The Relevance of Theory to Practice for Educational Administrator: Employ Theory as a Frame of Reference to Improve Practice

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Abstract. Theory in educational administration have the general explanations about particular events and guide research, but there is much scepticism about theory which are based on the assumption that educational administration is incompetent to develop into science. There is no single comprehensive theory of educational administration due to it encompasses a series of perspectives instead of a complete scientific certainty. Each theory has something to offer and tend to provide partial explanation about educational administration practices. This paper examines the relevance of theory to practice in educational administration and how the leaders employ the theories to refine and improve their practices with an emphasis is given to the leadership practices. This paper provides concepts of theory and its relevance to practices, followed by analysis on administrative theories and their implementation in educational practices. It can be concluded that theory is essential as the guidance for the leaders to effectively conduct their administrative tasks and to improve and refine organisational performances. The leaders or educational administrator should able to use theories optimally as the basis for their decisions rather than relies on experiences or personal interpretation.

Keywords: Educational administration · theory and practice · improve practice

1 Introduction

This paper examines the relevance of theory to practice in educational administration and how the leaders employ the theories to refine and improve their practices with an emphasis is given to the leadership practices. First part of this paper provides concepts of theory and its relevance to practices, followed by analysis on administrative theories and their implementation in educational practices.

Theory in educational administration have the general explanations about particular events and guide research, but there is much scepticism about theory which are based on the assumption that educational administration is incompetent to develop into science. There is no single comprehensive theory of educational administration due to it encompasses a series of perspectives instead of a complete scientific certainty. Each theory has something to offer and tend to provide partial explanation about educational administration practices.

This research is relevant to research related [1] to education management that basically this research explains that an educator or in this case called a lecturer must have his own management in an effort to achieve the objectives of the courses he teaches. It can be seen from the models and learning methods that he applies as well as other innovations that he presents in the classroom and outside the classroom related to the learning process he is carrying out.

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2   Methodology

This research uses the descriptive qualitative method. Data were collected from 125 participants consisting of teachers and lecturers in Kotamobagu by interviewing several representatives of the existing participants. After the data collection stage, the researcher analyzed the data using the analysis technique. There are six stages in the data analysis process: organizing and preparing the data, reading all the data, coding process, describing in detail, the narrative approach, and interpreting data.

3   Result and Discussion

One of the comprehensive definitions about theory in educational administration is provided by suggest that theory as "a set of interrelated concepts, assumptions, and generalizations that systematically describes and explains regularities in behaviour in education organizations".

The above concept provides an understanding that the purpose of theory is to provide general understanding about events or phenomena. In terms of organizational science, including educational administration field, theory is attempted to explain regularities in individual and group behaviour within organization as well as to provide the insight on structure and dynamics of organizational life [2].

3.1 Relevance of Theory to Practice

Although theory in educational administration can provide general explanations about particular events and guide research, but there are much scepticism about theory which are based on the assumption that educational administration is incompetent to develop into science. Theory and practice are often considered as irrelevant elements in educational administration [3]. Theorists typically use the scientific approach and operate on a higher level of abstraction and generality, while practitioners operate on a lower level of abstraction where they are primarily concerned with specific situation in their organizations and needs to be more flexible in applying scientific method.

However, Hoy and Miskel argue that theory has direct relations with practice in three ways:

1. Theory forms a frame of reference for the practitioner;
2. Process of theorizing provides a general mode of analysis of practical events;
3. Theory guides decision making.

The theory and practice relevance is not only about employing the concepts of theorist to justify the important aspects of a practical problem but also about embedding rational inquiry into decision making or problem solving. Accordingly, Bush declares that theory provides the framework for managerial decision and can improve managerial effectiveness.

To be useful in practical situation, [4] asserts that theory should place more emphasis as a map or instructions manual which provides means by which administrators can do their tasks or cope with events and conversely, put less emphasis as a speculation or contemplation about the actual events faced by administrators. Theory as a map would delineate the real-event structures and would able to provide directions on decision making. Similarly, state that although naturally theory is general and abstract, it may provide truthful projections about practical situation and help to understand and influence behaviour within organization. Bush and Bell provides an analysis about six different theories in educational management and their practical implications.

3.2 Theories in Educational Administration

Educational administration has gone through a vigorous period of intellectual excitement as an academic field of study, from attempts in 1950s to develop a science of administration based on the precepts of logical empiricism, to the Greenfield-inspired critiques over this model in the mid 1970s and to the range of well-developed theoretical alternatives that have come over the last 20 years [5].

[6] state that the development in educational administration is in line with the advances in the role of education in technological society. In the wider context, there are four main approaches in the study of educational administration, which are: behavioural, managerial, economic, and political approach.

The content and structure of theories in educational administration, since its earliest development in 1950s through the concept presented by Hoy and Miskel in 1996,

have been much influenced by theories of knowledge and theories of human cognition. Behavioural science approach to educational administration is primarily due to an underlying logical empiricist theory of knowledge. That although behavioural sciences are being used in organizational theory and analysis, any behavioural approach must necessarily be concerned with political attitudes and action. Furthermore, asserts that research and theory concerning human behaviour in organizational settings increased in the 1960s with the development of theory X and Y by McGregor (1960), extension of McGregor theory to system approach by Likert (1967), while Ouchi (1981) formulated theory Z for effective management of people within organization.

