

Teachers' perception of principal instructional leadership practices in five accredited kindergartens run by DMI sisters in Vietnam

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Abstract

This study investigated teachers' perceptions of principals' instructional leadership in five accredited kindergartens of the Daughters of Mary Immaculate Congregation (DMI) in Vietnam. Specifically, it aimed to assess the perceived effectiveness of principals' instructional leadership practices and examine whether these perceptions varied according to teachers' years of teaching experience. A quantitative research design was employed, utilizing a survey method for data collection. The study used the Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale (PIMRS) – Teacher Short Form, with responses from 129 out of 151 teachers across the selected kindergartens. Descriptive statistics and multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) were conducted to analyze the data. The findings revealed that teachers generally perceived their principals as active and effective instructional leaders, with all ten leadership functions rated as either very good or outstanding. The highest mean scores were associated with the dimension of defining the school's mission, particularly in the areas of framing and communicating school goals, emphasizing the significance of vision-setting in effective leadership. In the dimension of managing the instructional program, practices related to supervising instruction and coordinating curriculum were rated moderately high, while monitoring student progress received comparatively lower ratings, indicating a need to strengthen data-informed leadership. Within the dimension of promoting a positive school climate, professional development received strong positive ratings, whereas protecting instructional time and providing incentives for learning were rated lower, indicating specific areas for improvement. Furthermore, the MANOVA results indicated no statistically significant differences in teachers' perceptions of principal instructional leadership across different levels of teaching experience.

Keywords: instructional leadership, principal, teachers' perceptions, kindergarten schools, Vietnam

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

All educational institutions are established with two primary purposes: teaching and learning, and fostering teaching and learning (Stronge & Xu, 2021). Additionally, the principal played a crucial role in fulfilling these purposes by ensuring the connection among the schools' vision, mission, and strategic plan (Ash & Hodge, 2016; Mombourquette, 2017) and in improving the school effectiveness and student achievement (Mulyani et al., 2020; Stronge & Associates, 2018). Moreover, school principals were seen as the most essential people in the school and had the most substantial impact on student achievement (Grissom et al., 2021). Significantly, the findings of Liebowitz and Porter's study (2019) emphasized the significance of principals' instructional leadership practices in schools, indicating the direct evidence of the relationships between principals' instructional leadership behavior and student attainment, teachers' well-being and instructional practices, and schools' health. Therefore, Liebowitz and Porter assumed that the effort and behavior of principals in instructional leadership were potential instruments to promote student achievement.

Moreover, instructional leadership has been stressed as one of the crucial factors influencing school improvement at the start of the 21st century (Hallinger, 2015; Stronge & Xu, 2021). Many researchers demonstrated that instructional leadership had the potential to foster student outcomes to reach the highest level (Hallinger et al., 2015; Leithwood et al., 2020) through creating a strong instructional atmosphere and enhancing teachers' motivations (Zheng et al., 2017). Additionally, in the 21st century, there was a great and increasing attention to principals' instructional leadership (Pan et al., 2015), because it had the most powerful influence on student learning outcomes among all leadership styles (Hallinger, 2015). Thus, principal instructional leadership is significant in promoting student achievement. Given the significance of instructional leadership to student achievement as discussed above, school principals should prioritize their instructional leadership role to accelerate education quality and student outcomes (Hallinger, 2015; Stronge & Xu, 2021). However, school principals usually focus more on administrative roles rather than paying attention to their role in instructional leadership, which significantly impacts school development and student achievement (Mackey, 2016).

In the context of Vietnam, since the comprehensive reform introduced in 1986, which focused on meeting the workforce's needs in the Vietnam economy that was shifting quickly, education was the top priority of this reform. Specifically, there were essential modifications relating to the education system, quality, finance, and legal aspects in the educational field in Vietnam during this time (Le et al., 2022). However, the issue of education quality and student outcomes remained (MOET, 2013; 2017). Since 2013, the Ministry of Education and Training has introduced the radical and comprehensive renovation of education in Vietnam. This renovation also emphasized the development of education quality, school effectiveness, and holistic development for learners (MOET, 2013). Therefore, education quality and school effectiveness are still significant issues taken into consideration by the Ministry of Education and Training of Vietnam. To continue practicing the radical and comprehensive renovation to foster the development of education quality, the Ministry of Education and Training of Vietnam recently issued a document named "Education Development Strategies of Vietnam in the period of 2021 - 2030 with a vision to 2045". This document presents the guidelines and direction of the Ministry of Education and Training to all educational institutions to have the same focus on the development of education quality. This document also emphasizes the importance of leadership and management renovations in the school to promote effectiveness and quality education (MOET, 2021). For the preschool level, the effective practice of the new curriculum, which was a theme-based curriculum introduced in 2002 (Vu, 2021), and the application of

new teaching methods and content, which focused on the student-centered approach, have been expected to promote the quality of education and student achievement (MOET, 2020). Moreover, the Ministry of Education and Training introduced a new scheme that continues promoting the application of the student-centered approach for the preschool level in the period of 2021 - 2025. This scheme encourages all preschool leaders to create schools where students are at the center of all school activities (MOET, 2020). Therefore, the education reforms, renovations, directions, and vision of Vietnam revealed that education quality and student achievement are still a fundamental focus at all levels of the education sector of Vietnam. In addition, the role of principals in Vietnam's schools places much more emphasis on administrative tasks, and their instructional leadership role has not been described clearly, systematically, and consistently yet (Hallinger & Truong, 2014, as cited in Hallinger et al., 2017).

