emotional and social development. Surely, parents always want to choose a nice and good school for their children to learn. Therefore, how to be an attractive school for parents to enroll it. The schools should not only have a nice facility and environment, also it needs to have a good leader who is able to be the soul and guide for school.

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Since educational researcher have identified that principal's leadership is possibly the essential element of an effective learning environment (Kelley, Thornton, & Daughtery, 2005) and is defined as the ability of a principal to initiate school improvement, to create a positive school climate, and to stimulate and supervise teachers in such a way that the latter may execute their tasks as effectively as possible (Van de Grift, W & Houtveen, A. A. M, 1999). As we can see that the principal is the mental model for a school, he /she should have the ability to develop the school's capacity and acts as leadership partner, team builder, colleague, also facilitator by empowering teachers to lead and participate; facilitating teachers in discussion and decision-making situation; supporting teacher ideas and decisions; and supporting teacher innovation, creativity, efficacy, growth, and productivity (Martin, 1990). Such leadership is determined by the followers, not the leader. Actually, when teachers, staffs are happy for the school, they will collaborate together, and then the school will have a positive and open organization climate. And when school gets a positive climate, the students' achievement will be more effective.

In order to improve student achievement or making students' future life success, the principal have to hold accountable for affirm that all students are proficient on state-mandated assessments. If he or she fail to do it, then he or she face problem that will impact the school reputation and a winning outcome will not be achieved, particularly no parents will put their children in this school.

According to International School Association of Thailand (ISAT), there were approximately 100 –110 school members in this association by the year of 2015. But there has been no recent study carried out on the relation between the principal's leadership behavior and school climate in Thailand. The principal's impact on school climate was the most direct way for them to impact student academic success. Therefore, how then principal influences the school climate, through the focus on instruction, collaboration, and parental involvement is worth further investigation.

Research Objectives:

There were three research objectives:

1. To identify the teachers' perception of principal's leadership behavior among Nursery & Kindergarten sections in an International School of Thailand.
2. To identify the teachers' perception of school climate among Nursery & Kindergarten sections in an International School of Thailand.
3. To determine if there is a significant relationship between teachers' perceptions towards Principal's leadership behavior and school climate among Nursery & Kindergarten sections in an International School of Thailand.

Literature Review

General, "leadership as act that initiates a structure in interaction as part of the process of solving a mutual problem", according to Hemphill (1967, P.98). Lipham (1974) defined that leadership was the initiation of a new structure or procedure for accomplishing an organization's goals and objective. Basically, leadership is an influential relationship between the superiors and the subordinates in which the

former is helping the latter to perform their duties well to attain the definitive goals of organization (Bennis and Nanus, 1985; Burns, 1978) Leadership greatly involves positive influence on the subordinates and is not coercion that the leader makes effort to alter the attitudes and actions of the subordinates directed to the specific goals. (McLagan, P. & Nel, C. 2002)

As the research shows that people gone from the supposition that leaders are born through to the possibility. And leader potential can be measured via psychometrics measurements, also the *research point that anyone can be made a leader (Behavior Theories) by teaching them the most appropriate behavior response* for any given situation, and then behavior will be included task and relationship behaviors. The Ohio State studies (1964) help explain the relationship between the leader and follower.

The Ohio State Studies

In the Ohio State Leadership Studies, initiated by the Bureau of Business Research at the University in 1945, Leadership was analyzed from a two-dimensional model which is initiating structure (Task Oriented Behavioral) and consideration (People Oriented Behavioral). The Ohio State Leadership Studies, using the Leader Behavior Description Questionnaire (LBDQ), isolated two elements of leader behavior with this measure initiating structure (Task Oriented Behavioral) and consideration (People Oriented Behavioral). Initiating structure (Task Oriented Behavioral) by the leader is considered task –production centeredness on the part of the leader. For the element of consideration (People Oriented Behavioral), the leader’s behavior symbolized friendship, trust, warmth, interest, and respect between the leader and individuals in the work group.

