

## THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PRINCIPALS' INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP AND SCHOOL PERFORMANCE OF RURAL PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN MALAYSIA

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### ABSTRACT

*One of the five system aspirations for the Malaysian education system is the Equity. The main agenda is 50% reduction in achievement gaps between urban-rural schools. The international evidence clearly shows that strong school leadership is also required to produce significant improvement in student achievement. Principals are more than just administrative leaders—they are instructional leaders who focus on improving the quality of teaching and learning in their schools. School leadership among teachers and administrators has been considered a driving force for student achievement and educational reform. The purpose of this study is to look into the correlation between principals' instructional leadership and rural public secondary schools' performance in Malaysia. Principals' instructional leadership was measured using PIMRS, a survey instrument developed by Hallinger in 1995 and Gred Purata Sekolah (GPS) or Average Grade Score by the grades obtained in the rural public secondary school SPM results were taken as school performance. The study found that there was a significant negative relationship between Principals' instructional leadership and rural public secondary school performance. The dimension managing instructional programs made the largest contribution to school performance. The implication of the findings is to offer better information to educators and administrators on how Principals' instructional leadership manifests itself on school performance and its effect on rural public secondary school performance. Programs aimed at helping principals to increase their level of instructional leadership will help increase rural public secondary school performance. The implication of the findings is to offer better information to educators and administrators on how Principals' instructional leadership manifests itself on school performance and its effect on rural public secondary school performance. Programs aimed at helping principals to increase their level of instructional leadership will help increase rural public secondary school performance.*

Key words: Principals' Instructional Leadership, Rural Public Secondary School Performance

### INTRODUCTION

Instructional leadership means goal orientation that can define clear directions through school's empowered visions and missions and able to motivate others in order to achieve success where the main focus is students' achievements (Hallinger, 2005, Norashikin, 2018). According to Lemoine et al (2014), instructional leadership is the effective leader who sets the direction and establishes a vision to reach academic goals. Effective principals have high expectations for teacher and student performance, articulating performance standards for teaching and learning. As an instructional leader, the principal works with curriculum and instruction; the school leader presents focused and on-going professional development, encourages instructional innovations, utilizes proactive change processes, and frequently monitors and evaluates teachers and student learning. The effective school leader communicates and builds relationships with teachers who become part of the leadership team. Leadership is distributed among team members who are working collaboratively toward the same goal. School leaders establish a safe, orderly, and positive environment and school culture in which learning can occur.

### BACKGROUND OF STUDY

Education is the development of enabling learning, or the amassing of knowledge, skills, beliefs, values and habits (Farhana, 2017). It plays a role to reinforce the development of a good quality citizen for the nation's social, cultural and economic progress (Farhana, 2017) and in the pursuit of national values and goals and to transform Malaysia into a hub of educational excellence (Azman, Sirat, & Pang, 2016 cited in Farhana, 2017). To achieve the nation's aim, the Malaysia Education Blueprint (2013-2025) has focused on the quality of leadership and teaching practices in schools as the domain factors to accomplish the success of the education system, thus boosting schools' performance all over Malaysia be it urban or rural schools, primary or secondary schools (Ministry of Education, 2013).

### PROBLEM STATEMENT

There is limited research related to rural schools in Malaysia. Malhoit (2005), in his research entitled "Providing rural students with a high-quality education", highlights some strategies that can be put in place in order to make a rural school become a quality school. One strategy is that a rural school should be led by effective school leaders; principals instructional leadership. Educational researchers have come to a consensus that this factor is the most crucial one that a rural school should have. Without it, there will never be a good rural school. Hallinger (2005) found that principals are able to contribute to school effectiveness and students' achievements through instructional practices that can influence schools and classrooms and that the administrative roles of the principals are irrelevant with present educational development. Hallinger (2005) stressed that the biggest effect instructional leadership principals have upon students' achievements is when the instructional leadership focusses on three dimensions that is defining school goals, managing instructional programs and creating a positive conducive school climate. School teachers and administrators are being pressured more than ever before and held accountable for the performance of all segments of populations within their schools (Mitchell, Kensler, & Tschannen-Moran, 2015; Jennifer Kartzmars, 2018). School