DMI kindergarten schools are a private education system run by the sisters of the Congregation of the Daughters of Mary Immaculate (DMI). The DMI schools' mission is to provide a high-quality education embedded with the DMI core values to bring a thriving life to students and a favorable environment to school members to continue improving their careers and lives. There are 12 DMI kindergartens located in three different areas in Vietnam. All principals of these schools are DMI sisters. DMI principals and school leaders have been trying a lot to improve the DMI education system. As a result, five among 12 DMI schools have achieved the National Standard of Education issued by the Ministry of Education and Training of Vietnam. However, the education quality and student outcomes are taken into consideration in the DMI schools. The emphasis on examination, achievement, and degree of Vietnamese education (MOET, 2014) still strongly affects the education quality in the DMI schools. Thus, to improve the education quality, DMI teachers need to be supported and equipped with the necessary resources, competencies, and environments to make them more confident in teaching to bring expected outcomes. DMI principals are considered the most significant people to take care of this responsibility. Therefore, following the most effective model of educational leadership, which is instructional leadership, the researcher wants to discover how DMI principals are practicing their instructional leadership roles based on teachers' perspectives in the five accredited DMI kindergartens to improve education quality.

Besides the gap in education quality and student outcomes, the lack of evidence in the empirical literature regarding this topic is also considered in this study. McDermott (2018) in his research indicated that only a few published studies investigated teachers' perceptions of their principals' instructional leadership practices. They also suggested that teachers' perception or feedback in shaping principals' instructional leadership practices has not been investigated thoroughly, and more studies on this topic are needed. Therefore, given the significance of principal instructional leadership on school improvement and student achievement, and to fill the gaps of empirical studies on teachers' perceptions of principal instructional leadership, this study aimed to investigate principal instructional leadership practices based on teachers' perceptions in DMI kindergarten schools. Specifically, this study attempted to identify the level of teachers' perceptions of principal instructional leadership practices, and whether these perceptions were affected by their years of teaching experience.

2. Literature Review

The primary purpose of this study was to identify teachers' perceptions of principals' instructional leadership practices. This section will review concepts and research studies connected to principals' instructional leadership, including definitions of instructional leadership, the instructional leadership model of Hallinger and Murphy (1985), the instructional leadership roles of principals, the impact of principals' instructional leadership, and principals' instructional leadership based on teachers' perspective.

2.1 Instructional Leadership: Definitions

In the literature, there are narrow and broad definitions of instructional leadership. The narrow definition of instructional leadership refers to practices, such as curriculum development, teacher supervision, learning

evaluation, and classroom observation, directly connected to teaching and learning (Marks & Printy, 2003). The broad definition of instructional leadership refers to all leadership practices such as hiring and staffing teachers, building school culture, supporting teachers, allocating budgets, and providing resources, which directly and indirectly influence student learning (Goldring & Greenfield, 2002). From the narrow perspective, the instructional leadership role of principals is crucial in promoting teaching and learning. Thus, instructional leadership was described as a series of principals' practices that affect the school teaching and learning process to improve student outcomes (Babb, 2012). In "New Thinking about Instructional Leadership", Horng and Loeb (2010) also indicated that in the traditional instructional leadership literature referring to the narrow view, teaching and learning are the most significant factors of school leadership; and principals, who give substantial consideration to instruction and curriculum, are essential and necessary for successful schools. Horng and Loeb also presented another perspective of instructional leadership that highlights the organization's management that supports instructional development, and this can be seen as the broad perspective. This perspective emphasizes the massive effect of principals as instructional leaders on student learning in many different ways: hiring qualified teachers, assigning teachers appropriately, creating opportunities for teacher improvement, providing proper and timely support to teachers, fostering collaboration, and maintaining positive working environments.

Recently, shared instructional leadership, which requires teachers to work and learn collaboratively and serve as school leaders to enhance instruction, is seen as a broad perspective of instructional leadership (Louis et al., 2010). Thus, the shared instructional leadership is significant for teachers and principals because it generates and fosters a collaborative, engaging, and empowering culture that can promote teaching and learning at higher quality levels (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015; Zahed-Babelan et al., 2019). This proposed study aligns with the broader view of understanding this construct.

2.2 Hallinger and Murphy's Instructional Leadership Models (1985)

According to Hallinger and Murphy, instructional leadership refers to principals' behaviors that aim to promote the teaching and learning development of the school. The authors proposed an instructional leadership model including three dimensions with ten functions that principals are encouraged to follow in doing their instructional leadership role. The first dimension is "*defining the school mission*" with two functions of principals, which are "framing school goals and communicating school goals" (p. 221). This dimension emphasizes the crucial role of principals in identifying and determining the primary purposes and objectives of the school. It also underscores the task of principals in communicating these goals to all stakeholders. Principals have to make sure that all school members clearly understand what they are going to achieve in the future. In doing so, they will put more effort into their work to achieve the school's common goals.

The second dimension is "*managing the instructional program*" (p. 221), in which principals have three functions as follows: "Supervising and evaluating instruction, coordinating curriculum, and monitoring student progress" (p. 221). This dimension demands principals to have a profound engagement in supporting, monitoring, supervising, and evaluating the teaching and learning of the schools. Thus, principals are expected to be proficient in teaching and learning, and be eager and committed to the school's advancement. The last dimension is "*promoting a positive learning climate*" (p. 221) created by five functions of principals: "Protecting instructional time, promoting professional development, maintaining high visibility, providing incentives for teachers, and providing incentives for students" (p. 221). This dimension has many purposes and requires principals to do many different tasks. Thus, to fulfill these tasks, the principals have to establish an academic press by developing superior expectations and criteria for teaching and learning (Hallinger, 2015).

