

MEASURING THE SKILLS OF LEADERSHIP AND INSTRUCTIONAL COACHES FOR SCHOOLS TRANSFORMATION PROGRAMME

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Abstract: *The study aims to determine the levels of coaching skills among the school transformation coaches. They are specially selected mainly to assist school leaders and teachers in transforming the schools and students towards excellence. The objectives of this study are first, to assess the levels of listening and questioning skills, and second, to identify the extent of the related skills being used. There are five listening sub-skills and five questioning sub-skills identified for the purpose of this study. It comprises 43 participants selected from 110 coaches who have been involved since the programme started in 2016. The study uses quantitative and qualitative approaches. The participants are required to carry out a coaching simulation session. Each of them is given 20 minutes to conduct the session and 10 minutes for feedback session. They are assessed by two certified coaches for each session. A checklist form and grading form are used as instruments. There are four levels of competency to identify the participants' listening and questioning skills known as Ineffective (1), Developing (2), Skilled (3) and Excellent (4). The results of the study find that most of the participants are at the 'Skilled' level for both listening and questioning skills. The former was at the Mean level of 3.33 and the latter was at 3.58. Further analyses for listening component skill find that the sub-skill of 'making conclusion' is used by most of the participants and the sub-skill of 'using decision making tools' is the least used. For questioning skill component, the sub-skill of 'using appropriate open and closed questions' is the most used and the sub-skill of 'creating awareness for decision making improvement' is the least used. It can be concluded that the participants' have good skills in listening and questioning for coaching. It is suggested that they need to further develop their skills in helping their coaches to make decision using appropriate tools and for improvement.*

Keywords: *Coaching, Education, Leadership, Instructional, Schools, Assessment*

Introduction

Coaching is based on the principle that each individual need someone to guide them on deciding what is best for the betterment of their personal and professional development. In an organizational context, coaching is part of training and development process of an employee.

It is an effective method of training deliverance for professional development that many organizations have acknowledged its importance.

Leadership and instructional coaching are carried out specifically to help schools improve the quality of their leadership as well as teaching and learning process. This is based on the premise that students' excellence is depended on the quality of the school's management team and teachers.

Coaching process can only be effective if it is carried out accordingly. The theory and concept of coaching need to be applied to ensure that a coaching process is really practised. It is understood that there are theories, concepts and models of coaching being applied by practitioners from various backgrounds but in principle, they are similar.

Therefore, it is important to know how far the actual coaching practices are applied especially when it involves newly practising coaches as in this study. This is due to the problem that empirical evidences on the coaches' knowledge and skills are still lacking. This is because there is almost no study being carried focusing on these specially appointed coaches.

Background of The Study

In 2013, the Ministry of Education (MOE) has embarked on a master plan to transform all schools under its administration in the country that takes into considerations of the needs of the 21st Century reality. This master plan known as Education Blueprint 2013-2025 focuses on the education system and students' needs that involves the leadership, teachers and students aspects. It is hoped that by 2025, the education system in the country is able to produce excellent schools with high performance leaders, high quality teachers and excellent students academically and socially.

To ensure the success of the master plan, MOE introduces an initiative called as School Transformation Programme in 2016 which is officially known as TS25. It is aimed at enhancing students' excellence and school quality by implementing best practices in instructional leadership as well as teaching and learning. Special coaches are appointed among educators who have vast experience in teaching and leading.

These coaches are assigned to selected schools to help the school heads and teachers on ways to implement good practices in all aspects of instructional leadership and management. This has been carried out for two years since it started in 2016. Before that, these coaches are given a series of training on how to carry out their responsibilities including knowledge and practice of coaching.

Based on these, the scope of the study is focusing on this group of coaches as participants. Their knowledge and skills on coaching practices are the collected data and analysed qualitatively and quantitatively. These are carried out by observing and interviewing them using face-to-face method.

Rationale of The Study

The study is carried out for the following reasons. It has been identified that lack of empirical evidence on the coaches' practices is the problem that needs to be looked into. It is

the researcher's institution responsibility to give these coaches knowledge and skills of coaching practices. This responsibility also includes providing help and support to enhance their coaching skills. The findings of this study are therefore can be considered as a starting point on how to further develop their coaching skills.

The study is also carried because these coaches mostly have little or no experience in coaching prior to their appointment as coaches for this programme. They are selected mainly for their knowledge and experiences as teachers and administrators. Assessing their coaching skills provides a better understanding on the effectiveness of the coaching training given to them.

In addition, it is considered a suitable step to assess the coaches' skills after practising them for two years with a series of coaching session with the schools' leaders and teachers. This can be considered as a basis of studying the impact of coaching practices on the selected schools that to be carried out later.

Objectives of The Study

The study is carried based on the following objectives:

1. To identify the levels of listening and questioning skills in coaching.
2. To identify the extent in which these two main skills are being used.