administrators are expected to demonstrate effective leadership and instructional leadership skills (Gülcan, 2012; Jennifer Karzmars, 2018). Principals in recent educational settings are practicing leadership approaches and strategies beyond traditional transformative and facilitator leadership that has been used in the past (Gulcan, 2012; Jennifer Karzmars, 2018). To achieve the nation's aim, the Malaysia Education Blueprint (2013-2025) has focused on the quality of leadership and teaching practices in schools as the domain factors to accomplish the success of the education system, thus boosting schools' performance all over Malaysia be it urban or rural schools, primary or secondary schools (Ministry of Education, 2013).

Overall, as long as the right policy can be put in place, we are certain that the quality of Malaysian rural schools can be improved and therefore, the gap exists between these schools and their urban counterparts can be minimized or possibly closed. Over the years, there have not been numerous studies that have looked at the correlation of Principals instructional leadership of rural public secondary schools and school performance. The aim of this study is to investigate the influence of principals' instructional leadership on school performance in rural public secondary schools.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Research Question 1: What is the level of principals' instructional leadership of rural public secondary schools?

Research Question 2: What is the level of the school performance of rural public secondary schools?

Research Question 3: Is there a significant relationship between principals' instructional leadership and school performance of rural public secondary schools?

Research Question 4: Which dimensions of principals' instructional leadership contribute significantly towards school performance of rural public secondary schools?

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In this study, the researcher used the open-system perspective from system theory, which is the input-throughput-output research because students' academic achievement is the outcome of the principals' instructional leadership that can influence and bring an impact to teachers' instructional practices. The researcher used the SPM Examination Results as school performance. The SPM Examination 2017 results announcement made by the Director General of Education Ministry of Malaysia Datuk Dr Amin Bin Senin on the 15 March 2018 revealed some findings.

SPM examination results are reported based on the candidate's achievement and performance of subjects. Candidate achievement refers to the degree to which candidates dominate the learning in all subjects tested. The index is used to show the achievements of candidates across the country is the National Average Grade (GPN). Smaller National Average Grade (GPN) value indicates better performance. The performance of the subject refers to the degree to which candidates dominate the knowledge, skills and values measured in each subject. Index used to reflect the performance of the subjects is the average Grade Subjects (GPMP). The smaller value of GPMP also showed better performance. Achievements of the Candidates for the year 2017 was better than in 2016. The National Average Grade (GPN) for 2017 was 4.90 compared to 5.05 for the year 2016 with an increment of 0.15. Achievements of the candidates based on the location of the candidates' achievements in urban and rural areas was also encouraging. The achievements of candidates in the urban areas increased by 0.14 namely 4.75 in 2017 compared to 4.89 in 2016. Unfortunately, the achievements of the candidates in the rural areas had increased by 0.14 i.e. 5.22 in 2017 compared to 5.36 than in 2016. Increase in candidate's achievement showed an improvement in rural area equivalent to increase in candidate achievement in the urban areas. Differences in achievements between candidates in the urban and rural areas remained 0.47 in the year 2017 is the same as in 2016. But the result is below the National Average Grade (GPN) for the year 2018 i.e. 4.89.

Table 1: Candidates' achievements based on location for the year 2018, 2017 and 2016

Year	National Average Grade (GPN)	Urban Average Grade	Rural Average Grade	Difference
2018	4.89	4.75	5.18	0.43
2017	4.90	4.75	5.22	0.47
2016	5.05	4.89	5.36	0.47
Difference		0.14	0.14	

Achievements of the candidates based on the location of the gap between the performances of the candidates in the urban and rural narrowed by 0.04 in the year 2018 compared to the year 2017. This is due to the increased performance of the candidates in the rural areas of the candidate's achievements in 0.04 while urbans remain the same.