Halpin and Croft’s (1963) School Climate Theory

Halpin and Croft (1963) described organizational climate as the “personality” of the school and conceptualized it along a continuum from open to close. They presented eight dimensions of the school climate such as disengages, hindrance, esprit and intimacy as reflected in the behavior of teacher and aloofness, production emphasis, thrust and consideration as reflected in the behavior of the principals. Disengages – refers to the teachers’ involvement towards any activity to achieve the school objectives; Hindrance – refers to the obstacles that the teacher encounters in daily life of teaching; Esprit – refers to the morale, spirit and liveliness characteristic that group of teacher has it; Intimacy - refers to the teacher socialized regularly with their colleague both in and out of the school; Aloofness –refers to psychological and physical distance of a principal from the teachers; Production emphasis – refers to leadership behavior of the principal that is characterized by degree of aim teachers to accomplish the work; Thrust – refers to the involvements for the active, energetic, role- modeling aspect from the principal’s behavior; Consideration – refers to the principal’s attitude for treating their staff members.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study was in the Figure 1. It showed the hypothesized relationship between the two variables. The primary variable was

principal's leadership behavior which was composed by task behavior and relationship behavior. And the other variable was school climate which including disengages, hindrance, spirit, intimacy aloofness, production emphasis, thrust and consideration.

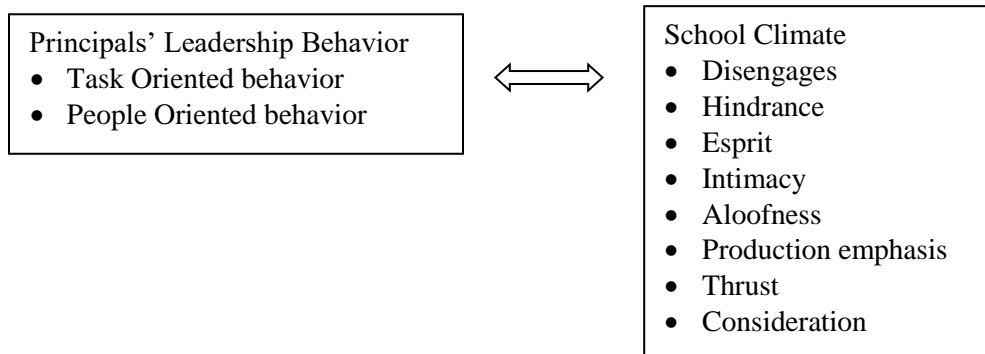


Figure1: Conceptual Framework of This Study

Research Instrument

The research instrument was a three-part questionnaire for this study. The researcher uses the same instrument from the previous study by Ming-Tung Chen (1990). The first part of the questionnaire was surveyed the demographic factors of the respondents: position, Gender, age, total years of teaching experience, total years at the present school, and educational level. And second part of the questionnaire aimed at the teachers' perception of the behavior of their principal. This principal's leadership behavior description questionnaire part was based on the leadership Behavior Analysis (LBA), an instrument developed by Blanchard, Hambleton, Zigarmi, and Forsyth (1981) which consisted of twenty items. The last part of the questionnaire measured the teachers' perception towards their school climate. This school climate questionnaire part was based on the Organization Climate Description Questionnaire (OCDQ), an instrument developed by Halpin and Croft (1963). The third part of the questionnaire consisted of 48 items measuring eight dimensions of behavior occurring within a school.

Population

The population of this study was the total number of the full-time teachers who are teaching at Nursery & kindergarten sections in an International School of Thailand. Thus, 60 teachers teaching in Nursery & kindergarten sections in an International School of Thailand, were used as the target group of this study.

Findings/Results

Demographic Information

With 53 respondents, there was more female teacher than male teacher in Nursery & Kindergarten sections in an International School of Thailand. And most teachers were between age group of 30 – 39 years. Most teachers had 3- 5 years of teaching

experience. Also, the majority of teachers were having 3- 5 years of teaching experience at their school. Bachelor's Degree holders were more than Master Degree holder in Nursery & Kindergarten sections in an International School of Thailand.