Based on this model, Hallinger created the *Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale (PIMRS)*, and more than 250 worldwide studies have utilized this instrument (Hallinger & Wang, 2015; Muda et al., 2017). Thus, this instructional leadership model is also selected as an appropriate conceptual framework in the proposed study.

2.3 *The Roles of Principals as Instructional Leaders*

The roles or responsibilities of principals as instructional leaders are presented via the instructional leadership model mentioned above. As instructional leaders, principals are supposed to set a clear vision, mission, and goals for the school; communicate all of these to school members; supervise and monitor instruction, evaluate and support teaching and learning, provide resources and foster teacher professional development; creating and supporting a favorable school climate for learning to reach the school goals.

In addition, as Bush et al. (2019) and May and Supovitz (2011) highlighted the great need and significance of instructional leadership for school improvement, principals have to enable teachers to deliver quality instruction in order to enhance student learning and achievement. Many researchers also affirmed that instructional leadership practices are crucial instruments for principals to reach the school goals and purposes; especially in the recent time, the role of principals for learning has been focused (Bush & Glover, 2016; Hallinger et al., 2018; Jarvis, 2018; May & Supovitz, 2011). Moreover, as instructional leaders, the role of principals is to foster the school standard to reach higher levels because principals are considered instructional models that instructional personnel and teachers look up to for instructional leadership (Sanchez et al., 2020). Furthermore, Maponya (2020) found that in doing their instructional leadership, the principal played a fundamental role in improving student learning and creating a positive teaching and learning culture. Therefore, instructional leadership practices enable principals to lead to effective changes in teachers' instruction in the classroom, which can improve student learning. As instructional leaders, principals' central role is to give the highest priority to instructional quality and try to bring this vision to achievement.

2.4 *The Impact of Principals' Instructional Leadership*

The pivotal role of the principal leadership is to promote student performance (Tedla & Redda, 2021). Many studies have demonstrated that among all types of leadership, instructional leadership had the most powerful impact on student achievement (Hallinger, 2015), and principal instructional leadership has been considered the most significant leadership in the 21st century (Hallinger et al., 2015; Zheng et al., 2017).

Heck and Moriyama (2010) examined relationships among contexts, leadership, and instructional practices in elementary schools. This study indicated that instructional leadership practices in building school contexts and composition factors had direct and positive impact on the instruction quality of teachers and, in turn, affected student learning. Thus, the efforts and practices of principals in setting the school context indirectly influenced student outcomes. The study results of Louis et al. (2010), which aimed to investigate factors of instructional leadership that affect student outcomes, highlighted that the quality of classroom instruction and professional community were two additional factors that were receiving more attention in affecting student attainment. The research of Bendikson et al. (2012) in 102 secondary schools presented that principals' instructional leadership directly and indirectly affected the quality of instruction and student outcomes. The direct impact was seen when principals focused on the quality of teachers' practices, such as the quality of teachers' inquiry and learning, the curriculum quality, and teaching and appraisal. On the other hand, when principals focused on generating conditions for good instruction, such as school policies, routines, resourcing strategically, a safe and orderly environment, and administration resolutions supporting learning and teaching with high quality, they had indirect impacts on the school teaching and learning. Hallinger and Murphy (2013) also stressed that principals' instructional leadership behaviors in establishing a positive climate for learning, maintaining attention to instruction, fostering teacher professional learning communities, and leading instructional shifts had an indirect impact on student learning. Zheng et al. (2017) in their studies also assumed that through practices of creating a strong instructional atmosphere and fostering teachers' motivations, principal instructional leadership affected student achievements. Leithwood et al. (2020) revisited *Seven strong claims about successful school leadership* by considering each claim based on indications in empirical studies. This work also confirmed that principal instructional leadership behaviors in generating positive studying environments and conditions had indirect and the most powerful impact on improving teaching and learning. Lastly, Hou et al. (2019) studied "The impact of

instructional leadership on high school students' academic achievement in the Chinese context" with the participation of 26 schools. The authors concluded that the more principals focused on teaching and learning, the greater their influence on students' outcomes.

All studies mentioned above pointed out that principal instructional leadership practices in various factors have minimal direct impact and strong indirect impact on student learning. The study of Mora-Ruano et al. (2021) as entitled "Instructional leadership as a vehicle for teacher collaboration and student achievement," also supported these findings when they mentioned that principals' instructional leadership indirectly affected student attainment in empirical research. Moreover, they highlighted that teachers were the ultimate mediators of this indirect impact. Thus, teachers were the main factor that instructional leadership practices of principals could have indirect impact on student outcomes. Therefore, this proposed study tried to address principals' instructional leadership practices based on teachers' perception.

2.5 Principal Instructional Leadership based on Teachers' Perspectives

There are not many studies on principals' instructional leadership practices exhibited in the school based on teachers' perspective. The research of Bada et al. (2020) in Nigeria tried to identify principals' instructional leadership practices using the PIMRS of Hallinger and Murphy with the participation of 389 secondary school teachers. The results indicated that practices of principals in defining school mission were the most effective instructional leadership behaviors, and developing a positive school learning climate was rated lowest. Moreover, this study found that there is no difference in teachers' perceptions of principal instructional leadership regarding teachers' years of teaching experience. The principals' instructional leadership investigated by Yasser and Amal (2015) in Omani schools was also rated by teachers with the highest score on framing school mission and goals, but rated the lowest score on managing instructional programs. Additionally, the findings of both studies of Bada et al. in Nigeria and Yasser and Amal in Omani indicated that the principal instructional leadership was rated significantly differently by male and female teachers. In addition, teaching experience was another factor that influenced teachers' perspective on principals' instructional leadership, as indicated in the research results of Gumus and Akcaoglu (2013) in Turkish.