Figure 1: National Average Grade (GPN) 2014-2018

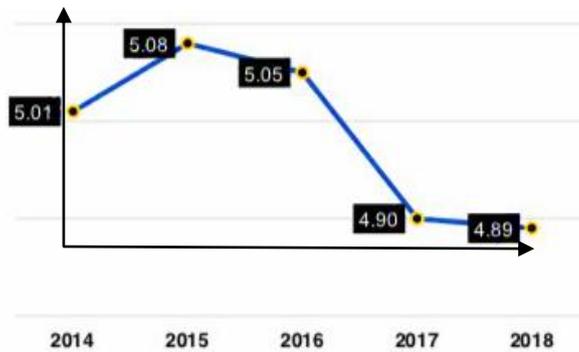
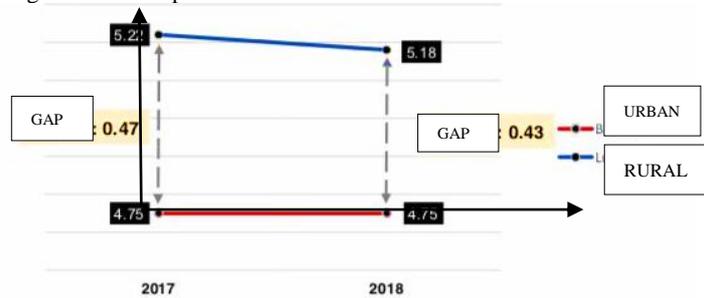


Figure 2: The Gap in The Location Of The Candidates Achievements



There is a gap in the results obtained by rurals compared to urbans. Urbans are better and their Average Grade result 4.75 reached way above the National Average Grade (GPN) of 4.89. Rurals did not do well as their results 5.88 are way beyond the National Average Grade (GPN) of 4.89. What was the set back and what went wrong in the rural educational system?

Thus, it is timely that a study is undertaken to investigate the relationship between correlation of Principals’ instructional leadership and school performance of rural public secondary schools. The findings from the study would benefit various departments in the ministry and schools that deal with the facilitating education for the students to rope in school performance. In consequence, this will help them to increase Principals’ instructional leadership and gain better school performance of rural public secondary schools.

**METHODOLOGY**

**SAMPLE**

The hypotheses were tested using respondents selected using stratified random sampling comprising of 379 teachers (32.7% male, 67.3% female) attending secondary schools in five states; Perlis, Kelantan, Pahang, Johor and Malacca, in Malaysia. All respondents were full time teachers with an average of 10 years in service and an average of 123 teachers have been working under their present principals for 1 or 2 years.

Table 2: Gender of Teacher Respondents

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	124	32.7	32.7	32.7
	Female	255	67.3	67.3	100.0
	Total	379	100.0	100.0	

Table 3: Number of sample size from each state

States representing Malaysia	Number of Public Secondary School Teachers	Number of Public, Rural Secondary School Teachers	Number of Samples
Pahang	9280	5671	94
Kelantan	10846	6670	110
Perlis	1211	1021	17
Johor		7097	117
Malacca		2500	41
<b>Total</b>		<b>22959</b>	<b>379</b>

Source. E-Operasi Statistics State Education Department for the year 2018 Morgan and Krejcie's (1970) sampling determination table.

The sample was representative of a rural public secondary school teacher demography to the extent that it did not represent any one single demographic group (e.g. gender, age groups etc.) extensively.

## MEASURES

The respondents' survey instrument was evaluated using Likert scale developed by Rensis Likert 1903, an American social psychologist who is primarily known for developing the 5-point Likert scale, a psychometric scale that allows people to respond to questions of interest, in order to measure people's attitudes (such as personality and attitude tests). It is a five item scale that requires respondents to answer questions pertaining to them. The scale is a measure of the degree to which situations in one's life are appraised as agree or disagree. Respondents responded to each item using a five-point Likert-type scale from 1 (never) to 5 (very often).