Research Objective One

This objective was to identify the teacher teachers' perception of principal's leadership behavior among Nursery & Kindergarten sections in an International School of Thailand. In order to analyze the teachers' perception, descriptive statistics were utilized to calculate the mean and stand deviation of each questionnaire of principal's leadership behavior.

Table 1: Means and Standard Deviations for Teachers' Perception on the Principal's Leadership Behavior (N=53)

	Mean	S.D.	Interpretation
People Oriented Behavior	3.34	.48	Neutral
Task Oriented Behavior	3.62	.46	High
Total	3.48	.40	Neutral

Referring to Table 1, the overall mean score of the teachers' perception of principal's leadership behavior was 3.48. It was in the range of 2.51 – 3.50. According to the interpretation criteria, the teachers' perception of principal's leadership behavior were considered as "Neutral", whereas most teachers from Nursery & Kindergarten sections in an International School of Thailand perceived their principal as Task Oriented Behavior by the mean score of 3.62 higher than the People Oriented Behavior of mean score for 3.34. Therefore, It was considered that teachers perceived their principal's leadership behaviors as Initiating Structure (Task Oriented Behavior Leaders) regarding to the higher mean score.

Research Objective Two

This objective was to identify the teacher teachers' perception of school climate among Nursery & Kindergarten sections in an International School of Thailand. In this study, descriptive statistics were used to compute the mean and standard deviation for each item of the questionnaire to analyze the teachers' precipitations on the school's climate.

Table 2 showed that the mean and standard deviation for the teachers' perception of school climate among Nursery & Kindergarten sections in an International School of Thailand. The perception of school climate was the sum total of each of eight dimensions. The mean of Aloofness dimension was the lowest among the eight dimension of school climate at the school. And the mean of Thrust dimension was the highest among the eight dimension of school climate for the Nursery & Kindergarten sections in an International School of Thailand. However, the total mean for the teachers' perception of school climate was 3.62 in the range of 3.51 – 4.50. This implied that Nursery & Kindergarten sections teacher viewed their school climate as positive.

Table 2: Means Standard Deviations for Teachers' Perception of School Climate (N=53)

	Mean	S.D.	Interpretation
Esprit	3.55	.54	Positive
Disengages	3.27	.63	Neutral
Hindrance	3.40	.68	Neutral
Intimacy	3.18	.48	Neutral
Aloofness	3.17	.72	Neutral
Consideration	3.48	.51	Neutral
Production Emphasis	3.58	.48	Positive
Thrust	3.62	.52	Positive
Total	3.62	.46	Positive

Research Objective Three

This objective was to determine if there is a significant relationship between teachers' perceptions towards Principal's leadership behavior and school climate among Nursery & Kindergarten sections in an International School of Thailand.

The data was analyzed by a statistical software program, and the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (r) was utilized to ascertain the relationship between the teachers' perception on the principal's leadership behavior and the school climate. Therefore, the researcher proceeded with the analysis of the data and the result was displayed in Table 3.

Table 3: Pearson Correlation between the Principal's Leadership Behavior and School Climate (N= 53)

	Mean	S.D.	Pearson Correlation	Sig.
Principal's Leadership behavior	3.48	.40	.636**	.000
School Climate	3.62	.46		

The results showed that $r = .636$ and is smaller than .05 significant level. It indicated that there was a positive relationship between teachers' perception of Principal's Leadership Behavior and school climate, this relationship was at the level of moderate ($r = .636$). Therefore, the research hypothesis was accepted that there was a significant relationship between the teachers' perceptions towards principal's leadership behavior and school climate among Nursery & Kindergarten sections in an International School of Thailand.

Discussion*1. Perception on Principal's Leadership Behavior*

This study found that the teachers' perception of principal's leadership behavior among Nursery & Kindergarten sections in an International School of Thailand was "neutral." The mean of the initiating structure dimension of leadership behavior was higher than the Consideration dimension of leadership behavior.