A quantitative study on this topic was conducted in Malaysia by Ghavifekr et al. (2019) using the PIMRS of Hallinger. The purpose of the study was to investigate principal instructional leadership roles and practices based on teachers' perspectives, with the participation of 105 teachers of elementary schools. This investigation showed that principals' instructional leadership practices on promoting a positive climate were rated at a low level, and defining the school's mission and managing instructional programs were rated at a moderate level by their teachers.

In Vietnam, Hao (2016) conducted a study on this topic with the participation of 569 public primary schools in the south. The investigation also utilized the PIMRS of Hallinger. The findings of this study indicated that framing the school goals and coordinating the curriculum were rated with higher scores, as a result of some studies above, and protecting instructional time and maintaining high visibility were rated with lower scores. Thus, based on teachers' perspective, principal instructional leadership practices were the most effective in framing the school goals and coordinating the curriculum, and less effective in protecting instructional time and maintaining high visibility. For the whole scale, principals were rated by teachers as active instructional leaders. This investigation also showed that teachers' perspectives of their principal instructional leadership differed in years of teaching experience, gender, and years working with their current principals.

From the studies above, principals' instructional leadership behaviors based on teachers' perspective varied depending on the contexts of each investigation, the school levels that principals and teachers were working in, teachers' age, gender, years working with current principals, and teaching experience. In the findings of some studies, framing the school goals was measured by teachers as the most effective practice of principals as instructional leaders. However, the less effective practices were very different in each study. Thus, the principals

can practice their instructional leadership role in many different ways; nevertheless, what practices that are exhibited in the school and that teachers can realize are more crucial. The proposed study also focused on this. Additionally, teachers' years of teaching experience influenced their perceptions of principal instructional leadership in studies of Hao (2016) and Gumus and Akcaoglu (2013), while they did not impact their perceptions in the study of Bada et al. (2020). Thus, this study also attempted to investigate whether teachers' perceptions of the principal instructional leadership differ regarding their years of teaching experience.

2.6 The statement of the problem

Given the significance of principal instructional leadership on school improvement and student achievement, and to add more evidence to the empirical studies on teacher perception of principal instructional leadership, this study aimed to investigate teachers' perceptions of principals' instructional leadership in the DMI kindergartens in Vietnam. Specifically, this study attempted to determine the state of DMI principals' instructional leadership practices based on teachers' perceptions and differences in their perceptions regarding their years of teaching experience. Specifically, this study addressed the following research questions:

Research questions

1. To what extent did DMI kindergarten teachers perceive their principal's instructional leadership?
2. Are there significant differences in teachers' perceptions of principals' instructional leadership regarding their years of teaching experience?

Hypothesis for the second research question:

Ho: There is no difference in teachers' perceptions of principal instructional leadership regarding teachers' years of teaching experience.

H1: There are differences in teachers' perceptions of principal instructional leadership regarding teachers' years of teaching experience.

2.7 Significance of the Study

While numerous studies on principals' instructional leadership have been conducted in Western contexts, there remains a lack of research in East Asia, including Vietnam (Hallinger, 2015). This study contributes to addressing that gap by providing empirical data from DMI kindergartens in Vietnam, thus enriching the international literature on instructional leadership in early childhood education and private sector schools. Previous research on this topic in Vietnam has been limited and primarily focused on public primary and secondary schools. Only four international studies were identified: Hao (2016), Hallinger et al. (2017), Nguyễn et al. (2018), and Huong (2020). None have investigated private kindergartens. Therefore, this study adds new insights by examining instructional leadership in a faith-based, private kindergarten context. Importantly, the findings offer practical value for the education sector, particularly DMI schools, by highlighting areas of strength and improvement in principal leadership practices. Insights drawn from teachers' perceptions can help principals refine their approaches to enhance school effectiveness and student learning outcomes.

3. Research Method

3.1 Research design

This study employed a quantitative research design to answer the research questions. Specifically, the descriptive statistics were used to measure teachers' perceptions of principal instructional leadership practices. Additionally, the multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was used to find the significant differences in

teachers' perceptions of principal instructional leadership regarding their years of teaching experience. Moreover, the data collection method of this study was a survey using the PIMRS questionnaire.

3.2 Participants

The study was intended to be conducted in the five accredited kindergartens run by DMI sisters and located in three different areas of Vietnam: two schools in Ho Chi Minh, the largest city in the south of Vietnam; two schools in Hue, a small city in the middle of Vietnam; and one school in a highland place in Vietnam. All the DMI principals were DMI sisters in the age range of 38 to 47 years old. The DMI principals have been working for two to fifteen years as principals. Moreover, 151 female teachers were working in these five DMI kindergartens. They have attained bachelor's degrees, college degrees, or teaching certificates in pre- and kindergarten education.