Significance of The Study

The study is significant because its findings provide a clear understanding on the coaches' ability in handling their coaching sessions. This helps to determine the strengths and weaknesses of the coaches' skills and find ways on how to develop and enhance the skills. This is important for the programme evaluation purpose since its success is heavily depended on the effectiveness of the coaches when implementing their consultations at schools. The instruments used for this study can be considered as another significant contribution for this study. It is because the instruments are developed based on the needs and requirements of school leaders and teachers of the country.

Literature Review

Definition and Concepts of Leadership and Instructional Coaching

Coaching is a task or activity in training and helping a person to do certain things (Cambridge Dictionary, 2018). It is mainly about what John Whitmore describes it as 'unlocking a person's potential to maximize their own performance' by helping them learning instead of teaching them (Team FME, 2013). Coaching has no definite definition (van Nieuwerburgh, 2017) to be agreed upon (Thomson, 2014). Its definitions could also be confusing according to Wilson (2007). Leadership coach and instructional coach are two of the most used terms in education context. These refer to highly skilled persons whose main responsibility is to assist and guide the school management teams for improvement and attaining student achievement (Laba, 2011). In other words, leadership and instructional coaches have the competency and capacity to deal directly with the school heads, senior leaders, middle leaders and teachers to help them develop their capability for school improvement and student achievement.

Organizations implement coaching initiatives for several reasons. According to Ely, Boyce, Nelson, Zaccaro, Hernez-Broome and Whyman (2010), leadership coaching is needed to improve leadership skills, develop new leadership skills and develop leadership capabilities.

Instructional coaching is mainly aimed at improving classroom instructions by focusing on ‘learning and development’ (van Nieuwerburgh, 2017) to change and improve their teaching practices (Purdy, 2017).

GROW is one of the mostly used models of coaching because of its applicability and effectiveness according to Thomson (2014). It is a process that helps coaches to carry out their sessions within the coaching framework principles. A coaching session usually starts with setting up the goal (G), exploring reality (R), choosing options (O) and identifying the way forward or will (W). GROW is a coaching cycle that a coach needs to know and understand as stressed by Jim Knight (Hanover Research, 2015). In applying this model or any other coaching related model, there are skills that coaches need to have. According to HR Division (2015), communication skills are pertinent to ensure effective implementation of coaching sessions. It is important for coaches to have good listening and questioning skills for a meaningful communication. They have to practise active listening skills to enable them to paraphrase, reflect, summarise and give feedback on what have been said by their clients. Having good questioning skills requires coaches to know when to ask closed and open questions, what questions to ask and what questions not to ask. The main purposes for questioning are to clarify, probe, enquire and stay focused.

An assessment of coaching effectiveness is important especially when it involves an organizational level initiative with a special allocation of budget. The need for the coaching effectiveness assessment is widely discussed in Carter (2006), Wilson (2007), Ely et al. (2010), McGurk (2010), O’Dell (2011) and Grover and Furnham (2016). There are various studies focusing on this such as McGurk (2010), O’Dell (2011), Krasnoff (2015) and Lawley and Linder-Pelz (2016).

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of the study is derived from an attempt to understand the competency of the coaches in implementing their coaching practice. Knowledge and skills are factors that could determine the competency aspect.

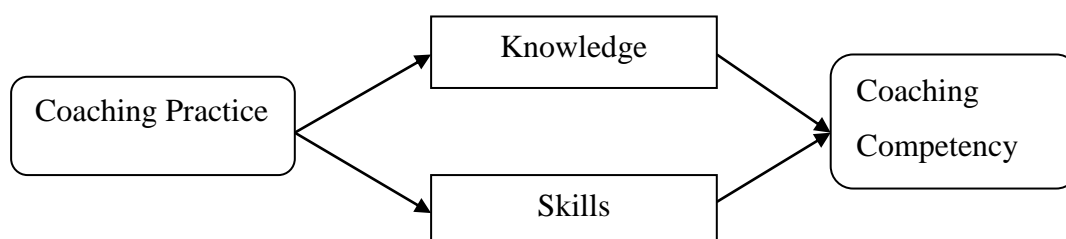


Figure 1: The Theoretical Framework of the Study

The coaching practice in this study is based on the GROW Model (Thomson, 2014; Hanover Research, 2015). In determining the extent of the coaches’ competency in their practice, knowledge and skills play an important role in the process of applying the GROW Model. This is because both factors are interconnected with competency (Zineb, Soumia, Souad & Karim, 2017). In this context, the coaches need to know what GROW model is and how to apply it using the two most important skills namely, active listening and meaningful questioning.

Methodology

The study uses both qualitative and quantitative approaches. It involves 43 participants selected among 110 coaches of the TS25 initiative. Each of them is required to carry out a 20-minute coaching simulation session and followed by a 10-minute interview session. Each session is assessed by two certified coaching experts. There are 14 assessors appointed for this study. These assessors are given a special training on how to conduct the simulation sessions. The participants' listening, and questioning skills are assessed during the simulation session and interview session. Two participants are called in at one time to carry out the simulation. Both of them take turn to play roles as a Coach and a Coachee. There are five stimulus questions provided in which the Coachee has to choose one. Only the Coachee knows the scenario and the Coach needs to handle the session based on the scenario.