In terms of theory and practical knowledge, Evers and Lakomski (2001, p.507) argue that "one of the major issue with which any account of administrative theory needs to deal is the question of administrator practical knowledge".

Furthermore, there is no single comprehensive theory of educational administration due to it encompasses a series of perspectives instead of a complete scientific certainty. Each theory has something to offer and tend to provide partial explanation about educational administration practices. Although, Donmoyer confirms that, the concept of "naturalistic coherentism" which is generated by Evers and Lakomski is attempted to construct not only a theory in educational administration and leadership but also to establish an inclusive theory that can subsume other theories which has been employed in this field despite some critiques has been raised over the claim that the substance of educational administration theory must cohere with theories in natural sciences. That many scholars in the past have tried to link the concept of theory with science and did not consider that administration is a body of knowledge and practice, neither an academic discipline nor a profession.

3.3   Employ Theories to Refine and Improve Practice in Administration

Gamage and Phang provide an analysis about historical evolution of educational administration theory as a generic field and their practices within organizations. They argue that there are two streams of thought development in this field during the 20th century which are summarized as follows:

1. Administrative efficiency approaches.

   a. Frederick Taylor (1858 – 1915)
      His approach was how to get more work out of workers who were assumed to be naturally lazy and engage in systematic soldiering. In practice, this approach suggests managers to use scientific research methods to enhance worker's performance by using administrative techniques as 'the task system' or 'task management'.
   b. Henry Fayol (1841 – 1925)
      Like Taylor, Fayol focused on industrial administration but expected more from managers. He believed that administration tasks should be spread across organization. In practice, Fayol's approach suggests to divide organizational operation into six functions, including technical, commercial, financial, security, accounting and administration.

   c. Luther Gullick (1892–1993) and Lyndall Urwick (1891 – 1983)
     They formulated organizational principles by expanding Fayol's approach to be more inclusive. In practice, they propose the division of administrative activities into "POSDCORB".

2. Organizational behaviour approaches

   a. Mary Parker Follett (1942)
     Her approach was recognized as the psychological aspect of administration and suggests dealing with this aspect in administration practices.
   b. Elton Mayo (1933) and Fritz Roethlisberger (1939)
     Their Hawthorn study has led to the discovery of the importance of 'human relation' and 'informal organization' in the administrative thought and practices.
   c. Chester Barnard (1938)
     Barnard detailed the lack of attention to the informal organization and differentiated leadership in terms of its field of activity and organizational guidance. In practice, Barnard's theory proposes to look at an organization as a system of communication as well as a system of logical decision making.
   d. Herbert Simon (1957)
     Simon developed a value-free science of administrative behaviour and used mathematical analysis in his approach. Practically, Simon proposes to regard people within an organization as decision-making organism, while decision making process should be communicated within organization.
   e. Max Weber (1947)
     He identified and developed the bureaucratic model. His approach suggests seeking maximum efficiency through rational approaches to management. The characteristic of bureaucracy that are applied in practices are chain of command, goal orientation, labour division, rules and regulation of organization, impersonal relationship among staffs and clients, and technical competence and merit as the basis for staff recruitment and their career progression.

As can be seen from above description, theories in administrative can be applied in practical setting within organizations. The aim is to improve organizational performance, through increasing organizational or administrative efficiency and using behavioural approach. The title "ACKNOWLEDGMENTS" should be in all caps and should be placed above the references. The references should be consistent within the article and follow the same style. List all the references with full details.

3.4 Leadership Practice and Educational Administration Theory

According to [7], Oppedisano, Sherman (2004), leadership is the ability to influence people to achieve shared objectives. Similarly, Rost (1993, cited in Densten and Gray, 2001) state that leadership is an influence association among leaders and their followers who intend real changes that reflect their shared purposes. Educational organizations need to be flexible to constantly face emerging problems in change environment. One of the emerging ideas in leadership in educational administration field is contingency

theory, proposed by Fielder and Chemers, which is based on the premise that relationship-motivated leaders and task-motivated leaders can be effective in particular situation.

The first comprehensive contingency model proposes that effective group performance depends on the match between the leader's style of interacting with subordinates and the degree to which the situation allowed the leader to control and influence. There are three contingency variables to determine situations: leader-member relations, task structure, and position power. As organizational complexity has become more advanced, it seems reasonable to argue that effective management should be relied upon a critical analysis of the actual situation within organization. The theory of contingency can be useful in administrative practices.

4   Conclusion

Theory is essential as the guidance for the leaders to effectively conduct their administrative tasks and to improve and refine organizational performances. The leaders or educational administrator should able to use theories optimally as the basis for their decisions rather than relies on experiences or personal interpretation. However, theories have to be implicated under the right condition and should be engaged with creativity, innovation and modification of the educational administrators.

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