The distribution of the questionnaire forms to all teachers of the said DMI kindergartens was carried out through the Google Form website and their emails. Teachers, who were willing to participate in the investigation, answered the questionnaires. The questionnaire was sent to 151 teachers working in the five DMI kindergartens. However, 13 of them were newly recruited in the said schools for several months, so they were excluded from this study. The researcher received 129 responses. Thus, the total number of participants in the survey was 129. The Excel Software and JASP application were used to find descriptive statistics of teachers' demographic information. As shown in the table 1, the age of participants ranged from 21 to 58 ($M = 34$, $SD = 8.34$); their years of teaching experience ranged from 1 to 30 ($M = 10.88$, $SD = 7.15$); they have been teaching in DMI schools for 1 to 30 years ($M = 8.75$, $SD = 7.15$); and they have worked with their current principal for 1 to 10 years ($M = 3.43$, $SD = 2.08$).

Table 1
Demographic Information of Participants

Teachers (N=129)	Age	Years of teaching experience	Years of teaching in DMI schools	Years of working with the current principal
Mean	34	10.88	8.75	3.43
SD	8.43	7.15	7.15	2.08

The frequency distributions and percentages of the participants' demographic information (school location, educational attainment, and grade level of teaching) are presented in Table 2. As shown in the table 2, among the total of 129 respondents, 41.9% of the participants are working in two DMI kindergartens located in HCM City, 28,7% of the participants working in two DMI kindergartens located in Hue City, and 29,5% of the participants working in the DMI kindergarten in a highland place. In addition, the majority of the participants have attained university degrees (42.6%) and college degrees (36.4%) in pre- and kindergarten education, and only 21% of the participants have possessed teaching certificates in pre- and kindergarten education. Moreover, the percentage of participants teaching in the 5-6 years old grade level is highest (32.6%), following is the percentage of participants teaching in the 4-5 years old grade level (29.5%), 26.3% of the participants teaching in the 3-4 years old grade level, and the percentage of participants teaching in the 2-3 years old grade level is lowest (11.6%).

Table 2
Distributions of Participants by School Location, Educational Attainment, and Grade Level of Teaching

		Frequency	Percentage
School Location	HCM City	54	41.8
	Hue City	37	28.7
	A highland place	38	29.5
Educational Attainment	Teaching Certificate	27	21.0
	College Degree	47	36.4
	University Degree	55	42.6
Grade Level of Teaching (Kindergarten)	2-3 years old	15	11.6
	3-4 years old	34	26.3
	4-5 years old	38	29.5
	5-6 years old	42	32.6

3.3 Instrument

The Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale (PIMRS) - Teacher Short Form, created by Hallinger (2015), was utilized to find the state of principal instructional leadership practices. In addition, a sheet of demographic information, which the researcher developed, was added to the questionnaire. The demographic information sheet included the teacher's grade level of teaching, educational attainment, years of teaching with the current principal, age, years of teaching experience, and the school name and location. This scale measures the instructional leadership practices of principals through three dimensions: "Defines the school mission, manages the instructional program, and develops a positive school learning climate" (Hallinger, 2015, p. 119). These three dimensions are seen as three subscales presenting ten functions of principals as instructional leaders in this PIMRS. The first subscale, defining the school's mission, presents two functions: framing the school's goals and communicating the school's goals to school members. These two functions of the first subscale include five items. The second subscale, managing instructional program, presents three functions: coordinating the curriculum, supervising and evaluating instruction, and monitoring the student progress of principals. These three functions of the second subscale include seven items. The third subscale - developing the school learning climate, presents five functions: protecting instructional time, providing incentives for teachers, providing incentives for learning, promoting professional development, and maintaining the high visibility of principals. These five functions of the third subscale include ten items. The PIMRS Teacher Short Form includes 22 Likert-type questions. These questions range from one to five. One refers that principals "almost never" perform in the way presented in the item. Five refers that principals "almost always" act in the manner shown in the item.

Table 3

The Interpretation of the Mean Scores of the PIMRS (Joel, 2017, p. 86)

Scale of Means	Descriptive Equivalent	Interpretation
4.20 – 5.00	Almost always	Outstanding
3.40 – 4.19	Frequently	Very Good
2.60 – 3.39	Sometimes	Good
1.80 – 2.59	Seldom	Needs Improvement
1.00 – 1.79	Almost never	Poor

3.4 Reliability and Validity of the PIMRS Teacher Short Form

The standard form of the PIMRS consists of 50 items. Concerning efficiency in data collection, the increase in the quality of teachers' responses, and the decrease of time obstacles for teachers, the authors of the PIMRS conducted 13 studies and developed a shorter version, including 22 items. This short version can be utilized by teachers to measure principal instructional leadership practices, and it still maintains a high rate of validity, reliability, and utility. Compared to the Standard Form, the PIMRS Teacher Short Form is more effective and productive in collecting data (Hallinger & Wang, 2013). The PIMRS Teacher Short Form was tested via utilizing a Gen Theory test, and the findings of this test proved that the PIMRS Teacher Short Form met the high standard of reliability as shown in Table 4. Moreover, factor analysis and Rasch analysis also indicated that the internal validity of the PIMRS Teacher Short Form remained at high levels (Hallinger, 2015).