Observations are made based on related sub-skills. There are five listening sub-skills and five questioning sub-skills being assessed:

Table 1: Competencies For Listening And Questioning Skills

Listening Skills	Questioning Skills
1. Making notes based on Coachee's information	1. Asking relevant open and closed questions
2. Framing what has been discussed for clear understanding	2. Probing for more information
3. Rephrasing and simplyfying	3. Igniting Coachee's mind for making choices
4. Summarising	4. Keeping focused on agreed agenda
5. Using decision making tools	5. Making Coachee aware of the need to make decision for improvement

The assessors observe the participants during the simulation session using an observation form as an instrument to identify the frequency of use for each of the sub-skills. The assessors then interview the participants to triangulate the observation data. After that, the assessors discuss with each other to make a consensus on which competency level to give. There are four levels of competency identified for this study namely, "Ineffective" (1), "Developing" (2), "Skilled" (3) and "Excellent" (4).

The data are then analysed quantitatively to obtain the mean scores for both listening and questioning skills of all the participants. An analysis is also made to obtain the mean scores of each of the sub-skills.

Findings

The study manages to carry out 43 coaching simulation sessions that involve 43 participants and 14 assessors. The participants comprise 26 males and 17 females. All participants are experienced lecturers from Teacher Education Institutes.

An analysis is carried out based on the overall scores of all the participants according to listening skills and questioning skills evaluation. Their skills are determined based on a four-level scales. These are 'Ineffective' (1), 'Developing' (2), 'Skilled' (3) and 'Excellent' (4). The level is given based on the assessors' observation using a checklist form after making a consensus. It is found that the mean score for listening skills is 3.33 and the mean score for questioning skills is 3.58. These findings show that the participants have good skills in

listening and questioning when carrying out coaching sessions. Their questioning skills found to be slightly higher than listening skills.

Further analysis is also done to determine the extent of using all the ten sub-skills for both listening and questioning skills. This is based on the assessors' checklist that indicates the participants' usage of each of the sub-skills. There are 39 participants included in the analysis based on 39 checklist forms selected out of 43 participants. Five checklist forms are not selected due to incomplete data.

Table 2: Sub-Skills Observation Analysis

Listening Skills	N	Yes	No	%	Questioning Skills	N	Yes	No	%
1. Making notes based on Coachee's information	39	27	12	69.2	1. Asking relevant open and closed questions	39	39	0	100
2. Framing what has been discussed for clear understanding	39	24	15	61.5	2. Probing for more information	39	29	10	74.4
3. Rephrasing and simplifying	39	35	4	89.7	3. Igniting Coachee's mind for making choices	39	35	4	89.7
4. Summarising	39	33	6	84.6	4. Keeping focused on agreed agenda	39	31	8	79.5
5. Using decision making tools	39	16	23	41.0	5. Making Coachee aware of the need to make decision for improvement	39	27	12	69.2

For listening skills component, the study discovered that 'Rephrasing and simplifying' sub-skill is the highest in which 89.7 percent of the participants use it. This is followed by 'Summarising' (84.6%), 'Making notes based on Coachee's information'(69.2%), 'Framing what has been discussed for clear understanding' (61.5%) and the least used by the participants is 'Using decision making tools' (41.0%).

For questioning skills component, the most used sub-skill is 'asking relevant open and closed questions' which involve all of them (100%). This is followed by 'Igniting Coachee's mind for making choices' (89.7%), 'Keeping focused on agreed agenda' (79.5%), 'Probing for more information' (74.4%) and the least used is 'making coaches aware of the need to make decision for improvement' (69.2%).

Discussion

The findings indicate that the participants have the required skills in giving attention to what their Coachees are saying as well as the skills to ask relevant questions to make sure that their Coachees give full attention and stay focused in the discussion. It can be said that the participants have developed their coaching competency especially in listening and questioning after having involved in the initiative for two years.

However, the findings also indicate that there are aspects that the participants need to improve. It is suggested that more focus should be given on the knowledge of decision-

making tools and how to use them effectively in coaching. The participants should also focus on developing their ability to listen more attentively to enable them to frame the scope of discussion. This is important because it would help Coachees to get clearer understanding on the situations they are discussing. For questioning competency, it is suggested that more focus to be given on developing participants' skills in assisting Coachees to make appropriate decisions as the next step for improvement. This is because many of the participants lack this ability and making improvements is an evidence that indicates the effectiveness of the coaching practice.

Closure

The study is only focusing on Coaches' coaching competency in terms of their listening and questioning skills based on five sub-skills for each of the two main skills. The findings may not represent the entire TS25 Coaches but could serve as a starting point to implement a larger scale study with a large number of participants and more vigorously in-depth analysis. The findings could also be used in an effort to enhance the Coaches' competency.

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