As mentioned in Ohio leadership studies, consideration is the degree to which a leader shows concern and respect for followers, looks out for their welfare, and expresses the relation between leadership and outcome variables – Follower personality as a moderator 5 appreciation and support (Bass, 1990). Initiating structure is the degree to which a leader defines and organizes his role and the roles of followers, is oriented toward goal attainment through planning, and establishes well-defined patterns and channels of communication, and methods of procedure. (Fleishman, 1973). Hence, initiating structure is a task – oriented leadership style, focusing primarily at the efficient use of resource and a high reliability of operations and outcomes (Yukl, G. 2002; Derue, D. S., Nahrgang, J. D., Wellman, N. & Humphrey, S. E. 2011).

In other words, the initiating structure of leadership behavior of the leader could create a high achievement work, accepted the new ideas and strives to fulfill the purpose of the organization, which would make school to improves its education quality and corrects its mistake as soon as it can, meanwhile, the school could become bigger and better. Based on the findings of research question one, the researcher believed initiating structure (Task Oriented Behavior) leader is one of the most necessary and important leadership behaviors in principal leadership.

2. Perception on School Climate

The research concluded that the teachers' perception on school climate were positive. Positive school climate is vital for student learning and academic achieving, also it will affect to the increased student graduation rates and teacher retention. (Emily Buchana, 2013). Lee, Bryk and Smith, J. (1993) indicated that the organizational effectiveness t influenced teachers and administrators were associated with positive outcomes. The school environment is considered a main factor in the school's influence on student performance (Miron & Nelson, 2002; Hox by& Rock off, 2005) and effect parents to make decision to enroll their children in the school (Rinehart & Lee, 1991; Bulkley& Fisler, 2002; Kayes& Maranto, 2006). Also, Scherz (2004) found the school climate could plays a critical role in social and emotional well- being of students and highly contributes to the overall health of a school. Meanwhile, Hoyle, English, F. and Steffy, B (1985) stated that school climate was one of the most important components for a successful instructional program.

Therefore, building a positive school climate will not only work to improve student outcomes, but will promote higher moral, staff performance, and the entire healthy environment. In agreement with the above studies, the current study found that teachers' perception on school climate among Nursery & Kindergarten sections in an international of Thailand were positive.

3. Relationship between Principal's Leadership Behavior and School Climate

In this study, the researcher attempted to determine the relationship between teachers' perception on the principal's leadership behavior and school climate. The research hypothesis showed that the significance of the relationship between the principal's leadership behavior and school climate was Sig.000, which is less than .05. Therefore; the research hypothesis was that there was a moderate positive significant relationship between teachers' perception towards principal's leadership behavior and school climate among Nursery & Kindergarten sections in an International school of Thailand.

Previous research done by Kelly, Thornton, and Daugherty (2005) also found that education leadership is possibly the most important, single determinant of an effective learning environment. And the principal is the greatest single influence in defining and setting the climate for the school (Stringer, 2002). Elbot and Fulton (2008) also describe principal as the catalysts for helping members of the school community think and act in more integrated ways.

A previous research done by Ali & Hale (2009) was showed the result that a high trust in a principal positively influences the organizational school climate. Moreover, all employees direct their energy to the achievement and accomplishment of the organizational goals. And both the students and the teachers enjoy the processes of learning and teaching respectively. On the other hand, when principals are less enthusiastic about their work, the school climate is negatively affected and the performance of both students and the teacher is debilitated, so effectiveness of an organization and the organizational school climate perceptions of teacher are directly affected by the principal's leadership behavior.

Another expected result of the study was that a significant relationship between the organizational culture and administrators' leadership style. This finding directly comes from Kempka's study (2011). He had conducting the related study at St. Gabriel's Foundation school and have a clear picture of their organizational culture and administrators' leadership style. And these studies indicated that principals possess the power, authority and position to impact a school's climate. Hence, in the researcher's study, there was also a significant relationship between the principal's leadership behavior and school climate among Nursery & Kindergarten sections in an International school of Thailand. Although there were gapped yeas in doing the research on almost the same topic, the teachers' perception on the principal's leadership behavior and school climate were not so different.

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