Table 4

Reliabilities of the PIMRS (Teacher Short Form)

	Whole scale	Subscale 1	Subscale 2	Subscale 3
Reliability	.943	.935	.901	.912

3.5 The translation of the PIMRS-Vietnamese Form

The PIMRS was used in a previous study in Vietnam and translated from the original English version into the Vietnamese version. The author of this PIMRS gave permission to the researcher to use this scale in this

study and sent to the researcher both the original English and translated Vietnamese versions of this scale. The steps to translate this scale from the original English version to the Vietnamese version were presented in the study of Nguyễn et al. (2018) as follows:

First, one researcher translated the PIMRS into Vietnamese. Then, a second researcher was responsible for translating the PIMRS Vietnamese version back into English without accessing the original PIMRS English version. Next, a third bilingual reviewer compared the original English and back-translated Vietnamese versions of the PIMRS for syntax and typographic errors, as well as for words or terms that sounded awkward or seemed conceptually problematic. In the final step, a committee comprised of the translator, the back-translator, the reviewer, and an additional member of the research team reexamined problems found during the review of the original English version and each of the translated versions. The committee discussed discrepancies until it reached consensus on alternative wordings. After this step, members of the committee agreed that the English and Vietnamese versions of the PIMRS were equivalent in meaning and that the PIMRS-Vietnamese Forms would be easy for the respondents to understand. (Nguyễn et al., 2018, p. 10)

4. Result and Discussion

4.1 RQ 1: Teachers' perception of principal instructional leadership in the five accredited DMI kindergarten schools

Table 5 presents the descriptive statistics of principal instructional leadership practices as evaluated by teachers. Among the ten identified practices, *communicating school goals* received the highest mean score ($M = 4.331$, $SD = 0.84$), followed by *framing the school goals* ($M = 4.206$, $SD = 0.113$), *promoting professional development* ($M = 4.174$, $SD = 0.082$), *coordinating the curriculum* ($M = 4.158$, $SD = 0.119$), *supervising and evaluating instruction* ($M = 4.151$, $SD = 0.126$), *maintaining high visibility* ($M = 3.961$, $SD = 0.143$), *providing incentives for teachers* ($M = 3.927$, $SD = 0.195$), *monitoring student progress* ($M = 3.856$, $SD = 0.005$), *protecting instructional time* ($M = 3.856$, $SD = 0.89$), and *providing incentives for learning* ($M = 3.790$, $SD = 0.127$) obtained the lowest mean ratings. Overall, the teachers' ratings of principal instructional leadership practices ranged from 3.790 to 4.331, indicating relatively high perceptions across all dimensions. According to the interpretation of the scale of means associated with the PIMRS, practices within the "Defining the School Mission" dimension—specifically, communicating and framing school goals—were perceived as outstanding. Meanwhile, practices within the "Managing the Instructional Program" and "Developing a Positive School Learning Climate" dimensions were rated as very good. These findings mean that, from the perspective of teachers, principals were actively and effectively engaged in instructional leadership.

These results align with the findings of Hao (2016), who reported mean scores for principal instructional leadership practices ranging from 4.41 to 3.50, also indicative of very good to outstanding performance. However, contrasting results were noted in the study by Ghavifekr et al. (2019), where mean scores ranged between 2.02 and 1.32, reflecting poor performance and a need for improvement in instructional leadership practices. This discrepancy underscores the variability in principal leadership performance across different contexts and highlights the importance of situational and systemic factors in shaping instructional leadership effectiveness.

The statistical findings further indicated that the principal's practices in *communicating school goals* ($M = 4.331$, $SD = 0.84$), *framing school goals* ($M = 4.206$, $SD = 0.113$), and *promoting professional development* ($M = 4.174$, $SD = 0.082$) received the highest mean ratings among the ten instructional leadership functions evaluated. In contrast, the practices of *providing incentives for learning* ($M = 3.790$, $SD = 0.127$), *protecting instructional time* ($M = 3.856$, $SD = 0.89$), and *monitoring student progress* ($M = 3.856$, $SD = 0.005$) were

associated with the lowest mean scores. The practices related to *supervising and evaluating instruction* ($M = 4.151$, $SD = 0.126$), *coordinating the curriculum* ($M = 4.158$, $SD = 0.119$), *providing incentives for teachers* ($M = 3.927$, $SD = 0.195$) and *maintaining high visibility* ($M = 3.961$, $SD = 0.143$) fell within the moderate range.

According to the interpretation scale for the PIMRS mean scores, teachers perceived the principal's leadership practices in the *Defining the School Mission* dimension, specifically, *communicating and framing school goals*, as outstanding, while *promoting professional development* was rated as very good. These practices were viewed as highly effective in supporting instructional leadership. Meanwhile, principal practices in *supervising and evaluating instruction*, *maintaining high visibility*, *coordinating the curriculum*, and *providing incentives for teachers* received moderately high mean scores and were also categorized as very good, although perceived as slightly less effective than the top three practices. Lastly, while the practices of *providing incentives for learning*, *protecting instructional time*, and *monitoring student progress* obtained the lowest mean ratings among the leadership functions assessed, they still fell within the very good range. However, their relatively lower scores suggest that these areas may benefit from further development and emphasis to enhance overall instructional leadership effectiveness.

In short, the statistical results of this study revealed that, based on teachers' perceptions, the principal instructional leadership practices within the first dimension, *defining the school mission*, received the highest mean scores and were considered the most effective. Specifically, the practices of *framing the school goals and communicating these goals* were consistently rated as outstanding. Within the second dimension, *managing the instructional program*, the practices of *supervising and evaluating instruction* and *coordinating the curriculum* received moderately high mean scores, indicating moderate levels of effectiveness. However, the practice of *monitoring student progress* received the lowest mean score within this dimension, reflecting comparatively lower effectiveness. Regarding the third dimension, *promoting a positive school learning climate*, the principal's role in *promoting professional development* was perceived as one of the most effective, receiving a high mean score. Practices such as *maintaining high visibility* and *providing incentives for teachers* were rated moderately, suggesting moderate effectiveness. In contrast, practices related to *protecting instructional time* and *providing incentives for learning* received lower mean scores, indicating these areas were perceived as less effective. Despite variations in individual practice ratings, the overall interpretation of the PIMRS mean scores indicates that all principal instructional leadership practices were perceived as either very good or outstanding. This implies that principals were actively engaged in a broad range of instructional leadership responsibilities and that their efforts were generally effective, as perceived by the teachers.