Table 4: Likert Scale

Scale	Represents
1	Never
2	Seldom
3	Sometimes
4	Frequently
5	Always

The scale has been proven to be a reliable tool to measure only the amount of instructional practices, independent of other constructs like teaching practices. The reported coefficient alpha for this scale is .904, 0.915 and 0.854 respectively. Pallant (2011) stated that the values of Cronbach's Alpha of above 0.6 are considered acceptable, 0.7 is good, and 0.8 is the most appropriate. Table below shows that all variables in the questionnaire achieved the reliability of above 0.8, which is very appropriate for the study.

Table 5: Reliability Coefficient for Each Variable (N=379) for Principals' Instructional Leadership

Variable	Item No.	Item Deleted	Cronbach's Alpha
Principal Instructional Leadership	59	0	0.891
Defining school mission	12	0	0.888
Managing Instructional Program	15	0	0.853
Creating a Positive School Climate	32	0	0.907

## DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

The participants were asked to provide details about themselves for extraneous variables. They reported data about gender, age, years of service, years of working with present principal and service category.

## PRINCIPALS INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP SURVEY:

The respondents were asked to indicate their responses to the five principals' instructional leadership factors such as Defining school mission, Managing Instructional Program and Creating a Positive School Climate that could have affected their schools SPM performance.

## STATISTICAL TREATMENT:

Descriptive statistics were utilized. Pearson correlations and multiple regression were used to assess the relationship between variables. Data were analyzed using SPSS.

## DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

Table 6: Descriptive Statistics for teacher Respondents

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Age on 1st Jan 2018	379	21	59	40.87	7.911
You are in teaching service for	379	1.0	38.0	5.464	7.5572
How long have you been working under the present principal?	379	.0	24.0	2.420	2.5511
Valid N (listwise)	379				

The Descriptive Statistics Table 6 shows that the mean score for the participants' age as on 1st Jan 2018 is 40.87 with a wide dispersion as the SD is 7.911. This indicates that there is a wide range of age among teachers. The mean for the participants' teaching service is 5.464 years. The standard deviation for teaching service is 7.5572 indicating the dispersion as rather wide too. The mean for question 'How long have you been working under the present principal?' is 2.420 years.

## PRINCIPALS' INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

Research question 1: What is the level of Principals' instructional leadership of rural public secondary schools?

Table 7 Mean Score and Standard Deviation of the Principals' Instructional Leadership (N=379)

Variable Principals' Instructional Leadership	Mean	Standard Deviation	Level
Overall Principals' Instructional Leadership	4.023	.313	High
<b>Dimensions</b>			
Defining school mission	4.116	.435	High
Managing Instructional Program	4.028	.355	High
Creating a Positive School Climate	3.985	.342	High

Note: Mean 0 to 2.39 as Low; 2.40 to 3.69 as Moderate; more than 3.70 as High Source. Hallinger (2003).

Based on Table 7, overall, the Principals' Instructional Leadership is at high level (Mean=4.023). All the dimensions of the Principals' Instructional Leadership are also at high level. Standard deviation is .313.

## LEVEL OF SCHOOL PERFORMANCE

Research question 2: What is the level of the school performance of rural public secondary schools?

Table 8: Descriptive Statistics GPS

	N	Mean	Std.Deviation
GPS_rec	379	5.402	.506
Valid N (listwise)	379		

The Descriptive Statistics table shows that the mean score for the school performance indicated by GPS is 5.402 with a wide dispersion as the SD is .506. This indicates that there is a wide range of GPS among rural public secondary school performance. The level of the school performance of rural public secondary schools GPS is 5.402. The higher value of GPS indicates rural schools' lower performance than GPN which is 4.89. Hence, the results indicate that the GPS of the rural schools is unsatisfactory. The mean score for overall GPS for rural schools does not meet the target.

## CORRELATION BETWEEN PRINCIPALS' INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP AND SCHOOL PERFORMANCE

Research question 3: Is there a significant relationship between Principals' Instructional Leadership and school performance of rural public secondary schools? A correlation test that was conducted in order to address research question 3.