These findings reflected the educational priorities outlined in the 21st Chapter of the DMI Congregation, which emphasizes the importance of improving educational quality and student achievement (DMI Congregation, 2021). The study results indicated that DMI principals intentionally practiced their instructional leadership roles in alignment with the congregation's educational mission, demonstrating a clear commitment to fulfilling its directives through active and effective leadership practices.

The results regarding *defining the school mission* are consistent with previous empirical studies. Specifically, studies conducted by Bada et al. (2020), Yasser and Amal (2015), and Hao (2016) similarly found that principals' practices in defining the school mission were rated highest in terms of effectiveness and mean scores by teachers. For *managing the instructional program*, the findings of this study partially align with previous research. Yasser and Amal (2015) reported that these practices were rated with low mean scores, while Ghavifekr et al. (2019) found moderate mean scores, findings that are broadly consistent with the current study's results. Findings related to *promoting a positive school climate* both support and diverge from prior research. The high mean score associated with promoting professional development is consistent with the results of Ahmad (2018). Similarly, the low rating of protecting instructional time aligns with findings by Hao (2016). However, in contrast to Hao's study, which reported low ratings for maintaining high visibility, this study found that those practices were rated with moderate mean scores. Additionally, research by Bada et al. (2020) and Ghavifekr et al. (2019) identified generally low ratings for principal practices in developing a positive school climate. Thus, this study partially

corroborates those findings, particularly in the areas of protecting instructional time and providing incentives for learning, both of which received low mean scores in the present study.

Table 5
Descriptive Statistics of Principal Instructional Leadership Practices

Practices	Standard Deviation	Mean	Descriptive Equivalent
II. Communicate the school goals	0.084	4.331	Almost always
I. Frame the school goals	0.113	4.206	Almost always
IX. Promote professional development	0.082	4.174	Frequently
IV. Coordinate the curriculum	0.119	4.158	Frequently
III. Supervise and evaluate instruction	0.126	4.151	Frequently
VII. Maintain high visibility	0.143	3.961	Frequently
VIII. Provide incentives for teachers	0.195	3.927	Frequently
V. Monitor student progress	0.005	3.856	Frequently
VI. Protect instructional time	0.89	3.856	Frequently
X. Provide incentives for learning	0.127	3.79	Frequently
Whole Scale	0.184	4.041	Frequently
Scale of Means	Descriptive Equivalent	Interpretation	
4.20 – 5.00	Almost always	Outstanding	
3.40 – 4.19	Frequently	Very Good	
2.60 – 3.39	Sometimes	Good	
1.80 – 2.59	Seldom	Needs Improvement	
1.00 – 1.79	Almost never	Poor	

4.2 RQ 2: Significant differences in teachers' perceptions of principal instructional practices and their years of teaching experience

Table 6 presents the distribution of teachers based on their years of teaching experience. Out of the 129 respondents, 34 teachers (26.36%) reported having between 1 and 5 years of teaching experience, while 44 teachers (34.11%) indicated 6 to 10 years of experience. A total of 22 teachers (17.05%) belonged to the 11 to 15 years experience group, and 29 teachers (22.48%) reported having 16 or more years of teaching experience.

Table 6
Distribution of Teachers' Years of Teaching Experience

Years of teaching experience	N
1 – 5 years	34 (26.36%)
6 -10 years	44 (34.11%)
11 – 15 years	22 (17.05%)
16 years and above	29 (22.48%)
Total	129 (100%)

The results of Pearson's correlation analysis ($p < 0.001$), as shown in Table 7, indicated statistically significant correlations among the three dimensions of instructional leadership. Prior to conducting the multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA), assumption checks were performed. As presented in Table 8, Box's M test for the homogeneity of covariance matrices yielded a p-value of 0.08, and the Shapiro–Wilk test for multivariate normality produced a p-value less than 0.001. These results confirmed that the data met the necessary assumptions for proceeding with MANOVA. Specifically, the p-value from Box's M test exceeded 0.05, indicating that the assumption of homogeneity of covariance matrices was not violated, thereby justifying the use of Pillai's Trace as the appropriate test statistic.

The MANOVA results, as presented in Table 9, showed that the Pillai's Trace test yielded a p-value of 0.447, which is greater than the 0.05 significance level. As a result, the researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis. This indicated that there were no statistically significant differences in teachers' perceptions of principal instructional leadership across the four groups categorized by years of teaching experience. Further support for this finding is provided in Table 10, where the descriptive statistics and results of the univariate ANOVA for each of the three instructional leadership dimensions also showed non-significant p-values (0.237, 0.178, and 0.092, respectively). These values further confirm that teachers' years of experience did not significantly influence their

perceptions of principal instructional leadership practices.

Table 7

Pearson's Correlations

Variable		D1	D2	D3
Framing the school mission	Pearson's r	—		
	p-value	—		
Managing the instructional program	Pearson's r	0.885	—	
	p-value	< .001	—	
Promoting a positive school climate	Pearson's r	0.793	0.884	—
	p-value	< .001	< .001	—

Table 8

Assumption Checks

Box's M-test for Homogeneity of Covariance Matrices

χ^2	df	p
26.928	18	0.080

Shapiro-Wilk Test for Multivariate Normality

Shapiro-Wilk	p
0.925	< .001

Table 9

MANOVA: Pillai Test

Cases	df	Approx. F	Trace _{Pillai}	Num df	Den df	p
Years of experience	3	0.991	0.070	9	375.000	0.447

Table 10

Descriptive Statistics and Univariate ANOVA Results of Teachers' Perceptions of Principal Instructional Leadership between Different Groups of Teachers' Years of Teaching Experience

Dimensions of instructional leadership	N	M	SD	Df	Mean square	F	p
Framing the school mission	129	4.229	0.689	3	0.672	1.430	0.237
Managing the instructional program	129	4.122	0.680	3	0.757	1.664	0.178
Promoting a positive school climate	129	4.041	0.747	3	1.190	2.194	0.092

In short, the statistical analysis revealed no significant differences in teachers' perceptions of principal instructional leadership based on their years of teaching experience. This suggests that teachers' evaluations of their principals' instructional leadership practices were consistent regardless of their length of service. This finding is consistent with the study conducted by Bada et al. (2020) in Nigeria, which similarly concluded that teachers' years of teaching experience had no significant influence on their perceptions of principal instructional leadership.

5. Conclusion

This study examined DMI principals' instructional leadership practices based on teachers' perceptions in five accredited DMI kindergartens in Vietnam. It assessed the perceived effectiveness of these practices and whether teachers' years of experience influenced their perceptions. Findings revealed that principals were seen as active and effective instructional leaders, with all ten leadership practices rated as either very good or outstanding. The highest ratings were in *defining the school's mission*, particularly in framing and communicating goals, highlighting the importance of clear vision-setting in school leadership. In *managing the instructional program*, practices like supervision and curriculum coordination were rated moderately high, while monitoring student progress received lower scores, suggesting a need for stronger data-informed leadership. In *promoting a positive school climate*, professional development received high ratings, whereas protecting instructional time and providing incentives for learning were rated lower, indicating areas for

targeted improvement. Additionally, the study found no statistically significant differences in teachers' perceptions of principal instructional leadership based on their years of teaching experience. This indicates that teachers' years of teaching experience did not impact their perceptions of principal instructional leadership practices, and their perceptions were consistent across new and experienced teachers alike. This consistency is a strength, but it also points to the potential value of differentiated leadership approaches tailored to teachers' career stages.

Implications for school leaders and administrators - From the findings of this study, some implications for school leaders and administrators are as follows:

Among the three dimensions of instructional leadership, the defining the school's mission dimension, particularly the practices of framing and communicating school goals, received the highest mean scores. This implies that educational leaders and administrators should prioritize clear communication of school goals and values to foster collective ownership and direction among teachers and staff. In managing the instructional program, practices in monitoring student progress received lower scores. School leaders and administrators should focus on collecting, analyzing, and utilizing data to make data-informed decisions that enhance instructional management, particularly in monitoring student progress. Regarding the third dimension, promoting a positive school learning climate, teachers rated providing professional development among the top three practices, reflecting principals' strong commitment to supporting teacher growth. These findings underscore the critical role of continuous learning opportunities in maintaining teacher morale and instructional effectiveness. School leaders and administrators may replicate this by institutionalizing professional learning as a key leadership priority.

Meanwhile, protecting instructional time and providing incentives for learning received comparatively lower ratings, although still within the "very good" range. This implies that it is crucial to protect the instructional core by minimizing disruptions and rewarding learning efforts to support deeper student engagement and achievement, and that school leaders and administrators should be aware of this and pay more attention to this matter to foster a supportive and positive learning environment. Additionally, the study found no statistically significant differences in teachers' perceptions of principal instructional leadership based on their years of teaching experience. It could contribute more to instructional improvement if school leaders and administrators could tailor their leadership strategies to better meet the diverse needs and career stages of their teaching staff.

Limitations and Recommendations - While this study provides valuable insights into instructional leadership in DMI kindergartens, several limitations should be acknowledged. Firstly, the study was conducted exclusively within DMI schools in the private sector, which may limit the generalizability of findings to other private or public kindergartens in Vietnam. Secondly, data were collected solely from teachers, focusing only on their perceptions of principals' instructional leadership practices. In light of these limitations, several recommendations are proposed. Firstly, future studies should include a wider range of schools, including both private and public kindergarten institutions, to enhance the generalizability of findings across the Vietnamese early childhood education sector. Additionally, comparative research examining principals' self-assessments of their instructional leadership practices would offer a more balanced understanding of leadership effectiveness and identify gaps or alignments between teacher and principal perspectives. Moreover, a qualitative approach could provide deeper insights into the nuances of instructional leadership, particularly regarding contextual and relational dynamics not captured in quantitative measures. Furthermore, future research should investigate the impact of principal instructional leadership on teachers' instructional quality, professional growth, and self-efficacy. Such studies would help establish the direct outcomes of effective leadership on teaching and learning. In conclusion, this study contributes to the growing body of literature on instructional leadership by offering empirical evidence from the context of private kindergarten schools in Vietnam. It underscores the importance of sustained attention to all dimensions of instructional leadership in enhancing school effectiveness and supporting teacher development.

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