Hypothesis 1<sub>01</sub> H<sub>01</sub>: There is no significant relationship between principals' instructional leadership and school performance of rural public secondary schools.

Table 9: Correlation test of Principal Instructional Leadership and GPS

	Principle Instructional Leadership	GPS
Pearson Correlation	1	-0.266
Significant (2-tailed)		0.000
N		380

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 10 shows that there is a significant negative relationship between Principals' Instructional Leadership and GPS ( $r=-0.266$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ). Therefore, this indicates that the increase in Principal Instructional Leadership will lead to a decrease in GPS score. The smaller the GPS value the better the schools perform. Thus, the null hypothesis is rejected.

The results of the correlation proved that there is a significant relationship between principals' instructional leadership and school performance.

The hypothesis is that there is no significant relationship correlated with principals' instructional leadership and school performance of rural public secondary schools is thus, rejected.

### DIMENSIONS OF PRINCIPALS' INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

Research question 4: Which dimensions of Principals' Instructional Leadership contribute significantly towards school performance of rural public secondary schools?

Major assumptions in multiple regression can be seen in the table below.

Table 10: Major Assumptions in Multiple Regressions

No	Major assumptions in multiple regression
1	There must be a linear relationship between the outcome variable and the independent variables
2	The residuals are normally distributed.
3	There was no multicollinearity.
4	The variance of error terms is homoscedasticity.

For assumption 1, from the indication that there is significant positive relationship between Principals' Instructional Leadership and school performance ( $r=0.271$ ) indicates that there is linear relationship between the dependant variable and the independent variables.

As for assumption 2, is normally distributed as indicated by the histogram and plot below.

Figure 3: Multiple regression between dimensions of Principals' Instructional Leadership and school performance of rural public secondary schools. Normal Distribution

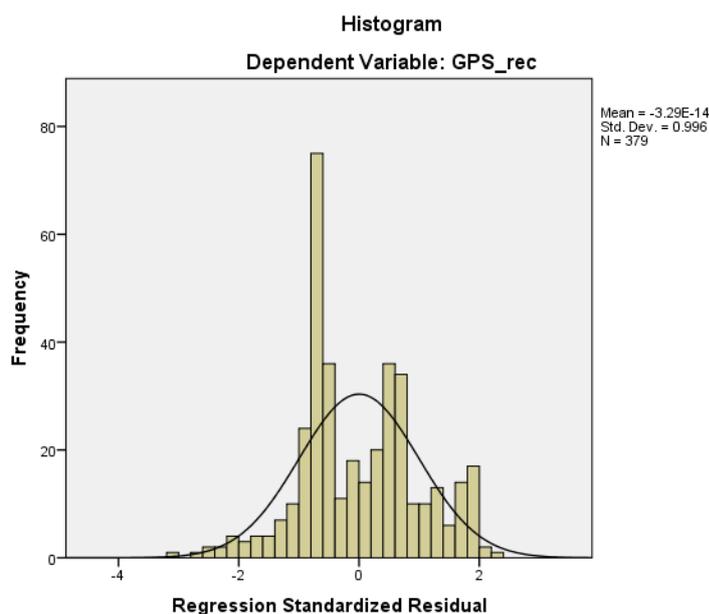
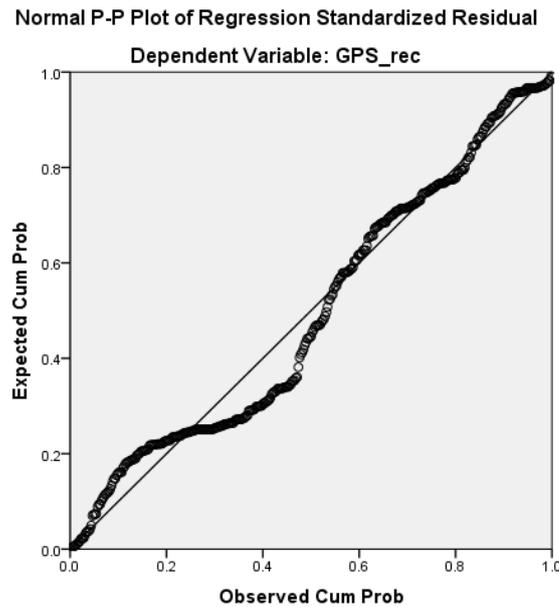


Figure 4: Normal P-P Plot of Regression Standardized Residual

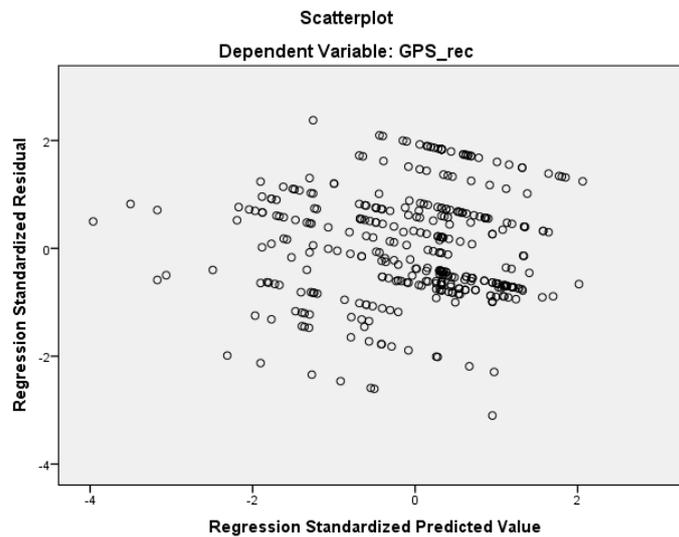


As for the assumption of multicollinearity, the VIF values of the variable were used to address this assumption.

Table 11: Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values.

Independent Variables	VIF
Principals' Instructional Leadership	1.002

Figure 5: Scatter Plot



Homoscedasticity is the last assumption where the variability in scores for variable X should be similar at all values of variable Y. The scatterplot should show a fairly even cigar shape along its length. This last assumption stated that the variance of error terms were homoscedasticity which means that they were similar across the values of the independent variables. A plot of standardized residuals versus standardized predicted value will show whether points were equally distributed across all values of the independent variables. Since there was no clear pattern or cone shaped pattern in the distribution, the data was homoscedasticity. Therefore, the last assumption was fulfilled.

After all of the assumptions already fulfilled, multiple regression was used to test the impact of dimension of principals' instructional leadership towards school performance of rural public secondary schools.

Based on Table 11, there is no multicollinearity that exists since that the value of VIF for both variables are below 5 (Hair, 2010). Furthermore, a correlation between independent variable of 0.379 which below 0.8 also indicate that there is no multicollinearity.

Table 12: Findings of Multiple Regressions on principals' instructional leadership towards school performance of rural public secondary schools.

Model Summary<sup>b</sup>

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.519 <sup>a</sup>	.423	.418	.48130

a. Predictors: (Constant), developing the schools learning climate, defining schools' mission, managing the instructional program

b. Dependent variable: GPS

The model summary Table 12 indicates that the R (.519), R square (.423) and Adjusted R Square (.418). This means that 42% of the variance in school performance was jointly explained by Principals Instructional Leadership.

Table 13: Scale for effects holds at R

Value of R	Effect	Predictors of school performance	Significance
.10	Small	Weak	Low
.25	Medium	Medium	Medium
.40	Large	Strong	High

According to Cohen (1994), the scale for effects holds at R = .10 is a small effect, R = .25 is medium effect and R = .40 is a large effect. So, the measures were considered strong predictors of school performance indicating practical significance in addition to statistical significance found.

Table 14: ANOVA<sup>a</sup>

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1 Regression	25.814	2	12.907	69.201	.000b
Residual	70.130	378	.187		
Total	95.944	380			

a. Predictors: (Constant), Principals Instructional Leadership

b. Dependent Variable: School Performance

Table 12 shows that 42% from the change in variance for GPS relates to the variables of Principals' Instructional Leadership. With the result (F = 69.201; p < 0.05), that there is significant contribution by Principals Instructional Leadership towards School Performance of Rural Public Secondary Schools.

Table 15: Coefficients

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t		Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)	.964	.328		2.943	.003		
Principals Instructional Leadership	.694	.071	.496	9.800	.000		1.002
a. Defining schools mission	.109	.072	.093	1.513	.131		1.001
b. Managing the instructional program	.357	.105	.249	3.424	.001		1.003
c. Developing the schools learning climate	.227	.097	.154	2.333	.020		1.000

a. Dependent Variable: School Performance

As shown in Table 15 above, for the independent variable (Principal Instructional Leadership), the probability of the t statistic (9.80) for the b coefficient is .000 which is equal to the level of significance of 0.05. It can be concluded that there is a statistically significant relationship between Principal Instructional Leadership and School Performance. The results of the analyses showed that both independent variables, Principals Instructional Leadership ( $\beta=0.496$ ;  $t=9.800$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ) is significantly correlated to school performance of Rural Public Secondary Schools. The results show that managing the instructional program ( $\beta=0.249$ ;  $t=3.424$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ) made the largest contribution to schools performance and developing the schools learning climate ( $\beta=0.154$ ;  $t=2.333$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ) is the second largest contributor relationship towards schools performance. The smallest contributor was defining schools' mission ( $\beta=0.093$ ;  $t=1.513$ ;  $p > 0.05$ ) indicating that was no significant contribution.

The data from the principals' instructional leadership Survey yielded the following results. As shown in Table above, for the independent variable (principals' instructional leadership), the probability of the t statistic (9.80) for the b coefficient is .000 which is equal to the level of significance of 0.05. It can be concluded that there is a statistically significant relationship between principals' instructional leadership and School Performance. This means that when principals' instructional leadership goes up by 1 standard deviation, School Performance of Rural Public Secondary Schools goes up by 0.496 standard deviation. The results of the analyses showed that independent variable, principals' instructional leadership is significantly correlated to school performance of Rural Public Secondary Schools. Principals' instructional leadership made a statistically significant contribution (beta = .496).

Table 12 shows that 42 % from the change in variance for GPS is connected with the variables of dimensions of Principals' instructional leadership. With the result ( $F = 69.201$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ), that there is significant contribution by dimensions of Principals' Instructional Leadership towards Rural Public Secondary School Performance.

## CONCLUSION

Various extensive funding has been put forward by the Government of Malaysia programs in education sectors from independence till date. As proven by this study, teaching and learning process are related to principal quality which is developed among the schools. School Leaders with good skills are needed urgently to increase the learning and teaching quality which leads to an improved school performance. In addition, the researcher found that principals are equipped with good instructional leadership and engage these practices, in enhancing good performance of the school in rural areas. Furthermore, this study also has found that significant relationship exists among principals' practices of instruction and school performance. Researcher also discovered the current levels of principals' instructional leadership in rural secondary schools. Principals are regarded as valuable possessions that establish and increase the future of nation's children. Therefore, quality of principals directly relates to the education quality of the nation (Hanushek and Rivkin, 2007). This study has proved that principal's instructional leadership are able to improve schools' performance Hence, steps should be taken by schools for principals to come up with planning in instructional leadership that encourage teamwork in schools. The findings also indicated that instructional leadership had a significant positive influence on the performance of schools. The multiple regression indicated that the most influential predicting dimension was Managing Instructional Programs. To enhance practices of instruction, principals need to consider creating a positive school climate in school which encourages positive learning. Principals' instructional leadership acts as a key player to stimulate, supervise and monitor teaching and learning in schools which will bring improvement to student learning and school performance. Principals' instructional leadership which can help to achieve results include knowledge and responsibility sharing and instructional leadership practices act as key areas to stimulate, supervise and monitor teaching and learning in schools which will bring improvement to student learning, thus school performance.

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